

## Vol 4, No 1 (2011)

### Identity and Self-Identification

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## **“Listen I will tell the story to you / As I have been told it”<sup>1</sup>: Memory and identity in the plays of Nicola McCartney**

**Kathy McKean**

Jo has an obsession with time and memory, and an unspecified “communication disorder” (McCartney 1999: 19).<sup>2</sup> In these respects, this character in Nicola McCartney’s *Home* (Tron 1999) embodies a number of the writer’s concerns and recurring themes which I shall explore in this article. McCartney describes the origins of her plays as “a feeling”, one that she wants her audience to share in and understand. Consequently she structures her plays in order that the audience might experience events as her protagonist does (2011b). This frequently involves a fracturing of space and a palimpsestic vision of time, in which language and form resonate with notions of memory. This is true of *Laundry* (lookOUT 1994), McCartney’s first production about the Magdalene institutions, and of *Hartland*, McCartney’s most recent project about a young woman held and abused by a couple throughout her teenage years (2011a) and also of *Heritage* (Traverse 1998). Clearly, explorations of the relationship between memory and identity figure in the work of a number of other contemporary playwrights, including Martin Crimp, Linda McLean and Phyllis Nagy, but nevertheless it remains an angle through which McCartney’s work, and the ways in which it has been written about to date, can be further explored and understood. In particular, the treatment of time in the plays, in which temporal moments overlap and occur simultaneously, can be usefully thought of in relation to Derrida’s theory of “hauntology”. (1993). In some of the plays, it is possible to argue that memory *constitutes* identity, since protagonists are caught in repetitive and fractured structures of place and time from which they must strive to escape by accessing their own memories and correctly interpreting them. The central aim of this article is to argue that McCartney’s representations of memory are deeply linked to constructions of identity in her plays, and that identity is a key focus in her work. McCartney grew up in Belfast, and left to study English and Theatre at the University of Glasgow in the early nineties, in defiance of her family’s wish for her to study to become a teacher at “home”. Perhaps understandably, the complex and problematic stagings of identity that characterise her work contain an element of autobiography. She has

described her plays as, at least partly, an articulation of her feelings about her need to escape Northern Ireland for fear that she would “suffocate” (2011b).

McCartney remains interestingly positioned between her identity as a Scottish and Irish playwright. Scottish theatre comprises a diverse range of practitioners and practices not all of which are Scottish in origin. Indeed, the National Theatre of Scotland has recently confronted criticism on this issue.<sup>3</sup> McCartney rose to prominence as a playwright around the same period as writers such as David Greig, Zinnie Harris and David Harrower who – nationally and internationally – represent the strengths of Scottish playwriting. Amongst Scottish playwrights and critics, McCartney identifies a certain level of “tension” about her credentials: “sometimes I’m considered part of the group and sometimes I’m not” (2011b). She equates this feeling with what she experienced growing up, and how she feels now her work is being commissioned by Northern Irish companies: she’s not from there anymore.

*Home* takes place in Jo’s family home to which her sister Jen has returned for a visit at the behest of their concerned Aunt, Kath. Jen’s mother, Annie, has been injured in a car accident and now refuses to leave the house. When Jo goes missing, Annie suffers a panic attack. This kind of heightened anxiety is also figured in the play in a series of monologues, by Jo, in which she speaks about her own inability to cope with the world (1999: 68). In Carol Moore’s production, the actors delivered these monologues through direct audience address, with lighting further isolating the speaker from the other characters. Significantly, these sections are written in heightened, poetic, language that echoes formally the fractured temporal structure of the play:

Once  
There was  
She was  
My  
Friend  
She was  
Beautiful  
She had  
A soft  
Soft  
Blue

And long long blonde  
Walked  
On the beach  
And listened  
And watched  
The  
Wave wave wave wave waves  
And talked  
Bird talk  
And sung  
Bird songs (1999: 32-3).

In *Home's* penultimate scene, each characters' speech overlaps creating the impression of a search for space and resonating with the play's central themes: that truth exists in the gaps between words, in what is unspoken, and that memory is an unreliable witness (1999: 70-6). The surface narrative of *Home* takes place over three days, and begins with Jen's narration of her journey, overlapping with Jo's dialogue, a technique that establishes their shared history. Together the sisters narrate the landmarks in Jen's walk from the station to their childhood home, identifying the location of accidents and games and evoking memories. These sections of dialogue are interspersed with their mother Annie's rendition of John Hartford's 'Gentle On My Mind' (1968), a Country song that problematises notions of home and duty, as Jen and Jo share a repeated mantra about the homing behaviours of honeybees in their different stage and geographical spaces. Jen describes her feeling of being trapped in a "Coffin. / Sealed" (1999: 41), and this notion of home – and by implication of self – as something to escape from is fore grounded throughout the play. As the characters of *Home* narrate their personal and collective history through a combination of dialogue and monologue, it becomes clear that for them, home is a place where they are neither fully understood, nor heard. As her family argue about her future, it is Jo who finally and actively seeks independence.<sup>4</sup> Her previous attempt at escape, revealed through the memories recalled in the play, has taken the form of drowning.

Throughout the play, the fracturing of time, place and language into fragments, in which voices compete to be heard, resonates with the way Jo describes her experience of the world. This approach is not unique to *Home*. McCartney explores the impact of the  
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fractured nature of memory in relation to articulations of identity elsewhere in her work. *Heritage* (Traverse 1998), for instance, is an examination of the politics of memory and identity in the context of sectarianism carried by the Irish emigrant community to Canada. Set between 1914 and 1920, the play juxtaposes historical events and prejudices with a love story between Michael, a Catholic, and Sarah, a Protestant. In the play's opening scene Michael performs a step dance as he burns alive. This is a sequence later narrated by Sarah in the play's penultimate scene. *Heritage* can be understood quite straightforwardly as a memory play that works to expose the romantic fallacies fuelling nationalist sentiment. Mourning her lover, Sarah initially goes through a process of mythologizing Michael, before rejecting this version of events to forge, it is implied, an alternative future. At the end of *Heritage* Sarah rejects the rhetoric of nationalism and mythology to stand literally at a crossroads. The end of the play, like its final image, is left open (1998: 123). The overlapping and non-linear structuring of time and place in *Heritage* and *Home* is also present in *Hartland* (2011a), in which a father, suspected of involvement with the disappearance of his daughter, appears in the same stage time with her. The sense of fractured reality is achieved through narrative devices that leave the audience to attempt to reconcile a picture that is never fully formed.

These aspects of McCartney's work have attracted praise, criticism and a number of awards nominations.<sup>5</sup> The reviews for *Standing Wave* (Tron 2004), for instance, were almost uniform in their praise of the play's experimental structure and composition, with Joyce McMillan pronouncing "the sheer boldness, humanity and historical force" of the play "the kind that makes you feel the earth move a little under your feet" (2004). *Heritage* also attracted praise; Neil Cooper commended Philip Howard's "complex and evocative" production in *The Times* (1998). McMillan was not quite so effusive, observing of *Heritage* that at "its worst, it might be possible to accuse the play of confronting its chosen theme too obviously and schematically", concluding that the production "sometimes strives too hard to clothe what's essentially a big, naturalistic 20<sup>th</sup>-century tragedy in the Arthur Miller mould in a few shreds of stylised post-modernity" (1998). McMillan's ambivalence was echoed in reviews for *Home*. *The Independent's* Sue Wilson, for example, was frustrated by "too scant and fragmented a sense" of the characters' histories and suggested the "writing seems so caught up in its own formal inventiveness [...] that it largely throws the baby of

intelligibility out with the naturalistic bath-water” (2000). McMillan compared *Home* unfavourably with McCartney’s other work:

The difficulty is that McCartney won’t get on with telling her story through dialogue and straight soliloquy, both of which she excels at. Instead, she insists on experimenting with a kind of fragmented internal monologue that involves chopping up fairly banal sentences into freeform verse [...] Why a writer as gifted as McCartney should do this to her own plays is not clear (2000).

Interestingly, academics in North America, in championing McCartney’s work, have invariably positioned her as an Irish playwright. A chapter by Charlotte Headrick, for example, who has also directed *Heritage*, appears in *Visions of the Irish Dream* (2009), and Headrick has presented numerous papers on McCartney’s work.<sup>6</sup> Headrick characterises *Heritage* as a “Troubles” play and “a play of reconciliation”, citing McCartney’s own heritage to underline this reading: “She has said that one needs to know one’s history and then forget it” (2009: 75). Matthew Spangler, in a paper for a North American conference, compared *Cave Dwellers* (Paisley Arts Centre 2002) with Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* (1957).<sup>7</sup> On this side of the Atlantic, and by contrast, Adrienne Scullion has considered *Home* and *Lifeboat* in articles for the *New Theatre Quarterly*. Scullion is among those who argue for a broader conception of post-devolutionary Scottish identity, one in which McCartney can be accommodated (2001). In ““And So This Is What Happened”: War Stories in new Plays for Children’, Scullion discusses McCartney’s *Lifeboat* (2005):

This desire to tell is initially framed as a childish need to explain what happened in biographical and literal terms to parents [...] However, this immediate responsibility [...] is also to be interpreted as a metaphor of society’s wider responsibility to construct, understand, and sustain community, and to tell that community of its own history, its past crises and celebrations” (2001: 329).

Scullion’s evaluation of the play’s techniques of telling and re-telling amidst the “mix of fantasy and reality” (2001: 328) points to a continuity between the devices McCartney uses in this young people’s play to those she employs in her work from *Laundry* to *Hartland*.

The range of responses apparent in reviews and analyses of her plays points to the complexity and opacity of McCartney's work. Adrienne Scullion's discussion of issues of identity and culture in McCartney's work is most closely aligned with the hybrid version of representation McCartney articulates for herself as an individual, and which may be found in her work.<sup>8</sup> Examining three plays by female writers staged in 2000, Scullion considers the importance of devolution to ideas of Scottish representation and identity.<sup>9</sup> She argues that by challenging conventions of narrative and gender, women playwrights "also challenge the conventions of representing and responding to the nation" (2001: 374), and that critical language needs to evolve to express and encompass these changing images and identities (2001: 375). Scullion argues that *Home* is constructed as a "mind-map" in which she identifies themes of community, belonging and "the motif of 'the return of the native'"<sup>10</sup>

For this play [...] the place of return is indeed home – but [...] this is a place, an identity, that is far from fixed. McCartney unsettles the idea of family, recreating it as flexible, reimagining it as a community that can shift and alter and evolve (2001: 386-7).

Scullion considers hybridity and flexibility in the context of debates about Scottish cultural, political and gender identities. These issues link inevitably to memory, and it is this link between memory and identity in McCartney's work that I shall now consider in more detail in *Heritage*, *Standing Wave* and *Home*.

As already noted, *Heritage* is a memory play in a number of senses: Sarah narrates and performs scenes from the past (before Michael's death); the events of the play's 'present' are dictated and defined by the characters' relationship to historical memory, specifically to sectarian divisions; these divisions and loyalties arise from a relationship to an Ireland that exists in memory. For much of the play, Sarah attempts to construct her lost lover through the differing levels of mythology manifest in each memory strand. This process is rendered literally through the myth of Deidre and Naoise that Sarah has learned from Michael, and which they tell each other throughout the play. Sarah introduces the audience to her relationship with words that invest it with mythic qualities: "I will tell you the story" (2001a: 9) - the story of her meeting with Michael. These words are repeated in the retelling of the myth of Deidre. The play is infused with omens that resonate

throughout, again enhancing the sense of epic and myth. Fire and burning form one such image, and one that connects to the play's title:

Heritage

A brand burned deep through skin of centuries

Scarring forever

The soul

The land

The memory

The future (2001a: 47).

Sarah is our guide to the personal and political history of the period and again this elevates her own memories. The passing of historical time is charted by her narration of the events that impact on her, and thus a diasporic understanding of historical memory is dramatically rendered on stage.

The notion that in memory, in different representations of the self in history, there are many layers and competing narratives is realised formally in the play's structure. In Act one, scene two, for example, a number of scenes overlap to create different temporalities simultaneously on stage, representative of different spaces in terms of "imagined communities" as well as literal place. The scene begins with a stage direction identical to that of the final scene (2001a: 7 and 123), with Sarah covered in the ashen dust that signifies she is speaking after the fire that destroys her family's barn and kills Michael and thus, on one level, temporally in the same moment as the play's ending. Four times she tells the audience "I will tell you the story", indicating her presence in a different temporality to the events she alternately narrates and participates in, even after the stage direction indicates a shift to "*Springtime 1914*" (2001a: 9). In the scene she shares with Michael, they are in the 'present' (post-fire) as they together begin the telling of the myth of Deidre and Naoise, and in the 'past', as they move to enact their first meeting. Though Ruth "appears" at the end of scene two, she is in a sense beginning scene three, reading from the bible as she continues to do in this scene (2001a: 16). Michael "disappears" at the beginning of scene three, rather than at the end of scene two, indicating a blurring of temporal and spacial boundaries demonstrative of the psychogeography of memory Sarah (re)creates



(2001a: 16). This treatment of time allows Sarah to cast Michael as the hero of her myth, enabling him to comfort her immediately after the vicious beating she receives from her father after disobeying his command not to see Michael (2001a: 99). It also allows her to interact with characters in scenes whilst speaking directly to the audience, as she does in Act one scene ten. Sarah's direct addresses are about the events in her wider community that impact on her life, and the language is demonstrative of the subjective viewpoint through which they are narrated to the audience. The passage of time is thus illustrated linking the moment that begins and end the play. McCartney employs a number of different devices to connect the non-linear strands within her work. In *Standing Wave*, two actors simultaneously occupy a number of different times and spaces as they share the role of composer Delia Derbyshire.

The title *Standing Wave* accurately describes the structure of the play. A standing wave is an echo phenomenon that "occurs when a sound bursts between two reflective surfaces" (2004: 26).<sup>11</sup> In this play notions of memory and identity are explored through the staging of two time periods from the protagonist's life via the agency of two different female actors playing playing 'Delia Derbyshire' in the 1960s and 'Delia Hunter' (the composer's married name) in the 1970s. In life Derbyshire was most famous for her contribution to the *Dr Who* theme tune and McCartney draws on concepts of time travel and regeneration to explore fracturing and fragmentation in time, space and self. Derbyshire developed electronic music, primarily at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, and was fascinated by the connections between maths and music; technical explanations of these concepts link structurally and thematically within the play. The third performer in *Standing Wave* plays 'The Man', who can regenerate into different people in Delia's life and tells Delia Hunter in the opening scene that he can travel anywhere in time and space (2004: 8). Radio commentaries on the space race accompany Delia's innovations in composition, and her struggle to achieve what her boss, Desmond Briscoe, considers impossible: the creation of a beautiful electronic sound. Briscoe's disdain is deflected by Delia through her compositions and her explanations of meaning in abstract sounds. The dislocated sounds of the war during her Coventry childhood reveal the significance of abstract sound for McCartney's central character and also the fear that drives her creatively. In scene twenty-one, when the two Delias speak as

one, they describe how the sounds are “inside” them (pp. 62-3). In this way the relationship between memory and identity are presented via aural landscapes.

The fracturing of space and time characterises the examination of memory and identity in *Standing Wave*. The two ‘Delias’ appear on stage simultaneously, their presence one of the signifiers indicating the era to which the action is aligned at different moments. ‘The Man’ morphs into different roles, such as Briscoe and Delia’s (future, present or ex) husband, and provides a further layer to the staging of identity. Among other things, McCartney stages different memories simultaneously thereby creating a literal staging of Derrida’s concept of “hauntology”, in which different temporalities converge. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida uses this term to describe the paradox of ghostly “appearance” (since it is both debut and return) and suggests that future scholars “should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always *there*, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet” (1993, p. 176). Derrida considers levels of ‘Non-Reality’ and the liminal spaces between realms, politicising this discussion as engagement with the ‘Other’ which takes us beyond binary oppositions. In *Standing Wave* time and memory work in a variety of ways that correspond to the notion of “hauntology”. One scene is played first in reverse and then forwards. Pre-recorded dialogue is interacted with in the theatrical present. The time metaphor described by ‘The Man’ in scene twenty-three, as a tape on an endless loop, is returned to throughout the play; as Delia splices different moments together to create different sounds. Different moments of her life resonate differently according to the moments with which they are juxtaposed. In one scene, Delia Derbyshire is in 1964 and Delia Hunter in 1971, both working at the BBC. The older Delia interacts with a period when she was at her most inspired and we see Delia Hunter literally destroying the work Delia Derbyshire creates (2004: 37-8).

In *Home*, it is substantially through listening to Jo that the audience not only gains necessary information with which to fill in gaps in what other characters say, but also appreciation of the play’s imagery. Jo’s knowledge of nature, and birds in particular, passes unremarked upon by the others in the play. However, in the final scene, set on the beach with Jen, the metaphor of the birds becomes clear: Jo can distinguish between the songs

and sounds because she listens. After her suicide attempt, she is sectioned, and her account of her time at the institution resonates with the experiences of a number of different characters in the play. She cannot voice her own desires and so the doctors try to repair her sense of self through language which is theirs rather than hers:

How can I answer you?

You don't say what you mean

Or mean what you say?

Question

Question

Question

Your white's too white

Your light's too light

It's

Agony (1999: 59).

In the character notes, Jo is ascribed a "communication disorder" rather than a specific diagnosis such as Asperger's Syndrome or autism. This less specific term functions as a metaphor for the women in the play as a whole, and also manifests both in the way the dialogue is presented on the page, and heard in fragmented phrases. Language is literally broken. Jo identifies self-awareness and meaning as located in silence rather than sound:

No sound turned up too loud to hear the spaces between the

noises

where

The Truth is (1999: 63).

Relationships and meaning are explored through language in *Home*. The routines that create circularity in the relationship between Kath and Annie are apparent in the language patterns they use. Failures of communication are evident in the overly-literal way in which Jo understands and misunderstands language. Jo spends much of the play quoting other characters. In scene five she describes what is "Strictly a one way conversation" in which another's rebukes to her become physically violent (1999: 25). She quotes unknown voices speaking to her and responds with her own voice; this literal fracturing augments wider *Maintained by the School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh*

questions about the fragmentation of self within and in response to memory and language. In this moment, Jo demonstrates an awareness of Otherness and other peoples' desire for her to be other than she is; "I'm trying" repeated throughout this passage (1999: 21).

The failure of language is apparent in the way meaning in *Home* resides in the unspoken; in the gaps. For instance, the play contains a number of clues as to Jo's paternity, but the audience are required to piece fragments together to link this issue with Annie's ultimate betrayal of her sister Kath, who discovered her with her husband, prompting a move to America. This truth is spoken as a silence (1999: 45). In *Home*, McCartney explores the myths of commonality and community that often dictate the way in which female relationships are prescribed. At one point, Annie reveals the limitations in her feelings of responsibility towards her daughter, admitting that Jo was in an institution because Annie did not want to provide twenty-four hour care for her (1999: 62). Language fails Annie when she attempts to describe her mixed feelings about Jo's return after she has gone missing, and Jo articulates a different truth when Annie asks her to voice conventional emotion:

**Annie**     You never tell me you love me [...]  
**Jo**             I did. Once. In the back garden.  
**Annie**     You were five years old!  
**Jo**             Why do I need to say it again? (1999: 45-6).

As in *Home*, language operates in a number of ways in *Heritage*, as McCartney purposely utilises its potential to augment the themes of her play in terms of memory and identity.

When addressing the audience in *Heritage*, Sarah uses heightened language through which she communicates the poetic images that place us historically and geographically in terms of the story. The poetic register also accentuates our sense that Sarah is outside time in these moments. There are a number of leitmotifs in her monologues that suture different elements in the play. These motifs invite exploration of implied meanings: repetition of the word "orange", for example, resonates with images of fire and indicates the violence inherent in statements of extreme nationalism. Sarah uses onomatopoeic language to describe scenes such as the barn building,<sup>12</sup> and also for the Twelfth of July parade (2001a: 14), where the potency of sounds and images, and the extent to which such sentiments can be internalised, are rendered through Sarah's performance of them. Language is used to

explore competing versions of history and self, perhaps best realised in Michael's exchanges with his grandmother Emer; they speak to one another in Gaelic, and she uses the Gaelic form of his name, Mihal. Language is an indicator of the division and difference that the Northern (/) Irish Diasporic community have brought to Canada.

In Sarah's opening monologue she defines the landscape in terms of what she "remember[s] from home" (2001a: 8). Home is her point of comparison, although it proves an inappropriate one, and remains a potent image throughout. Hugh McCrea, Sarah's father, receives seeds from "home" and plants crops to harvest in a landscape that will not sustain them. Her mother, Ruth's memory walk of orange lilies, again from seeds from "home", is a potent symbol of how she defines herself. As an audience, we never see the lilies, but create an image of them through Sarah's words and Ruth's tending of the flowers, and though props were used in the Traverse production it is significant to consider which objects were not physically present. The jug that Ruth has "carried the whole way here", for example, was mimed, as the stage directions indicate (2001a: 62). Michael breaks the jug and Sarah is left trying to collect the pieces together. The pieces cannot be collected and the jug cannot be fixed: these mimes represent the imagined aspect of heritage and the symbolic power of things from "home". Emer's relationship to the Diaspora and to home is different, since she remembers persecution by the English and Protestants and was forced from "home" to another land – albeit one in which she accepted land from her persecutors - where she fosters old language and hatred in her grandson.

Like McCartney herself, Michael contends that "you don't have to be born in a country to belong to it" (2001a: 66), but one of his first questions to Sarah is to ask her to describe a "home" he has never seen. By placing home and thus, to an extent, national identity in the realm of memory and imagination, McCartney offers a critique of sectarian hatreds. Peter, Michael's father, married a Protestant, and he offers a different version of personal and Irish history to Emer's stories as he warns his son: "History's more dangerous a friend than an enemy" (2001a: 38). For Emer, the past's injustices are very much in the present and dictate her interactions with the McCreas. When she tells the story of the potato famine to and with Michael, she uses the present tense (2001a: 34): the memory is in her present in this description and in the identity she creates to protect her from it.<sup>13</sup> Michael is presented with competing narratives about where he is "from" by Emer and Peter, who undercuts

Emer's imaginings to reveal the romantic lies behind pedestrian truths. Michael, however, prefers Emer's version, to the extent he engages in violent attacks against Protestants, destroying the barn that he and his father have worked with Hugh to build.

McCartney uses form in *Heritage* to imply that to make sense of time and memory is to make sense of one's self and also, paradoxically, that this is never wholly possible. The self is constructed via memory and is thus never really present in an autonomous or stable sense. This constitutes a theatrical realisation of Derrida's notion of "hauntology" in that past, present and future intersect and share the same moment. Similarly, McCartney's treatment of language and structure in *Home* underpins the examination of memory and identity in the play. Fractured language and repeated patterns are employed to illustrate fragmentation within and between characters and the relentless and inescapable circularity to the narrative of these relationships which can only be broken when characters move outside the "home". In scene thirteen of the play, characters repeat words from other scenes and sometimes other characters, as Jo ponders the different aspects of self. At this point, effectively, characters create meaning communally, their sense of identity dependent on the language of others. In the final scene, Jo makes explicit the connection between time and memory, offering the possibility of hope since perhaps, by playing with time, things can be mended:

How do you know [time] moves forward? Because that's the direction in which we remember things. That's the direction in which things fall apart. (1999: 80-1)

Having considered the dynamic between identity and memory as it is figured in McCartney's work at various points in her career, and suggesting some of the ways in which this dynamic resonates with contemporary discourses in national and gender identities, it seems important to note that her most recent project, *Hartland*, revisits these themes. In common with her first play, *Laundry*, *Hartland* concerns a missing person, a missing "female hero". McCartney's search for lost, for metaphorically and literally 'disappeared' characters illuminates her practice as a dramatist on a number of levels. Her apparent desire to provide roles, and even role-models, for women is combined with an inclination to realise the perspective of the outsider, or the other, that other Scottish playwrights such as Anthony Neilson, Douglas Maxwell and Henry Adam have also sought to articulate. McCartney has

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been making work during a period in Scottish theatre where conceptions of identity have been to some extent open to negotiation and rewriting. This notion of contemporary Scottish identity as to some extent in flux is evidenced in the fractured depictions of memory and their relation to identity in McCartney's plays. In employing a range of strategies to align her audience with the experience of her protagonists, McCartney provides the potential for us to experience the "feeling" with which, for her, the plays originate. In so doing she extends and disrupts narrative conventions and challenges well-worn assumptions about the compact between the stage and its audience. She also opens up a space in which audiences can question their own relationship to memory and identity. While it is arguably reductive to consider her practice solely in relation to national and gender identities, it is, as I have been arguing, in these respects that McCartney speaks most clearly as a contemporary dramatist, and where her contribution to these debates may be considered most vital.

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#### Endnotes.

<sup>1</sup> McCartney, N. 2001a. *Heritage*. London: Faber and Faber, p. 9. *Heritage*, was first produced at the Traverse, Edinburgh in 1998, directed by Philip Howard.

<sup>2</sup> *Home* premiered at the Tron Theatre, Glasgow directed by Carol Moore for lookOUT Theatre Company.

<sup>3</sup> There has been some criticism in the Scottish press of a lack of "Scottish" work in the programming, and at a recent 'Staging the Nation' event, the debate was again raised, with practitioners and audience members alike defending the NTS on this issue (National Theatre of Scotland, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> When Jo goes missing at the end of the play, she reveals in the final scene that she has been to the Further Education college that she previously attended unsuccessfully.

<sup>5</sup> McCartney won the *Time Out* Critic's Choice Award for *Entertaining Angels* (1996), Best New Play at the Irish Theatre Awards for *Convictions* (2000), Best Children's Play at the TMA Theatre Awards for *Lifeboat*. *Standing Wave* was nominated for Best New Play (2005) and *A Sheep Called Skye* for Best Children's Show (2007) at the CATS Awards.

<sup>6</sup> Charlotte J. Headrick's papers include 'Coming to America: Producing the North American Premiere of Nicola McCartney's *Heritage*' delivered at the American Conference for Irish Studies, CUNY, New York (2007); ' "You don't have to be born in a country to belong to it": Nicola McCartney's *Heritage*, A Drama of the Irish in Canada' delivered at the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures conference, University College, Dublin (2007); 'Shattering Irish Dreams: Nicola McCartney's *Heritage*' delivered at the American Conference for Irish Studies, Southern Region, Winthrop University; 'Into the West: Nicola McCartney's *Heritage*' delivered at the Canadian Association for Irish Studies, Mount Royal College, Calgary (2009). I would like to thank Charlotte Headrick for all of the material she has sent to me during the course of my research for this article.

<sup>7</sup> I do not have full details of this paper, but it was referenced by McCartney in interview, and by Charlotte Headrick in my correspondence with her about the playwright's reception in North America.

<sup>8</sup> McCartney explained how, in the recent census, she described herself as Irish, Northern Irish, Scottish and European (2011b).

<sup>9</sup> In addition to *Home*, Scullion considers productions of *Further Than the Furthest Thing* by Zinnie Harris (Traverse, 2000) and *Shetland Saga* by Sue Glover (Traverse, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Scullion defines the "Return of the Native" as "one of the key mythologies of community, indeed of nationhood" (p. 379).

<sup>11</sup> The play was produced by the Tron Theatre and Reeling and Writhing, directed by Katherine Morley.

<sup>12</sup> In this scene, Sarah addresses the audience to narrate the period of time in which the barn is being built. The dialogue of those engaged, in their present, in the barn building intersects and interacts with her words as they enact the construction process.

<sup>13</sup> Emer's use of "come" in "It come on so sudden" indicates a different use of English (echoing James Joyce's assertion in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1968, p. 189): "The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine"), but also performs a linguistic trick so again form and content match: memory is present in the description and in her identity.

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*Maintained by the School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh*

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