

Summary of the Evaluations

The following summary is drawn from:

- Transcriptions of recordings of post show discussions
- Evaluation forms, letters and emails to company.

Questions:

- 1 Does the play trigger reflections on current political tensions? If so, in what way?
- 2 Comment on historical authenticity of the play, with reference to audience experience of the POWs?
- 3 When considering a re-draft which elements of the play were most positive?
- 4 Which elements might you change?
- 5 Other comments

1 Current political tensions

- Many people commented that the parallels in our current relationship with Europe “ resonated “ and that it was well timed for “current affairs” and our “disastrous “ breakdown with Europe today.
- “ it made me think about the effects of shared trauma on a society- and how much time needs to elapse before we forget the lessons learnt. Eg the Italian post war constitution was drawn up after the end of Fascism in Europe and it’s a really beautiful socialist document- but of course leaders like Berlusconi have tried to change to meet their own ends..” (student Brighton)
- “ it’s about young people and a message of hope- lots of people interviewed on the march (on the day of the Brighton performance- March 30th) resented the fact that they hadn’t had the chance to vote in the referendum- but would be of age now- so they would welcome the chance to reverse that. I remember when I was young my parents when on youth rallies in the late 40s , led by the Communist party to promote international peace and liberty. It seems almost unimaginable now- but the play rang strong bells for me for that reason- particularly with the last speech.” (student. London)
- “ I found that speech so moving because it was verbatim- using your grandmother’s words.” (Brighton)
- “The verbatim speech at the end could be seen as a direct consequence of the story”(Midlands)
- The experience of living closely with the so called “enemy” meant that they could no longer “other “ them. Interesting that the most strongly “Leave” areas during the referendum are ones in which there are few immigrants- and are very “white” Student, Brighton)
- “ Integration takes determination, kindness, effort and time” . “ determination not to fear strangers”. A stranger is a “friend you haven’t met yet” (Midlands)
- Thought the timing of the performance was really important re Brexit (Brighton)
- HOWEVER- The point that the play was about international friendship was picked up by part of the audience, but some people felt that there was “ no connection between what was conveyed in the play and current events” Brighton
- “ The main impulse was to beat the Germans and squash them- and drag them into the community- and beat fascism that way...but that’s not what the play is talking about.”
- Some people felt that the final speeches were a bit “preachy” because of the obvious political affiliation of the writer! (towards Remain) Brighton

2 Authenticity

- Many members of the audience shared personal stories of family connections with POWs before and following the war including:
 - A few people in the audiences in all areas of the country were children or grandchildren of German and Italian POWs
 - Italian POWs were often blamed for pregnancies of unmarried women when local people were covering up the behaviour of “respectable” people (Midlands)
 - “ I grew up befriending POW families after the war, who had worked on my grandparents’ farm. Went to visit them and their families in their homes when they moved to Manchester” (Clwyd)
 - Could link it to the start of Llangollen International Eisteddfod- started in 1947 as a way of bringing the warring nations together through music, dance, poetry etc (Clwyd)
 - Life long friendships established (Clwyd)
 - As an Austrian citizen it was very interesting to have this insight (Clwyd)
 - “ musician friend of mine is the son of an Italian POW who stayed on after the war and set up his own farm (Midlands)
 - Brought up in South Wales..lots of Italians stayed after the war..However- some were already here- migrated in the ‘20s..and were interned during WW2 ((Clwyd)
 - “ the Welsh family where the Italian POW was posted during WW2 bought him a ticket after the war so he could come back to visit them! (Clwyd)
 - ▣ “ My Polish grandmother used to befriend Polish POWs and teach them English. Often, as kids we would go into the woods where there were still traces of the camp buildings and structures in the undergrowth” (Midlands)
 - ▣ father Horst was a German soldier in the Channel Islands, taken prisoner at the end of the war and moved to Cambridgeshire where he met Keith’s mother. She was a Welsh trainee schoolteacher on teaching practice in/near Cambridge. Horst was a motor biker, trusted to run errands on his bike, which helped with meeting locals. Tamy’s taken up writing in her retirement and has written a short story based on this family history. She’s happy to be put in touch with you.
 - Had an uncle Werner, a Polish-German PoW who met his aunt while she was working as a land girl. Again, similarities with your story.
 - ▣ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022009413493945>. Article on POWs in WW2

- Other points about authenticity
- “ I felt that there was a lot of animosity/conflict in the play- but actually people got on quite well.” Clwyd
- Very realistic in the portrait of collaboration. (Clwyd)
- Very authentic. Triggered memories and thoughts of Caerfallen (my grandparents’ farm) and the specific detail of the lambing and the farm. (Clwyd)
- “ When you are making a play about actual events you have to pay respects to the people involved and what actually happened. It was an artistic risk to include the verbatim speech at the end- but to my mind it paid off- because it made it deeper.” Rachel Gartside. RSC Education consultant
- (writer’s response to last statement) Although it’s important to pay attention to the rules of narrative - including the creation of climaxes and the reversal of fortunes and consistency of character etc- I also wanted to include representation of the fragmented, often *inconsistent* nature of life which doesn’t fit into neat patterns. A marriage between the two forms is quite tricky to pull off. Maybe it’s easier to separate the forms. (fiction and verbatim)

3 Most positive elements of the play which should not be lost in a re-draft.

- .Strongly positive statements made about roundedness of characterisation, both in the writing and in the acting.
- Quality of the acting widely commented on. (superb/fantastic) Special reference to the versatility of actors playing a wide range of parts.
- Fantastic performance. Thought of it as a performance- not a reading.
- “ Really enjoyed it *as a reading*. The active incorporation of stage directions by the actors was a masterly stroke of direction. The reading was very well choreographed!”
- Frequent comments on multi-layered quality (use of this word 3 times) of the writing and the “absorbing” and “engrossing” nature of the story.
- Many positive comments on the weaving together of different languages and musical elements
- “ Suspension of disbelief disappeared very quickly despite actors holding scripts” Indicates quality of writing.
- Wove in research and historical context in well
- Biographical elements woven in well
- Subtle and clever humour. Promoted sympathy for all characters
- Loved the interaction between individuals
- Drawn in quickly. Play had energy and pace
- Loved depiction of complex relationship between Dai and Elizabeth and the growing romance between Mario and Elizabeth
- Liked its rootedness in fact
- Loved the characterisation of Elizabeth and her struggle for independence- within a marriage (conveyed subtly in performance and writing)
- Wanted to see the moment when Caitlin was controlling her own life. Moment when her engagement to Mario was revealed was therefore important. (in class and feminist terms)
- Very rich threads: Plaid/Childlessness/pre-war unemployment/feminism/class warfare/jealousy/human response to need
- Good narrative arc
- Really conveyed the humanity of individuals versus the inhumanity and de-humanising effect of war
- Linguistically fascinating- with the overlap of different languages and musical traditions
- Would make a great radio play! (3 times)
- We loved the show. We thought the rehearsed reading format worked amazingly well – all attention on the voices and the words without any complications of set or costume. It was rather like being in a radio play studio but with the added benefit of actors making subtle gestures and small moves to reinforce the words (eg moving to another chair to indicate they’d left the stage, or shifting the position of one arm to show they were playing a different character). As for the words themselves, there was almost nothing major I’d want to change. My only doubt was about the twist of Caitlin and Mario coupling up, which felt a bit too neat and rather sudden – though I can see the dramatic appeal of Elizabeth’s old flame remaining in her world in the same way that Dai’s lost love remained in his.
- (John Goodman Midlands. Included in full as a typical positive response)

4 Things which could be changed

- Frequent references in evaluations to unease about Mario's decision to stay and marry Caitlin. Audiences felt that there were insufficient hints given in the script as to this as a possible outcome.
- People were also critical about Elizabeth's final speech and the speedy rapprochement with Emyln.
- Audiences felt that the verbatim nature of the final speeches clashed with the dramatic style of the fictionalised narrative
- Criticism of the initial wordiness and exposition in the opening scenes, when the Sergeant provides information about the placing of POWs.
- Some people felt that the writer should "kill her darlings" by dropping personal and verbatim material
- Others disagreed with this- and felt that a strength of the play was its authenticity. Suggestions made that more trails could be laid about Elizabeth's relationship with broad-casting before we go into the final speech. The problem with it was not that it drew on real rather than fictional material- more that it came from nowhere- in a rather clunky attempt at resolution.
- Steph Dale. Writer and tutor in play-wrighting at BCU and Bristol Old Vic: Full email feedback:
 - I really enjoyed the reading; you have created a fascinating world. I've noted a few initial thoughts below.
 - The world is strong, as are the characters who inhabit it.
 - Do you need 4 POWs? The strength of the piece is in its intimacy and the joy of watching actors multi-role. The play rotates around the model "a stranger comes to town". The others are surplus?
 - The wife talks of her concerns about her husband's fidelity and cites Caitlin - but then when she discovers Caitlin is pregnant she is supportive and doesn't query her or him...
 - I wondered whether the stakes could be higher for the family? If you set up her lack of a child earlier, it makes sense of her growing attraction to the POW.
 - Writing the letter for him - how dangerous was that? Consequences? This felt like a real moment but didn't go anywhere.
 - The writing around the loss of a child and a dead sheep was superb.
 - At the moment, I think the audience will think there is going to be a big reveal as to who the father of Caitlin's baby is. I loved the fact it didn't turn out to be the husband's but think the audience will want to know because it is so central to the first third of the piece.
 - Love the use of songs Love the use of languages: More of that!
 - Whose story is it? What is at stake and could the stakes be higher? At the moment, it feels like it's Elizabeth's story..If this is the case, perhaps worth adding more of her political growth - is it a story of a woman who is struggling with childlessness- and comes to realise she is good at something else? Agree with the feedback comment that it suddenly becomes all about the politics and we lose the personal, which is where most of the play sits. Maybe a bit more blending here? Politics comes as a realisation there are bigger things than the farm. Does moving towards one mean the loss of the other?

