

Review of 'Breaking the Code' by Hugh Whitmore as performed by Streatham Theatre Company, July 2015.

According to a post-mortem note unearthed in 2014, Alan Turing did not commit suicide but died as a result of violence.

Anyone who saw Streatham Theatre Company's production of *Breaking the Code*, Hugh Whitmore's play about the brilliant mathematician and Enigma code-breaker, will not be surprised.

This Turing, played by Louis Fox, is supremely confident in his intellect and - just as importantly - his moral choices.

"I have always been willing - indeed eager - to accept moral responsibility for what I do," he says.

His self-belief, combined with his genius as a logician, is key to both his professional success and personal downfall.

Homosexual acts were illegal at the time, and Turing saw no reason why they should be. Nor did he understand why his many liaisons upset his security-obsessed bosses.

In one of the few scenes in the play not dominated by the exceptionally talented Fox, Turing's mentor and fellow code-breaker at Bletchley, Dillwyn Knox (Enda Lambe, wholly convincing as a sharp and sympathetic brain behind a doddering facade) tries to convince him to consider the effect of his actions on other people.

In a speech the more forceful for the restraint of its delivery, Knox questions how Turing would react if he, Knox, were to reveal that he were terminally ill and frightened of dying. The done thing, Knox suggests, is to keep everything buttoned up.

Turing, uncompromising and unconventional, will do no such thing.

An affair with an impecunious younger chancer Ron Miller (William Roney, slippery but not entirely unsympathetic) is discovered by the police and proves his undoing.

Miller tells the police he had sex for the money, that Turing made the moves.

Convicted of indecency, Turing is forced to undergo chemical castration - injection with female hormones - as the price of avoiding prison.

Under orders to end his affairs or lose his job, the play depicts Turing as killing himself by deliberately biting a poisoned apple.

Yet even this, now disputed, ending does not leave behind a sense of Turing as martyr.

He shows no sign of self-doubt nor self-pity, only anger at the pettiness of the Secret Service bureaucrats who seek to control him, and a determination not to obey their rules.

While no-one could see *Breaking the Code* - the most assured and thought-provoking of STC's productions to date - without sadness at his persecution by an ungrateful establishment, the portrait it draws is of a man likely to have ruffled feathers whichever generation he was born in.

After all, it is at least possible that in today's Britain, when sexual relationships involving power imbalances are increasingly defined as exploitative, predatory and wrong, the tabloids would find as much to condemn now in Turing's behaviour as they did in the fifties.

Melanie Newman, July 2015