

The Drama House
Quality Film and TV Productions

Breaking the Code

Breaking The Code tells the story of a mathematical genius, Alan Turing (Derek Jacobi) who, seconded to the top secret Bletchley Park England during World War II, was responsible for designing the first computer, which enabled the allies to crack the German Enigma code and, some would argue, win the war. It was on Churchill's specific instructions that Turing was given all the resources he required - and his personal behavior tolerated: Turing was a practicing homosexual at a time when it was illegal. At Bletchley Park Turing encounters his new boss, Dillwyn Knox (Richard Johnson) who immediately recognizes Turing's genius and perhaps, his sexual predilections. Whilst discussing the practical applications of scientific research Turing speaks what is perhaps the central line of Breaking The Code: "I have always been willing - indeed eager - to accept moral responsibility for what I do." It was this uncompromising stance, plus his perhaps unworldly genius, which was Turing's strength when it came to scientific research, but was also his personal undoing.

Breaking The Code operates on two timescales, which are very skillfully inter-cut by Hugh Whitmore (Writer): the Second World War and England in the late 1950's. During the war we see the code-breaker at work, declining to compromise his nature by refusing to return the love of his female assistant, Pat Green (Amanda Root).

After the war we see Turing still doing research but getting progressively entangled in the law after he has voluntarily gone to the Police to report a break in. When asked whom he suspects, Turing suggests one of his casual male lovers. To the Police Officer's (Alun Armstrong) surprise, Turing confesses to his homosexuality - which is illegal - and is charged. After his trial he meets Pat Green again, who knew he was a homosexual but would have married him anyway, and who reveals that Dillwyn Knox had 'compromised' his own homosexuality and married conventionally. Turing also confesses to his mother (Prunella Scales) who, although shocked, supports him.

Eventually Turing goes on holiday to Corfu and picks up a young Greek boy. Shortly afterwards Turing commits suicide.

Summarized as badly as this Breaking The Code sounds rather bleak; it is not. It is frequently very funny, always compassionate and provides real insight into the dilemmas and problems homosexuality in a genius presents, not just to Turing but to his family, his professional colleagues, and not least The State's preoccupation with National Security - in the shape of one John Smith (Harold Pinter), the mysterious 'Man from the Ministry'.

Apart from recreating Derek Jacobi's remarkable performance, which he gave in both London and Broadway Theatres, the film has great visual interest as it crosscuts between the England of World War II and the post-war England of the 1950's. Breaking The Code

is a 90-minute film, shot on 35mm. It reunites Derek Jacobi and Herbert Wise (Director) whose collaboration on I Claudius was one of their earliest and greatest successes.

Sanibel, Florida. BIG ARTS Screening January 30, 2006

Program note:

Breaking the Code was shot on 35mm in the UK in November/December 1996. Major funding came from BBC TV and PBS (WGBH). When the film was delivered the BBC demanded cuts so that it would fit their schedule. PBS insisted on a fade in / fade out during the major speech Alan Turing gives on Mathematics because "Americans won't understand it. So, in spite of all its international awards, tonight is the first time that Breaking the Code will be seen as the author, director, and producer intended it to be seen when they shot it in 1996.

Alan Turing would doubtless be pleased that there some 50,000 mentions of him on the web. If you are coming to England, a visit to Bletchley Park, which reopens in April 2006, would give you an insight to where Alan Turing and many other code breakers lived and worked during WWII. Bletchley Park is conveniently situated now, as in WWII, equidistant between Oxford, Cambridge and London. Their Website is:

The BBCs website is always worth following for current news. It also publishes information released from Government Archives. For Example, the following:

By: Dominic Casciani
BBC News at the National Archives

BANFF Television Festival 1997
Special Jury Prize (Rocky)

Festival De Television De Monte Carlo 1997
Best Actor - Derek Jacobi
International Press Award - Best Drama

Royal Television Society (North) Awards 1997
Best Actor - Derek Jacobi

British Broadcasting Press Guild Awards 1997
Best Single Television Drama

San Francisco International Film Festival
Certificate of Merit Winner

US GLAAD Annual Media Awards 1997
(Gay & Lesbian News Bureau & Watchdog Organization)
Nomination - Outstanding TV Movie

BAFTA 1997
Best Actor - Derek Jacobi
(Nominated) Best Single Drama

Reviews

BRITISH PRESS REVIEWS

"BREAKING THE CODE (BBC1) was the best one-off drama I've seen this year, and last year actually. Everyone involved deserves medals, rises, and holidays in the Caribbean. Derek Jacobi turned in a sensational performance. I'm happy to eat my wor-wor-words about stage plays never working on television. The plot wove through layers and layers of meaning and nuances, the Enigma machine acting as a central metaphor for hidden truth, deceit and secrets."

"None of the characters was quite what you imagined, and I'd never have believed I'd be riveted by a 10-minute soliloquy on pure math and Wittgenstein. But I was. I'm sorry. I'm not doing this play justice. You should have seen it. Singling out Jacobi for acclaim is a disservice to the rest of the cast who were all equally brilliant, including Harold Pinter who was so unnervingly spooky that I don't believe he was acting at all."

A A Gill, the Sunday Times: February 9th 1977

"Whitemore's superb script counter-points Turing's ruthlessly logical mind with the instinctive human honesty - in life as in art, he was incapable of deceit - which proved to be his undoing. The combination of scientific genius and worldly innocence achieved by Jacobi was deeply affecting, enhanced as it was by wonderfully nuanced Englishness from Richard Johnson as his boss, Prunella Scales as his mother, Amanda Root as his would-be wife and Harold Pinter as a really scary Orwellian bureaucrat."

Anthony Holden, The Express on Sunday: February 9th 1997

"...the story of Alan Turing...is a dramatist's dream. And then there is the cast. Derek Jacobi as Turing, Prunella Scales as his mother, Alun Armstrong, Amanda Root, even Harold Pinter."

Daily Mail Weekend Magazine: February 1st 1997

"Just give thanks for a TV film with people really talking and thinking, no violence and no dumb music...Herbert Wise directs another masterpiece."

The Sunday Telegraph

Review: February 2nd 1997

"It is a splendid example of the kind of set-piece drama of which we no longer see enough."

Evening Standard, Pick of the Night: February 5th 1997

"Producer Jack Emery has assembled a top notch cast - Prunella Scales, Alun Armstrong, Amanda Root and even a small cameo from Harold Pinter - and brought it all in for under £900,000, a numerical feat comparable to some of Turing's own."

Time Out: February 5th 1997

"BREAKING THE CODE is a superb play and was superbly acted...Turing killed himself. The unmitigated tragedy at least inspired a great television play."

Roy Hattersley, The Daily Express: February 6th 1997

"Hugh Whitmore's BREAKING THE CODE (BBC1), which he adapted from his own West End play, broke all the rules of television and made no concessions to the lowest common denominator. Scaling intellectual heights and plumbing moral depths on a cerebral roller-coaster that took us through the extraordinary life of code-breaker Alan Turing, this was a white knuckle dram - all the more remarkable for being true. The script was unashamedly erudite, elegantly subtle, and never wavered from its burning intelligence...Jacobi displayed as great a genius in his craft as Turing had in his."

Christina Odone, The Daily Telegraph: February 6th 1997

"Hugh Whitmore's excellent BREAKING THE CODE (BBC1)...Any excuse to get real intelligent, five-bucket drama onto BBC1 is good enough. Whitmore's play is an elegant piece, with a virtuoso role for Jacobi...A genius pleading with a jobs worth is an unpleasant sight. Jacobi's upturned face is the perfect mixture of mask and passion; as an actor, he can personify abject loss and loneliness better than anyone I know...to see his Alan Turing on telly at last (courtesy of producer Jack Emery and director Herbert Wise) was a real, if unexpected, treat."

Lynn Truss, The Times: February 6th 1997

"This was not half-hearted production. It's key was the creation of atmosphere...and it was the honesty and detailed observation of this film that gave it such power."

Anthony Troon, The Scotsman: February 6th 1997

"A glorious 90 minutes."

AMERICAN PRESS REVIEWS

"Now embellished considerably by Mr. Whitmore and still graced with Mr. Jacobi's bravura performance, *BREAKING THE CODE* comes to television on Sunday on "Masterpiece Theater". Prepare for 90 riveting minutes."

"A horrifying inevitability engulfs the story, realized powerfully by the accomplished cast. Mr. Jacobi biting his nails and using a stutter similar to the one that served him so well in "I Claudius," is incredibly moving, all the more so by making Turing so utterly unapologetic about any aspect of his life."

"*BREAKING THE CODE* is one of those exquisitely crafted productions that seems to be a monopoly of British television."

New York Times: January 29 1997

"Once in a while, an actor gives a performance so incandescent that it seems likely to glow forever. If that performance is given only on stage, though, its light ultimately may dim with the fading memories of the few who had a chance to see it."

"That's why everybody should celebrate the fact that Sir Derek Jacobi's amazing performance as Alan Turing in Hugh Whitmore's *BREAKING THE CODE*, Baited with extravagant praise by critics who saw him do the play on the London and New York stage, is now available to us all."

"Jacobi re-creates his highly original and unforgettable portrayal..."

"Jacobi gets exceptional support from the fine cast, including playwright Harold Pinter as John Smith..."

"But it's Jacobi's deeply persuasive performance that makes all the difference. He creates such a simple and likable Turing that his downfall, with the man crucified by bureaucrats of an ungrateful nation, achieves the stature of profound tragedy."

"Jacobi never fails to give memorable performances but this may be his greatest ever in a heartbreaking drama with tremendous emotional impact."

Arizona Republic: February 2 1997

(And syndicated across USA)

"For a story with an unhappy ending, this is not a particularly self-pitying drama. Jacobi's beautifully modulated performance is a character study of a

gentle man unacquainted with false modesty, exasperated at the very notion of compromise."

"The superb supporting cast includes Prunella Scales as his nattering and fluttery mother, Amanda Root as the mousy colleague who adores him, and playwright Harold Pinter as a government agent who informs Turing, years after the war, that he is now considered a security risk. Even in peacetime."
USA Today: January 31 1997

"Jacobi's interpretation of the character is unique and wholly involving."

"Jacobi makes you see and understand Alan Turing's brilliance, and above all else his romance with, and his passion for, mathematics."

"While Jacobi's performance is at the heart of **BREAKING THE CODE**, he receives outstanding support, under Herbert Wise's direction, from several other performers, including Julian Kerridge as the hustler, Richard Johnson as Turing's boss during the war years, and Alun Armstrong as Mick Ross, a policeman almost as much of an enigma as the German code."

"Special mention must be made of Prunella Scales, perfect as Alan's mother, all fluttery and refined when we first meet her, later horrified when she has to face Turing's secret in a highly emotional scene. The other standout performance is by, of all people, playwright Harold Pinter, who plays a government official, who says his name is "John Smith" and who seems to have an extensive secret dossier on Turing. Pinter turns Smith into a menacing character from one of his own plays and if Turing was indeed driven to suicide by government pressure, the character that Pinter plays could definitely do it."

"What a sad waste! Jacobi makes Turing such an interesting and sympathetic character that it's a shock when the play - and Turing's life - ends. You want both to go on much longer."

Seattle Times: February 3 1997

"It's a pleasure to see such a talented cast run through its paces."

New York Magazine: February 3 1997

"The primary asset in tonight's show is Derek Jacobi as Turing. Jacobi makes Turing quite endearing. He finds an appealing sweetness in a difficult character yet he is smart enough not to overindulge in it."

"Jacobi's performance gives the production a poignancy that isn't easily

shaken. As Turing, he says he's always been willing, indeed eager, to accept moral responsibility for what I do. If only his government minders had been willing to do the same."

Detroit News & Free Press: February 1997

"Jacobi's performance brings this drama to life, and in doing that, finally pays tribute to the man who broke the code."

Houston Chronicle: February 2 1997

"No actor is more welcome on television than Britain's Derek Jacobi..."

"Turing's story, drawn from the stage play by Hugh Whitmore is both deeply sad and chilling. Yet Jacobi, who knows how to layer his characters with multiple emotions, adds real warmth."

"In all this is a rewarding yet heartbreaking television drama that speaks volumes about mores and morality, too."

Orange County Register: February 2 1997

CANADIAN PRESS REVIEWS

"It's a virtuoso, nuanced performance from Jacobi. ... Mathematics is not generally the stuff of great dialogue but Jacobi's reflections are delivered with such sheer intoxicating excitement the viewer is swept along in wonder ... Standouts in the supporting cast include Prunella Scales as Turing's sturdy mother and Richard Johnson as Dilwyn Knox, his bluff but wryly knowing associate at Bletchley. There is poignancy in their performances - as well as that of Amanda Root as the woman who sought to marry Turing, despite his homosexuality - that pushes this production well past the standard emotional plateau of conventional television. Also featured here is a rare acting performance by playwright and screenwriter Harold Pinter."

Richard Helm, The Edmonton Journal

"BREAKING THE CODE, the 'Showcase' presentation ... Derek Jacobi is brilliant"

TV Highlights of the Week, The Ottawa Citizen

"It is a story told in a series of dialogues, yet it seldom feels static or stagy. It makes a firm but rather gentle statement about accepting differences, rather in the manner of Turing himself.

Tony Atherton, Critics' Choice, The Ottawa Citizen

"This always-interesting production ... Jacobi is wonderfully pathetic as the

boy - man who could never really relate to people except on a casual sex-for-sale basis. He is the crumpled, stammering brilliant shell of a man who only really likes mathematics."

Starweek Magazine

"...BREAKING THE CODE, an elegantly wrought BBC-TV movie..."

John Haslett Cuff, Toronto Globe and Mail

"Derek Jacobi is superb as Turing ... A delicious turn by playwright Harold Pinter."

Brent Ledger, Xtra! Magazine