

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE IN PROMOTING PEACE AND OPPOSING WAR... November 2023

My name's Michael Mears, I've been a professional actor all my working life and in recent years I've also written a number of plays for theatre and radio. In my own modest way, I would also consider myself a peace activist.

So. The role of the arts and culture in promoting peace and opposing war...

Let's rephrase that as a question – can the arts and culture help promote peace, help oppose war? In a word – no. So, thank you for coming...

No, wait – seriously – I think the answer to that question is possibly. Or to be more precise – maybe...sometimes...it depends. It depends on who's experiencing the artwork, and it depends of course on the artwork itself, how effective it is, how engaging, how compelling...

In the last two years I've been touring my play THE MISTAKE all around the UK, a play about Hiroshima and the events leading up to the dropping of the first atomic bomb on that city in August 1945. On the tour this year it was performed by myself and a remarkable young female Japanese performer Riko Nakazono. There were many memorable performances during that time but I wanted to take the play further afield.

One day I find myself in the USA, I'm in Washington DC, and I'm standing in front of the White House – which is where I would love to perform the play...

In 2018, I did in fact perform my previous play THIS EVIL THING, which was about Britain's First World War conscientious objectors, in Washington DC, not at the White House but in a church not far from the White House. The peace organisation in Washington that helped organise that performance contacted the Obamas to see if they would be interested in attending. We didn't hear back from them. We invited the then President as well - er what was his name - but he was rather tied up with one thing and another.

But on this occasion, with my latest play, my D.C. contacts get in touch with the White House again and we nearly fall over when we get a response – that no less a person than the U.S. Secretary of State will be happy to attend the play.

It's all a blur, I remember very little about the performance, but immediately after the play ends, the U.S. Secretary of State steps forward and vigorously shakes my hand, he can barely speak, there are tears in his eyes, and finally he says that he is going straight back to the President to urge him to rethink government policy on nuclear weapons.

I'm stunned. *I* can barely speak. There are tears in *my* eyes. I grasp his hand and tell him that I can't believe that my modest little play would have such a profound effect in the corridors of power of one of the most powerful nations on earth.

Ah well, we can but dream...

Look, I would LOVE to perform my play about the dangers of nuclear weapons to world leaders, politicians, in the House of Commons... because I do believe that what the play explores and reveals about the devastating effects of those weapons on the individuals on the ground, the immediate and then the long-term effects, couldn't *fail* to change hearts and minds...

The next question posed on the flyer for this talk is this – 'Can a stage play, film or painting have a real, lasting impact on the serious issues of our time?' To which my answer is – not sure...

Here's a quote from a famous film director Martin Scorsese, talking about his latest film 'Killers of the Flower Moon'...a quote which perhaps is an answer to the question posed on the flyer...

'Art can affect us on a very deep, mysterious level. I've felt it myself and I've seen it in others. Certain films I've seen, some many times, are more than great movies – they are genuine revelations. I don't know if they put things right, but they widen our field of vision, our sense of what it is to be alive.'

In other words, like myself, Martin Scorsese is not sure...

There are numerous plays which could be categorised as 'anti-war', numerous films too, and paintings, novels, poems, photographs...

Let's consider a very famous painting...



Guernica by Pablo Picasso was inspired by the bombing of the small Basque town of Guernica by Nazi and Italian forces in 1937 - at the request of the Spanish Nationalists.

In this monumental work of his, Picasso refused to depict any realistic representation of the bombed town.

Instead, within the painting are various elements...

- There's a single light bulb: which symbolizes the deluge of fire from the bombing in the form of incandescent flames emanating from the body of the bulb.
- There's a horse: disembowelled with its body pierced by a spear.
- There's a bull: the emblem of Spain.
- There's a dove: which is barely sketched and as if erased to show the monstrosity of the war in front of the vanished peace.
- Several women are represented, notably one on the left of the painting, her head turned towards the sky, mouth open and

carrying her dead baby in her arms. Another, in the upper right of the painting is screaming with her head and arms raised to the sky.

- There's a man with a sword: the only man represented in this work, lying on the ground, with his whole body dismembered.

In September 1940, the Nazis, who had occupied Paris, decided to visit Picasso's apartment and studio and they came across a photographic reproduction of *Guernica*. One of the German officers asked Picasso: "*Did you do this?*" "No," Picasso replied. "*You did this.*"

It's a very powerful, unforgettable painting...that has had a lasting impact, undeniably...but has it stopped further wars? Has it brought about peace in the world?

There's a painting by John Singer Sargent in the Imperial War Museum just round the corner from here – painted in 1919, it's called GASED.



This huge, almost life-sized canvas shows injured soldiers in the aftermath of a mustard gas attack on the Western Front in August 1918 - witnessed by the artist who was there. Mustard gas was an 'indiscriminate weapon' causing widespread injury and burns, as

well as affecting the eyes. As shown in the painting, the eyes of the soldiers, blinded by the effect of the gas, are bandaged, and they're being assisted to walk by medical orderlies. A chilling image and a powerful testimony to the terrible effects of chemical weapons used in war.

But did this painting help prevent the future use of chemical weapons?

The Russian war artist Vasily Vereshchagin used to travel with the Imperial Russian Army to the country's southern border in Central Asia and make sketches that he would later turn into large-scale paintings.

His striking painting 'The Apotheosis of War' (1871) depicts a mountain of skulls in a deserted landscape with crows flying overhead...



Vereshchagin's own inscription to the painting was 'To all great conquerors, past, present and to come...'

His painting is a memorial, a timeless message and a warning. But was his message, his warning, heeded by future would-be conquerors – Russian, or whoever they might be?

Well, I would assert that without these paintings we'd be impoverished, that these paintings enrich our understanding of the true cost of *'the disasters of war'*. (The title of Francisco Goya's famous series of prints.)

Now turning to literature...

There are numerous novels that can be considered anti-war. I won't list them here. But in the light of my work on my play *THE MISTAKE* I will mention just two – both Japanese – firstly **Black Rain** by Masuji Ibuse – a beautiful but also very harrowing novel about the devastation wreaked on Hiroshima and the effect on one particular family. There are many passages which are difficult to read because of what they describe. But I think it's a profoundly important work, one which should be compulsory reading for all politicians and world leaders.

Then there is the extraordinary series of 10 graphic novels, or manga comics – by Keiji Nakazawa, called **BAREFOOT GEN**. Here is an example of a work of art about the devastation of war created by someone who actually experienced that devastation – who was a six-year-old boy living in Hiroshima at the time of the atomic bombing who miraculously survived (though many of his family did not) and grew up to become a successful manga artist, his most famous work being the autobiographical pictorial work *BAREFOOT GEN*.

Nakazawa says in the introduction - 'I envisioned Gen as barefoot, standing firmly atop the burnt-out rubble of Hiroshima, raising his voice against war and nuclear weapons. The episodes in *Barefoot Gen* are all based on what really happened to me or to other people in Hiroshima.'

He goes on to say:

‘Human beings are foolish. Thanks to bigotry, religious fanaticism, and the greed of those who traffic in war, the Earth is never at peace, and the spectre of nuclear war is never far away. I hope that Gen’s story conveys to its readers the preciousness of peace and the courage we need to live strongly, yet peacefully.’

In 1976, two Japanese peace activists were walking across the United States as part of that year’s Transcontinental Walk for Peace and Justice. Their fellow walkers frequently asked them about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and one of the Japanese activists had a copy of Barefoot Gen in his backpack. The Americans on the walk were astonished that an atomic bomb survivor had written about it in cartoon form and urged their Japanese friends to translate the book into English. And so **Project Gen** was founded by a number of volunteers to translate these remarkable books into English and into many other languages, including Russian.

The prayer of these volunteer translators has always been that BAREFOOT GEN would contribute in some small way to the abolition of nuclear weapons before this new century is over.

We’ll have to wait another 77 years to see whether their fervent prayer will be answered.

POETRY

There are many poems opposing war and promoting peace.

Some of the First World War poets, most famously of course.

More recently Owen Shears wrote a remarkable verse-drama called **Pink Mist** - about three young soldiers from Bristol who are deployed to Afghanistan.

That national treasure of ours Michael Rosen wrote a very powerful poem called **Don't Mention The Children**.

PLAYS

As for plays in the theatre - all the way back to the Greeks – with Euripides and his play *The Trojan Women*, for example – dramatists have been portraying the devastating effects of war.

There's no time today to explore Shakespeare and what he contributed to the debate on war versus peace...but other anti-war plays that come to mind are **Journey's End** by R.C. Sheriff - and of course Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop's stage musical **Oh What a Lovely War!**

If we turn to FILMS...

Well, once again...**Oh What a Lovely War!** as a film became a very moving and effective anti-war work of art.

All Quiet On The Western Front, is a German novel and film set in World War One.

Hacksaw Ridge is a film portraying the experiences of a Second World War American pacifist combat medic...

and there are many other films...

In relation to my own stage play THE MISTAKE – there is of course one of this summer's blockbusters – **Oppenheimer**... which though it brought the issue of nuclear weapons right back into the public eye, is not however, I would argue, a film that helps promote peace or opposes war – for the simple reason that for all its merits, it fails to reference, it fails to depict the appalling suffering of the Japanese on the ground who were the victims of those two atomic bombs.

There are other films of course, many of them, that would seem to positively glorify war, or at the very least have an unquestioning attitude towards wars and conflicts and how they should be resolved. These films would also have to be placed in the category of art and culture that doesn't promote peace, doesn't oppose war, but rather seem to perpetrate the belief that conflict can only be resolved by even greater, by superior violence.

But have the paintings, poems, plays, films, novels that I mentioned earlier helped to promote peace, helped to oppose war? I'd argue that yes, they have helped. In greater or lesser ways, they have helped...by shining an unflinching light on the conflicts depicted.

Now, what about PHOTOGRAPHY?

When it's an art, or reaches the scale of art, photography from war zones, photography which captures the suffering wreaked on individuals can have a profound and lasting effect on us.

I'm sure many people will be familiar with the famous 1972 photograph The Terror of War by Nick Ut...it's almost unbearable to look at...



Children are fleeing a Napalm bombing during the Vietnam War. The 9-year-old girl in the centre of the photograph is naked, and later became known as the "Napalm girl."

It's an incredibly moving and powerful photograph particularly as it depicts children ...but has that photograph for all its impact prevented the future suffering of children in wars?

There's another powerful photograph called Bloody Saturday, by H.S. Wong, taken in 1937. A baby cries out in the middle of a ruined railway station in Shanghai. The damage was caused by a Japanese air attack on civilians as part of the Battle of Shanghai.



This photo, which sparked western anger at Japanese wartime atrocities, was dubbed by the journalist Harold Isaacs as "one of the most successful propaganda pieces of all time."

The photo powerfully conveyed the human side of the tragedy in a way that words or civilian casualty statistics could not and it instantly struck a nerve in the United States where it was seen in Life magazine and in many other outlets. Until that moment, few Americans had paid much attention to the atrocities being committed by the Japanese army in its brutal march across China. As far as most westerners were concerned, the war in Asia was

somebody else's problem — certainly none of Washington's business. But this photo helped shift those opinions.

So in this instance it would seem that, intentionally or not, a photograph depicting the cruelty of war promoted anger and the desire for revenge rather than the opposite. I don't know whether that was the photographer's intention.

Then there's the remarkable British photographer Don McCullin...

This is from an article by Rick Poyner in Design Observer... You may well be familiar with the deeply moving photograph he mentions...

'Don McCullin took a picture of a grieving woman, whose husband had just been killed, at the beginning of his career as a photographer. He was 28 and he had gone to Cyprus to report on the armed conflict between Greek and Turkish Cypriots for the *Observer* newspaper.



These were his first pictures of war, and the assignment changed him. His hope, the hope so often expressed by those who document the worst calamities, was to force the world to take notice with an unforgettable image.

The mourning woman's misery has the elemental power of a religious scene. A second crying woman, facing in the same direction while lost in her own grief, makes this a scene of collective despair.

McCullin has often said that memories of the many horrors he witnessed return to him at night, and he still struggles to make sense of what he saw. In 2013, he told an interviewer that he no longer thought images of what war does to people should be shown. If the intention is to open society's eyes to the truth and prevent war, then the shock treatment hasn't worked, so what are all these war photographs for?' he said.

And then last but by no means least there's MUSIC. Most obviously in terms of what we're exploring today – protest songs...

*(spoken) Come you masters of war
You that build the big guns
You that build the death planes
You that build all the bombs
You that hide behind walls
You that hide behind desks
I just want you to know
I can see through your masks*

Bob Dylan, in his early performing years, was at the forefront of the folk movement and wrote numerous protest and anti-war songs.

This early song of his was one of his starkest, and didn't pull its punches...

*(spoken) You fasten all the triggers
For the others to fire
Then you sit back and watch
When the death count gets higher
You hide in your mansion
While the young people's blood
Flows out of their bodies
And is buried in the mud

I hope that you die
And your death will come soon
I'll follow your casket
By the pale afternoon
And I'll watch while you're lowered
Down to your deathbed
And I'll stand over your grave
'Til I'm sure that you're dead.*

It's angry and heart-felt alright – but I'm not sure how effective it is in promoting peace or helping the anti-war effort.

A more subtle protest song by Dylan is BLOWIN' IN THE WIND – which like all the most famous and effective protest songs doesn't accuse or blame or point the finger but poses a question or many questions...

*(sung) How many roads must a man walk down
Before you can call him a man?
How many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, and how many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they're forever banned?*

And now Dylan gives the answer to the questions he's posed – but it's an elliptical answer...

*The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind*

A more straightforward anti-war song was sung by Edwin Starr around the time of the Vietnam War which also asks a question – but an angry, passionate question...

'WAR - huh - yeah – what is it good for?'

And he too provides an answer, but this time it's unambiguous...

'Absolutely nuthin'! Say it again!'

There were the Beatles of course with their timeless anthemic 'All You Need Is Love'... and talking of anthemic songs we can't forget John Lennon's 'GIVE PEACE A CHANCE'.

Lennon told Rolling Stone magazine that he wrote this song specifically to be sung during demonstrations such as The Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam. When Lennon saw television footage of nearly half a million anti-Vietnam War protestors singing his song outside the White House in November 1969, he considered it to be 'one of the biggest moments of my life.'

Someone else we can't omit when having a discussion about protest songs is the American folk-singer and activist, Pete Seeger.

There's his version of Ain't Gonna Study War No More...

*(sung) I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield
Down by the riverside down by the riverside
Down by the riverside
I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield
Down by the riverside and study war no more!

I ain't gonna study war no more...
Ain't gonna study war no more...
Ain't gonna study war no more...*

That's an anthem if ever I heard one... songs like this give people a voice – a chance to join in, communally, to feel they're not alone but part of something bigger...singing songs like this can make people feel that they do have power, the power to change things for the better, that all it takes is for enough people who want that change to happen to come together and SING about it...

*(sung) Where have all the flowers gone?
Long time passing.*

Another Pete Seeger song...

*Where have all the flowers gone?
Long time ago.
Where have all the flowers gone?*

Again, this song poses questions – and then provides an answer...

But it's a factual observational answer...

Young girls have picked them every one.

And then the verse ends with another question – a repeated question...

Oh, when will we ever learn?

When will we ever learn?

It's 'when will *they*' in some versions, but it feels much more immediate, doesn't it, in the versions where it's 'when will WE ever learn?' – implicating us all – and in effect provoking us all – into LEARNING – truly learning from our past mistakes.

It's a brilliant, subtle, unforced song...easy to sing along to...

And its message is so gentle – but so powerful because of that...

The song continues...

*(spoken) Where have all the young girls gone...
Taken husbands every one.*

*Where have all the husbands gone
Gone for soldiers every one*

*Where have all the soldiers gone
Gone to graveyards every one.*

*Where have all the graveyards gone
Gone to flowers every one*

*Where have all the flowers gone,
Young girls have picked them every one.*

Oh, when will we ever learn?

When will we ever learn?

Here are just two comments picked at random from *Youtube* in response to this song...

'I am 71 years old, I served with the 1st Cavalry in Viet Nam. I still cry when the flag is raised and I still cry when I hear this song.'

'I'm a 72 year old Vietnam Vet and still this song makes me cry! When will they ever learn?'

(In considering 'music for peace', mention should also be made here of the **West-Eastern Divan Orchestra**, based in Seville, Spain, and consisting of musicians from countries in the Middle East... of Egyptian, Iranian, Israeli, Jordanian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian and Spanish background, all working and playing together.

It was founded in 1999 by the conductor Daniel Barenboim and academic Edward Said, and is named after an anthology of poems by Goethe.)

The third question on the flyer is 'Do the arts have a vital role to play in engaging people with and teaching them about those issues?'

Absolutely. The arts can be enlightening, educative, informative, thought-provoking – but most importantly they can also teach us emotionally, teach us how to feel...by connecting with us through individual stories, or powerful images...

One of the schools we performed THE MISTAKE at recently and where we then took a workshop gave rise to various responses from students.

It seemed to us that although in their history classes and other classes, they had looked at what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in broad terms, they really knew nothing about the details of the suffering endured by those on the ground, in the immediate aftermath of the bombings and then in the weeks, months, years that followed, as the effects of the radiation took hold on many survivors in the forms of various cancers, leukaemia and the like...

We asked a group of students to come up with their own words for the memorial cenotaph in Hiroshima Peace Park.

These were some of their answers...

A tragedy never to be repeated.

Forever remembered.

A horrific day in history. Never to be repeated again.

Atrocity.

Wish we could turn back time.

Never again.

Having us perform the play for these 16-18 year olds, was not a substitute for their lessons but I believe that having my co-performer Riko Nakazono there in the room, right there in front of them – performing the play and then being available to talk to them afterwards and answer their questions had a real impact – especially when they heard Riko recalling, when she was at school in Japan, aged just 7 years old, atomic-bomb survivors coming to the school to talk to the pupils about their experiences and to show them photographs of their injuries...

Academia versus the arts

Now, it's important to give credit to the many brilliant and very helpful books in the academic field, which look at war and conflict and which aid research, expanding our understanding of crucial historical events – such books often being filled with statistics, facts, figures, analysis of those statistics, fact, figures, all very helpful, as I say– and all of which have their place, all of which are useful to writers like myself who wish to address war and conflict in their work.

But statistics don't bleed.

Academic tomes cannot connect the reader emotionally, viscerally with what is being described – or if they do, not, I would maintain, in the direct impactful way that a work of art can do – a painting, a photograph, a play, a piece of music or a song that goes straight to the heart of the person experiencing it.

Human stories, the telling of human stories, the portrayal of individual human experience and suffering, in art, will always be more powerful than statistics.

On Hiroshima Day August 6th 2002, I read a newspaper article – with interviews with the pilot of the plane that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and a female survivor of the Nagasaki bombing three days later.

A fascinating pair of interviews, which first stimulated me to start writing my play THE MISTAKE.

What I learned in those interviews deeply informed what I wrote in the play – and indeed the elderly pilot and a female survivor became two of the three protagonists in my play –

These interviews were revealing and informative but transforming them and adapting them into **drama** seemed to make them come alive in profoundly moving and affecting ways – not my judgement – but the judgement of countless people who have seen the play in the last two years.

In 2015 I came across a letter in an excellent book about conscientious objection in the First World War...a letter from a young conscientious objector to his family about the awful conditions he was being confined in.

When I read this letter on the page of the book, yes, it was moving, yes, it was disturbing, but I couldn't help envisioning a way of making it come alive, making it even more vivid...

(I stand on a small wooden box and become the conscientious objector.)

Cleethorpes Military Camp. June 24th 1917.

My dear mother and sister, this is the best stuff I can find to write what may be my last letter. I am now confined in a pit, ten feet deep, which started at the surface at three feet by two, and tapers off to two feet six inches by fifteen. The bottom is full of water, and I have to stand on two strips of wood all day long just above the water line. There is no room to walk about and sitting is impossible.

The sun beats down and through the long day there are only the walls of clay to look at. I wish I could see your letters! I could be reassured or know your wishes. As it is, I feel sentenced to death – knowing that within a few days I could be sent to France...and shot.

Enacting that letter in a play, enacting the circumstances in which it was written connects, I believe, far more viscerally with people, or in this case, with a theatre audience.

Another statistic.

Around 100,000 people died as a result of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

How do we connect with a statistic like that?

But experience a Japanese performer enacting one of the survivors of that bomb, searching for her parents in the rubble of the ruined city, and then we connect, then we are moved, then we feel compelled, I would hope, to do all we can to ensure that such an appalling catastrophe never occurs again.

But let me be clear – art when it is simply agit-prop (agitation/propaganda) – is never as powerful as art that tries to understand *why* these things happen...tries to explore an event from all perspectives. Doesn't tell the viewer or reader what to think but asks questions, is this right?

Or as Shigeko in my play THE MISTAKE cries out at one point – *'Is this the only way to end a war now...by inflicting **this?**'*

The fourth question posed on the flyer is this – 'Is there a danger that artistic works tackling issues around war and peace only ever preach to the converted?'

My answer again is – absolutely. Maybe danger is the wrong word. Tendency. There is a tendency that artistic works tackling issues around war and peace only ever preach to the converted. And yet, I have been surprised by the unexpected responses of people who have seen one of my plays - for example in 2017 in a Quaker school in Yorkshire – where, due to the Quaker ethos, and the Quaker peace testimony, their opposition to all wars...well, I thought I was definitely playing on home ground, so to speak...

But at the end of the performance of my play, which was my previous play, THIS EVIL THING, about the struggles of Britain's First World War conscientious objectors, two teenage students came up to me...

The first one challenged me, saying, 'Sir, what are you saying, that war is evil, all war is evil?' No, I said, well, yes, I do passionately believe that war is not the answer, the way to resolve conflict...

'But your play, sir, you've called it THIS EVIL THING, so you are saying war is evil...'

Well, actually the title of the play refers to military conscription, that was the phrase used by a conscientious objector to describe military conscription, the compelling of men to take up arms even if it's against their beliefs and principles...

'But sir, surely war is necessary sometimes – sometimes it is the only answer...'

I hadn't been expecting this from a Quaker student...

Then a second teenage boy came up to me.

'Sir, sir, so I've seen your play but I want to ask what you would do if you were in a trench...'

A trench? Sorry, where is this trench?

'In the war, first world war, you're in a trench and the Germans are coming straight towards you-'

Hang on, wait, I wouldn't be in a trench...

'No, imagine that you are in a trench...'

But I wouldn't be, I hope I would have been a conscientious objector.

'No, sir, you ARE in a trench and a German soldier is standing at the top of the trench and is about to fire at you, but you have a grenade in your hand...'

But I wouldn't have a grenade in my hand-

'You DO have a grenade in your hand-'

I wouldn't be in the trench in the first place...

'You ARE in the trench, sir, you HAVE got a grenade, now what would you do?'

Actually, I've got some packing up to do right now...

And so I excused myself...

One of the teachers present came up to me a few minutes later, he'd heard the conversations and he said to me you realise of course that by no means all the students here come from Quaker families, indeed those two boys are international students, the first one from Nigeria, the second from Ukraine...

Suddenly their questioning of me and my play made complete sense.

Of course. We bring our own experiences, our own beliefs and mindset to every situation and also, therefore, to any work of art we experience.

I was glad to have been challenged in those ways, clearly I wasn't preaching just to the converted, and it was clear that watching that play had challenged those two boys' assumptions, got them thinking, provoked debate...

Something I long for, hope for, dream of when performing to young people is to have just one young budding Greta Thunberg type in the audience who is so moved and inspired by the play I have written that she/he goes out and becomes a passionate and highly persuasive advocate on the world stage for peace and against nuclear weapons...

But generally my experience with my plays is that yes, I seem to be preaching mainly – not always, but mainly - to the converted.

To which I respond, 'But even the converted need to have their views, their beliefs, their principles, their attitudes, refreshed, renewed,

reinvigorated...we all need to be reminded, we all have to beware of complacency...

Various people have asked me why I wrote my play THE MISTAKE, what effect I hoped it would have – to which I answer that I feel it's a wake-up call.

As I hinted at the start today, I would love to perform these works to politicians and world leaders, I *dream* of doing that.

I dream of world leaders, prime ministers, presidents being willing to attend one of my plays, being willing to be WOKEN UP.

I performed my play THIS EVIL THING down in Salisbury at the Playhouse for a week in 2017. It's an important area for the military down there, and I noticed that the Playhouse offered generous ticket discounts to soldiers seeing shows at the Playhouse. The Playhouse always has a rollicking good Christmas pantomime every year, and it programmes various comedies and thrillers.

But somehow I couldn't see a group of squaddies sitting in the local pub saying, 'Hey, there's some show on at the Playhouse about conscientious objectors in the first world war – anyone fancy seeing it?'

Much as I would love to have performed it to an audience of squaddies, that was not going to happen...

But how to *reach* wider audiences, audiences that aren't necessarily in sympathy with the underlying thrust of my work?

Of course there's the path of turning a theatre work into a film or a television series or a radio play at least – and thereby reaching a much greater audience.

All possibilities, yes.

But I keep returning to my first love, the theatre - and a quote from Gloria Steinem the journalist, political activist and feminist:

"Nothing can replace being in the same space. That's exactly why we need to keep creating the temporary worlds of meetings – (and I would

add, of live performances) - *small and large, on campuses and everywhere else.*”

Having a young Japanese performer like Riko Nakazono enacting her role of atomic-bomb survivor right there in front of you, sharing her emotional journey, seeing the tears in her eyes, right there in front of you...I do believe that is even more powerful and has an even greater impact than perhaps seeing a recording of her portrayal on a screen up there – or on a television there on the other side of the living room.

The actor, singer, activist Paul Robeson said -

“Artists are the gatekeepers of truth. We are civilization’s radical voice.”

The novelist Jeanette Winterson has written:

“What art does is to coax us away from the mechanical and toward the miraculous. The so-called uselessness of art is a clue to its transforming power. Art is not part of the machine. Art asks us to think differently, see differently, hear differently, and ultimately to act differently, which is why art has moral force.”

My own mantra is that I want my work, any work of art, to provoke thought, to challenge perceptions and to open hearts... not to provide easy answers but to ask searching questions...

Whatever difference my plays have or haven’t made, whether or not they are just a mere drop in the ocean, I still believe and always will believe that it’s better to do something than nothing...

One of the most poignant pieces of verbatim testimony I came across in my researching into atomic-bomb survivors was this:

*In writing my diary, I wanted to share with you the facts of my experience that August day and in the weeks following, in such a way that you would know about it not only with your mind...but would **feel** it...with your **skin**.*

I put those words into the mouth of Shigeko, the atomic-bomb survivor in my play who is writing her own diary, at the very end of the play – they're almost her final words – and are delivered directly to the audience.

It's not enough for us to know about these things just with our minds...

I believe that the arts at their very best, may not bring about world peace or the end of all wars, but that yes, the arts can make us **feel** with our **skin**...and that *that* can have a profound and lasting impact, working on individuals in subtle, subterranean ways that may not bear fruit for years.

But that will surely bear fruit at some time or another.

Let us hope so.

THE END