

THE 2018 ESPERANTO CONGRESS  
AND *RECORDED ISOLATION*

To say that the UK's decision to leave the European Union in 2016 has divided the country is to point out the obvious. Whilst I actually stumbled upon Esperanto, a language constructed in the 1880's as an attempt to create a universal auxiliary language, I was drawn to think about it in the context of the referendum after the event. The consequent themes that emerged from my thinking about Esperanto in relation to Brexit led to my thinking of themes that I considered worth addressing in a play. Most notably, I began to think of a desire for unity versus a desire for independence, and the tensions that so often emerge within society as a result of these two conflicting societal goals. Esperanto having been the guiding force for my thinking about these themes in the first instance, I felt compelled to attend the 2018 Esperanto Congress in Aberystwyth so that I could explore those themes further by talking to those who had taken the time to learn it.

On one level, one could argue that so divided a landscape is the nail-in-the-coffin of Esperanto, a language constructed as an attempt to create a universal *lingua franca*. Whilst the congress that I attended quickly disproved any notion that Esperanto is a dead language, one could nevertheless argue that the ideals responsible for its creation are under threat now more than ever. An attempt to unite those who might otherwise harbor a suspicion towards one another may seem to some to be a rejected pipe-dream, especially in the wake of a referendum in which many of our leaders seemed all-too-eager to exploit the kind of distrust that results from the inherent divisions that results from not being able to communicate with one another. I knew that I wanted this to be core to my play's focus; this, in turn, led me to want my main character's situation and his decisions resulting from it to be symptomatic of this rejection of unity. The congress and the language thus inspired me to think in time about a Robinson Crusoe by choice, a literal desert islander who consciously decides to isolate himself from the outside world for precisely these reasons.

However, I equally knew that I did not want this to be a play that rued the fate of Esperanto, not least since Esperanto could, on another level, be said to be more relevant now than ever. Whether or not the language resembles a bygone dream, Esperanto resembles that dream all-the-same. Esperanto thus symbolizes the kind of idealistic desire for unity that was and remains the heart of the emotional argument for staying in the EU. I do not expect Esperanto to become a rallying cry for so-called "Remoaners" anytime soon. Nevertheless, in a society ironically divided by those who desire unity with their neighbors and those who do not, I cannot help but wonder if there is a higher value to a language that seems at its heart to symbolize the former side of the divide, a side that still yields much influence. Attending this congress certainly reminded me of this idealism, one that I once felt but feel I lost as a result of the 2016 referendum. Again, my hope was that the main character at the heart of my play would be a testament to this loss of idealism, with his decision to isolate himself being the symbolic death of his own idealistic hopes for the island that he once held, as well as symptomatic of his own desire for a new delusional idealism based on isolationism and a fear of the other.

The Esperanto Congress made me think of all these themes, all of which were crucial to the formation of *Recorded Isolation*. I would like to think that this play was a success on a written level. I am extremely grateful to those who funded me so as to give me the opportunity to attend, and I would like to take the opportunity now to personally thank those who did so, as well as those who organized and attended the congress itself, all of whom were extremely accommodating and hospitable.