

These are the Times: A Life of Thomas Paine

Screenplay by Trevor Griffiths

Ray Brown

Ray Brown is a playwright whose play "Living Pretty" is currently on tour and has just been selected by the British Council for its Edinburgh Showcase. He is also a BTG reviewer

It's ten years since Trevor Griffiths and Richard Attenborough decided to make a film about Thomas Paine, the great English writer and radical. Paine had his fingers in the American Revolution and the French Revolution. He contributed books and pamphlets of great clarity and wisdom, written with a breathtaking, compassionate understanding of the human condition.

Paine, Griffiths and Attenborough - the dream team. But not for Hollywood. The film remains unmade. The book is dedicated to Richard Attenborough, '...comrade and collaborator on this long march.'

Griffiths decision to publish the script was a happy one. Anyone familiar with this peerless radical playwright's work knows that his stage and television plays read as well as they play. From the first few lines *These Are the Days* takes off like a flock of flamingos. It's beautiful: riveting, full of colour and movement. Ideas and emotions jostle with biographical and cultural detail. And it's funny as well. Here are the first few lines.

*An old man sings *The World Turned Upside Down*, stops abruptly: 'It grieves me we chose the bald eagle for our national symbol...'*

Wharfe Street, vivid with life. Two men leg a sedan chair through the crowd.

OLD MAN'S VOICE: '...he's a bird of bad moral character, generally poor and often very lousy...' The camera gradually closes on the sedan.

And Benjamin Franklin (for it is he) goes on to suggest that the turkey would have been more appropriate.

This is a masterwork and without doubt will one day be screened. In the meantime read the script and see your own production. Have a hanky ready for the last few pages!