

Optimism

Voltaire's 'Candide' is subtitled 'or Optimism' and despite the book's explicit sex, incessant violence, improbable coincidences and epic scope, it was optimism that proved the most difficult to adapt theatrically. Voltaire angrily satirised a philosophical view dominant in his age that considered their time and place to be 'the best of all possible worlds.' No matter how terrible the suffering it was all part of God's plan and, if we could but understand it, we would see it was all for the best.

Considering that contemporary society is saturated with conspiracy theories, political ambivalence and ironic detachment, it seemed to us that pessimism was the current worldview and we had to ask what place there was for Voltaire's attack on optimism.

However, as we worked on the show, both before and during the rehearsal period, it became clear that we had misunderstood Voltaire's anger. His attack was not so much on innocent optimism – or hope, even – but on the idea that we must accept things as they are: the idea that it's easier to change the explanation than to change the world. This 'glossing-over', the object of Voltaire's anger, continues today whether embodied in the language of Millbank spin doctors who turn 'benefit cuts' into 'incentives to work'; or of corporate managers who package sackings and mass redundancy as downsizing or maximising efficiency; or of self-help gurus who profit by turning adultery into 'sex addiction'; or even the language of our own private searches for comfort in the face of personal disaster in the mantra of 'surviving this will make me stronger, will make me a better person.'

To think that the world is not as it should be, to be angry, is to start to think politically. The wonder of Voltaire's novel is that it manages to be splenetically political, profoundly philosophical and very very silly all at the same time. We've tried to stay true to that spirit in our own, very liberal, adaptation. In a sense, the surprise for us was not how much of Voltaire's novel we had to change but how much of it we could keep in our contemporary staging.

David Greig

Pangloss taught metaphysico-theologo-cosmolo-nigology. He proved incontestably that there is no effect without a cause, and that in the best of all possible worlds, his lordship's country seat was the most beautiful of mansions and her ladyship the best of all possible ladyships. 'It is proved,' he used to say, 'that things cannot be other than they are, for everything was made for a purpose, it follows that everything is made for the best purpose.'

from Voltaire's Candide

Colin is still on the floor. Gina and Giorgio are standing over him.

Gina: If he's dead I'm in big trouble.

Giorgio: I'm really sorry about this, Gina.

I just got carried away with myself there.
I can't stop myself lashing out.
It's a disease.

Gina: I'm a manager.
I work myself to death.
I'm perforated with ulcers.
All I want is order and calm.
There's only one thing we can do.

Giorgio: Yes, Gina.

Gina: Give me the truncheon.

She truncheons him in the face. He holds his face. Gina kneels down and slaps Colin.

Gina: Garry! May I have you please.
Garry: Mam.

Garry enters. They stand around Colin.

Garry: ... OK.
Gina: It's not OK.
Garry: OK, OK, OK, OK ... OK.
Giorgio: It's not OK.
Gina: I want an explanation.
Garry: Let's get the facts straight. An employee of Fiesta Mexico has been in dispute with another member of staff.
He has ignored the company grievance procedures and instead resorted to violence. He was carefully subdued by a trained operative and has now been placed in the recovery position. No members of the general public were harmed.
It's – it's –
It's a definite vindication of Clearwaters' commitment to public safety.

from Candide 2000

