

When only the Scots language will do



LIZ LOCHHEAD

IT'S a mixed blessing having your play listed in the Festival Fringe programme as being "in Scots". Yes, this attracts some – and by no means exclusively Scottish – theatre-goers. Those either curious and adventurous or else those who have already enjoyed the vigour and energy of a good demotic text delivered by a committed cast of actors who know exactly what they're talking about and give it laldy.

But last week a friend confides that the son he's bringing along with him today is a bit scared that he might not understand it. This son, who grew up in Glasgow till he was seven, studied medicine in Dundee and has been a GP in that gritty city with its own unique brand of Scots speech for almost two decades. Naturally, he has no difficulty whatsoever with our Tartuffe and laughs as loud and long as the rest of them, no doubt relieved to find nothing unintelligible, obscure or antique.

Yesterday into my inbox came an invitation from Creative Scotland inviting me to "A Scots Gaitherin, a dey fir fowk yuissin the Scots leid in the airts an cultural lanscape o Scotland tae come thegither tae wurk toward developin forrit-thinkin weys tae encourage mair yuiss o Scots in creative life athort Scotland". I'm not making this up. "Yuissin" "athort" "leid"...

Until I saw John Byrne's The Slab Boys in 1978 I had no thought about writing anything in Scots. Here was this hilarious, wickedly cruel comedy about two working class, lazy, impudent, impoverished, secretly ambitious, deeply-competitive, talented, American-obsessed, rock'n'roll-obsessed, style-obsessed, same-girl-obsessed lads of the late 1950s getting through the day in a dead end job - all in their precise Paisley patois, I remember thinking the stupidest thing, which was 'are you allowed to do that?'

In 1984 the Royal Lyceum in Edinburgh asked me if I would do a new version of Tartuffe. Would it be in Scots? No, I said, but it would be for Scottish actors to perform in their own accents. When I got going on those rhyming couplets though it was like I got taken over, inhabited, by my granny's salty Scots tongue.

It was a hit because Moliere's play is so very funny, very outrageous, very bawdy. Puts on the table: sex. Men and women using it against each other. You have to laugh.

I've since become rather Moliere mad, done versions of all of his other three rhyming comic masterpieces, The Misanthrope as Miseryguts, School for Wives as Educating Agnes. I've done a Medea, my own Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off.

I have kept writing in Scots though. Sort of. All varieties, from Scots to Scots-English to modern slangy vernacular. Sometimes. Only where it feels to be the right tool for the job.

TOMORROW:
TOM GORDON
KEVIN MCKENNA
RAB MCNEIL
ALISON ROWAT



Monday
Ann Fotheringham, Alison Rowat, Mark Smith and Marianne Taylor

Tuesday
Stuart Waiton, Neil Mackay, Margaret Taylor and Catriona Stewart

Wednesday season
Nicola Love, Iain Macwhirter, Rosemary Goring and Andrew Mckie

Thursday
Alan Simpson, Neil Mackay, Alison Rowat and Brian Beacom

Friday
Helen McArdle, Rebecca McQuillan, Catriona Stewart and Marianne Taylor

Saturday
Kevin McKenna, Tom Gordon, Ken Smith, Rab McNeil, Alison Rowat, Keith Bruce and Fidelma Cook

Sunday
Iain Macwhirter, Bill Bain, Rab McNeil, David Pratt, Ron McKay and Susan Swarbrick

SEVEN DAYS OF HERALD VOICES



CATRIONA STEWART

“WELL,” he thought. “What a welcoming, positive sign, putting a refugee on a coin.”

And not just any coin, he mused, as he stared at the gentle face, so familiar under its battered bush hat. The most impressive coin, the coin of many sides. The majestic 50p coin. With his face. His, Paddington Brown.

Still, he would need a lot of these coins. An awful lot: 72,000 every year, to be precise, if the rumours were true and some bright spark really was going to tell the government that newcomers to the country would have to earn more than £36,000.

Paddington could hardly imagine such riches and he could hardly imagine what he could do to earn them. Still, it had always worked out for him in the end. Why, wasn't that the most marvellous spot of luck, meeting Mr and Mrs Brown on the station platform all those years ago?

And hadn't everyone been so good and kind to him since? The boat journey to London had been simply awful – it was something he never spoke of – and he missed Aunt Lucy and Uncle Pastuzo dreadfully but life was better for him here. No earthquakes to rob him of more loved ones. Oh, mama bear, poor papa bear.

Everyone had been so welcoming to an orphaned bear, barely more than a cub, and this was his home now.

This was his home and there was an awfully nice but alarmingly loud woman in it, clutching a clipboard and clucking around. While staring at the shiny 50p piece his mind had quite wandered. What did she want again?

“What do you want, again, please?”

Paddington asked her, passing back the coin. Oh, she said, she was from the Home Office – “But not to worry, ha ha!” – and she was here because a photocall had been organised to promote this lovely new coin.

“The Home Secretary will be here shortly and you'll show her your lovely new coin and she'll say how welcoming Britain is to our newest residents and you can talk about what a symbolic step this is, to have a... a bear... on our most important currency.”

Honed secret Terry? Paddington had never of such a thing. Suddenly her phone starting bring-bringing and off she clipped.

Paddington ran his paws down the rough comforting texture of his duffle coat until one landed in a blue pocket, reaching the crust of a marmalade sandwich. He took a bite and thought of those first days with no duffle and no Wellington boots, his small hind paws making soft padding sounds along the rain-soaked concrete.

“Pad, pad, Paddington,” he had crooned to himself, a gentle marching beat, an unthinking rhythm spurring him on.

The Browns had insisted he stay with them and they had had wonderful times but then the officials had come and put him on the bus, through the night, to this new city. How Mrs Brown had bravely stayed stoic, giving him a dozen stamps and a dozen jars of homemade marmalade. Mr Brown had wept openly, honking into a cloth handkerchief.

He wondered vaguely if there was such a thing as a pawkerchief.

The official woman was back, striding into his room as if it were hers, bringing another woman of obvious importance along with her. Paddington raised his hat. This must be the honed secret Terry.

“Hullo, Mr Pooh,” the woman said, loudly and slowly, as if he was hard of hearing.

“Pah-ding-ton,” Paddington replied, politely.

The woman looked momentarily confused and glanced at Mrs Clipboard. “Winnie the Pooh is the other one,” Mrs Clipboard whispered.

“Ah,” said the woman, entirely unabashed. “They do so look the same.”

She appraised Paddington. “Very British,

Refugee on a coin? ‘Lovely,’ thought Paddington



■ The 50p coin from the Royal Mint featuring the much-loved cartoon character, Paddington Bear.

your name.” Paddington was unsure if this was a question. “It's Pastuso, in actual fact, Mrs... uh, but no one could roar sufficiently throatily in pronouncing it and, unfortunately, without the correct roar it can sound really very, uh, rude indeed. So Mr and Mrs Brown called me Paddington.

“They say I shouldn't mention that I came from Darkest Peru. Or talk about the lifeboat. Or that I'm not really supposed to be here at all.

“They said I would be up to my knees in trouble. And here I am.”

The important woman was barely listening. The flat was too small for her, she felt it cramped. Paddington felt ashamed. The card for the electricity meter had run out even more swiftly than usual but he had become used to wearing his duffle coat indoors and used to the faintly damp smell.

Could they, she was asking the clipboard, possibly go outside for photographs. Yes, she knew they were in Glasgow but it really didn't look as bleak as she'd thought.

There was a hand on Paddington's shoulder. This was becoming really rather awkward. He would have to explain, but how could they not already know? “I can't, you see, go outside,” he said. The important clipboard towered above him, the hand now propelling him towards the door.

“How could so many people be so generous in marmalade and yet so many people want him gone?”

“No, you see, I can't,” he said. “I have to stay here in case they change the locks. And if they change the locks well, I can't get back in. And if I can't get back in I... have nowhere to go.” Paddington felt hopeless and helpless. He was a hopeful bear at heart but even he had misgivings.

He couldn't understand it. How could so many people be so generous in marmalade and yet so many people want him gone? He might only be a bear but he had made friends. He had made a family. He knew nothing of Peru any more. This was his home. His face was on the coin.

He looked at the obviously important woman. He finally had her attention. “Please look after...” Paddington paused and thought.

He thought of all the kindnesses he had been shown by Mr and Mrs Brown. He thought of the hospitality of Mr Gruber and how the Hungarian man had shown him a way to settle in this new country, a way to live with the endless missing of the old.

He thought of all the marmalade sandwiches he had been made, the bread soft and the spread oozing thick. Such unquestioning welcome.

Paddington looked the honed secret Terry right in the eye, his snout proud. “Please. Look after us bears.”

Issue of the day: The new rules on Everest



MAUREEN SUGDEN

world's 14 highest mountains and drawing climbers to the area from around the globe is a key source of revenue, one that the country does not wish to lose. The number of climbing permits granted has risen nearly every year since the commercialisation of Everest took off 30 years ago.

But fears have been growing about overcrowding?

Veteran climbers have long been warning about the dangers of allowing inexperienced climbers to attempt Everest, and of the overcrowding that results. Concern heightened after a photograph of a huge queue near the summit was shared online in May, showing climbers passing a frozen dead body. Elia Saikaly, who took the picture, said: “I cannot believe what I saw up there. Death. Carnage. Chaos.”

Nepal's government had issued a record number of permits this season, though?

Yes, a record 381 permits were granted, so overcrowding was certainly more likely.

Rules are fairly lax at the moment then?

There are currently no restrictions on the number of



■ A queue of mountain climbers at the top of Everest

climbers who can attempt the summit at a time and the problem is that most go in May when the conditions are at their most favourable. Expedition teams are free to set their own timetable for the ascent and so overcrowding again is an issue.

But things are going to change?

A high-level Nepalese panel, made up of climbing experts, agencies representing the climbing community and government officials, was set up to re-appraise the situation and they have come up with a new framework.

What will happen?

All climbers seeking a permit for Everest must now have previous high altitude mountaineering experience and training. The report proposes that those applying must already have climbed a Nepali peak of at least 21,325ft, and must also provide a certificate proving physical fitness to demonstrate they can handle the climb. They also have to employ experienced guides in a bid to discourage solo attempts, as well as to aid the process of reaching the summit.

Anything else?

The commission suggests a fee of

at least £29,000 is now introduced for those wanting to tackle Everest. And the government is also now considering requiring mandatory health check-ups at Everest Base Camp.

So the focus is on curbing the death toll and improving safety?

Yes, and making the mountain “dignified” once more. Tourism minister, Yogesh Bhattari, said: “Everest cannot be climbed just based on one's wishes. We are testing their health conditions and climbing skills before issuing climbing permits. “We will take this forward by amending the laws and regulations. We will make our mountains safe, managed and dignified.”

But will the rules work?

Ang Tshering Sherpa, former president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, said the government in Nepal is moving in the right direction, but expressed concern over enforcement, as corruption is rife in the area. He said of the future: “Challenges remain.”