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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

"Who's The Bloody Baritone?"

BRENDAN BEHAN'S DRAMATIC USE OF SONG.

DEIRDRE ANN MURPHY

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

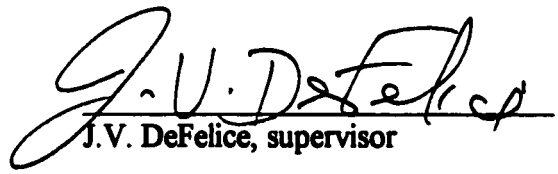
Department of Drama

Edmonton, Alberta
Spring 1998

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *"Who's the Bloody Baritone?" Brendan Behan's Dramatic Use of Song* submitted by Deirdre Ann Murphy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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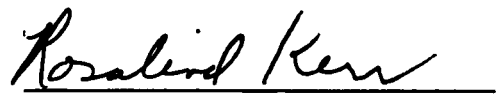

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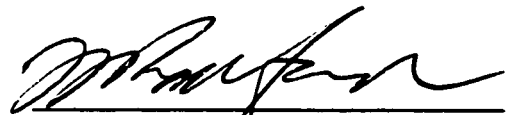

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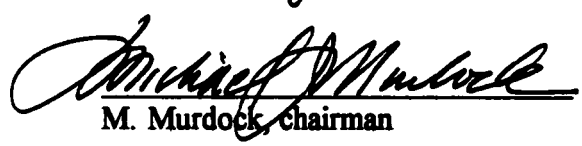

M. Murdock, chairman

ABSTRACT:

This thesis examines Brendan Behan's use of song and music in his plays *The Quare Fellow*, *An Giall*, and *The Hostage*. In these plays Behan utilizes song to such an extent one cannot overlook the integral nature of musical interludes within the body of the plays. A wide variety of songs and musical interludes are interjected into the action of these three plays and, as such, they often satirically comment upon the action of the play while also presenting the audience with a more perceptive understanding of the characters who sing them. My examination of these songs focuses on their traditional music source, documents the historical and personal references Behan includes in the songs and comments upon the songs' contribution to the drama. My study explores Behan's manipulation of song as a means of reconfiguring Irish history, icons, and traditions, in order to better represent his conclusions upon these institutions. During the course of my research I found it essential to examine the transformation of Behan's naturalistic tragedy *An Giall* into the absurd-like musical *The Hostage*. I explore Joan Littlewood's and the Theatre Workshop's contribution and influence upon this transformation. This research documents Behan's personal preference for drama that not only engages but also entertains its audience. My study of *The Quare Fellow*, *An Giall* and *The Hostage* explores Behan's affinity and use of song as a means of deciphering his dramatic conclusion upon Ireland's judicial, religious and political practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to express my thanks to my Professor and Supervisor James DeFelice for all of his support and encouragement. I would also like to acknowledge the critical contributions made to my thesis by Dr Rosalind Kerr and Dr F.L. Radford. I also extend my thanks to Ken Brown for his generous artistic partnership on *The Hostage*. Thanks to all of my friends in the Drama Office who have given me daily support. I would also like to extend my thanks to my fellow graduate students, staff and faculty of the Drama Department. To my friend Joanna Falck I give enormous thanks for her continuous support and advice over the past two years. Thank you to my friends and family all over the world, especially my Grandparents. I would also like to thank my Father for sharing his knowledge of the Gaelic language with me and for introducing me to Behan's work. Thank you to Ron for all of his assistance and for having such confidence in my abilities. Thank you to my Mother in particular, who has instilled in me an enormous respect for my Irish heritage and has always encouraged me to "get that piece of paper that says your something!" And finally thanks to my husband Dan for sharing my enthusiasm for this thesis and being so generous with his love and support.

CONTENTS:

Introduction

I have come to write this thesis for a number of reasons: in order to explore the plays of Brendan Behan, to research an aspect of Behan's writing which has been for the most part overlooked, and to fulfill a personal interest in Irish theatre.

The importance of song in Behan's work is an aspect I have decided to explore since I feel song is an essential thematic component in many of Behan's plays. The plays I am concentrating on include: *The Quare Fellow*, *An Giall* and *The Hostage*. *Richard's Cork Leg* will not be included because I have some reservations regarding the posthumous completion of the work. Within these three plays Behan's employment of song is clearly integral to the body of the works. Behan strategically uses songs his audience are familiar with, but instead of representing those songs in their "traditional" form, he alters them in order to introduce his unique perspective.

Behan's melding of song and writing appears to be a natural and almost unconscious act on his part. He draws upon his past experiences, the rich Irish history of his ancestors and often presents these references though song. The writer rarely wrote anything without including a musical reference or a song in full. Musical communication was inherent to Behan, it was a family tradition he continued. In *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, he explains:

> In addition to other extraordinary abilities, I'm a pretty good singer - or at least I was until my larynx gave in to too much of the gargle and too many cigarettes. And I had an extensive repertoire of songs, many of which I had learnt from my Uncle, Peadar, and from my mother who has never stopped singing, not even the depression stopped her ... No matter what anybody mentioned, she'd sing a song about it. And I was after doing the same ..."[1]

I find myself identifying with Behan's reliance upon song since I too was raised in a household whose daily routines were often punctuated by Irish music. My initial research into Behan's background appeared to establish the importance of song for this playwright. Peadar Kearney, Brendan Behan's uncle, composed the Irish national anthem: "A Soldier's Song" and Brendan Behan's mother, Kathleen Behan, took every opportunity to impart to her children the importance of this song as representative of the Irish struggle.

My parents left Ireland and immigrated to Canada when they were in their early twenties. It was always their hope to establish and maintain a sense of Irish heritage in their children. Thus, my brother and I spent our summers in Ireland. When I was a very young girl my parents taught me to sing many Irish songs. Indeed, singing is a tradition in my family which is evident when everyone is together, it isn't long before voices are heard singing an Irish tune. My mother has taught me to sing songs such as "Maids When You're Young," "She Moved Through the Fair" and "The Butcher Boy." My father was the individual who first introduced me to Brendan Behan, by sharing Behan's poetry with me. At the age of ten I could recite Behan's poem "Coming of Winter" and sing "The Lament for Brendan Behan" and that is how my long relationship with this playwright began.

My method of examining Behan's use of song and music in his plays has been performed in a mutli-layered fashion. As mentioned, my parents raised me to respect, understand and utilize Irish traditions in my life. I have spent nearly every summer of my life in Ireland; I have received over twelve years of training in Irish dancing; I have always enjoyed studying and performing Irish drama and my interest in Irish song and music has caused

me to seek out, learn, and sing traditional Irish songs. I feel as though my entire life has lead me to this thesis.

My understanding of Irish history has initially occurred through song. Certainly my family has attempted to inform me about the "great" moments in Irish history, but their understanding of these events are often influenced by very personal opinions of the state of Ireland. Thus, it was by listening to songs written about the Irish Famine, the Easter Rising and Ireland's division into North and South, that I initially gained an understanding of these various historical occurrences. My next step in understanding these events came from studying a number of Irish history texts.

Academically, when preparing for a presentation on the plays of Brendan Behan, in a graduate level course, I familiarized myself with the writer's body of work, the many works written on the life and work of Behan, and background material on the state of Ireland and its writers over the past several decades. It was during this presentation I began to focus upon the songs contained in Behan's plays.

During the course of my research I was unpleasantly surprised and disappointed to find very little information on Behan's use of song and music. There is no shortage of books and articles on this legendary playwright and his work. Most people writing about Behan do not interpret the songs and music contained within his plays to have any meaning beyond their surface value. In particular, the works completed on Behan by E.H. Mikhail, Colbert Kearney, and Ted E. Boyle are very thorough in their examinations of Behan's dramatic texts but these writers make only passing references to the plenitude of songs contained in Behan's plays. I have made it my goal to research, analyze and interpret

these songs in order to understand what I perceive to be a very crucial aspect of Behan's writing.

I have spent the past two years researching these various songs and documenting as many of their references as possible. I have also conducted lengthy interviews in Canada and Ireland with my parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. I have traveled to Ireland in search of songs, music and literature about traditional Irish music. I have also attended a number of Irish music concerts in Ireland, America and Canada. My research into the life of Behan has also assisted in developing my understanding of the writer's use of song.

Brendan Behan was born in 1923 in Dublin and was raised in one of the tenement houses owned by his grandmother on Russell street. His was a childhood filled with poverty, violence, alcoholism, but also camaraderie, and song. Brian Behan relates: "What the children lacked in material benefits they gained in other ways, for books and music, lively conversation and a strong sense of Irish cultural tradition were all readily available in the Behan household."[2]

Behan joined the I.R.A. at the age of sixteen and soon after set off for Liverpool to embark on a one man bombing mission. He was arrested shortly after arriving in England and when his bombing materials were discovered, he was sentenced to three years borstal detention. The years spent by Behan in this borstal at Hollesley Bay were later referred to by him as the happiest of his life. He became known in the borstal as an entertainer always ready to provide a song. Indeed Behan often utilized his creative energy by writing and singing songs:

> After I had stopped for a minute or two and allowed myself a bit of a read at *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and had a look at the bit early on where they have a Christmas carol, I started to put an air to it. That's a thing we're all very well

> able to do in my family. On my mother's side, my uncle was one of the best song-writers in the country, and one of the best known, and others of them were in the variety business, so it wouldn't take me long looking at a poem or a song to put an air to it.[3]

Behan spent this time in borstal developing his intellect and expanding his frame of reference with regard to the English people. The young Irish man had always envisioned the English to be his enemy and it was not until he met and lived with English boys similar to himself that he realized the need to distinguish between the politics and the people of a country. Indeed, Behan imparted this opinion to his mother Kathleen, who recalls it as such: "Do you know he said a funny thing to me one time? All his life he had been taught to hate the English, yet later on he wouldn't hear a bad word spoken against them. He claimed they were the finest people he ever had the pleasure to live among."[4]

Six months after being released from borstal Behan was arrested for an incident after a Republican commemoration ceremony at Glasnevin cemetery in Dublin. He shot at a policeman and was sentenced to fourteen years penal servitude. While in Mountjoy prison Behan spent time with his fellow political prisoners and gleaned much of the material for his first full length play, *The Quare Fellow*, including the thematic song "Along the Banks of the Royal Canal."

After serving four years in Mountjoy prison, Behan, along with many other political prisoners, was released under a general amnesty. He left Dublin and traveled across Ireland to the Aran Islands. He spent this time writing a great deal of poetry in Gaelic while also writing *Brendan Behan's Island*, his version of John Millington Synge's: *The Aran Islands*. The importance of song as a means of communication for Behan is evident

when one examines how Behan begins this work. He does so by quoting in full the alternate Irish national anthem: "As Down the Glen One Easter Morn."

My research into Behan's plays has primarily been that, my research. I make very few references in the body of my thesis to "experts" in the field of Behan-studies. I have read and studied an enormous amount of this published material but since it says very little about Behan's musicality I have relied upon my ideas and interpretations of the songs and music contained within Behan's plays.

In the course of my research for this thesis I have attempted to expand my knowledge of these plays by making every attempt at understanding the plays in performance. In April of 1997, I organized a reading of *The Quare Fellow* in the University of Alberta Drama Department. The play was read and discussed by several experienced actors and this process greatly developed my understanding of the play. As an example; the reading highlighted for me Behan's juxtaposition of comedic elements within the tragic situation presented in the play. When read aloud, Behan's play is remarkably humorous while the deadly action provides a striking contrast.

In June of 1997 I traveled to Ireland and was granted permission to do additional research on Behan's plays at Trinity College Dublin. Among the many Behan holdings at Trinity was a copy of his Gaelic play, *An Giall*. This play had a very limited publication and its English translation an even rarer publication. I was fortunate enough to find an English translation by Richard Wall and, thus, have included *An Giall* in my research.

While in the second year of my Behan studies, I took a class on British Theatre and expanded my research to include Behan's artistic partnership with Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop. As I prepared a presentation on this partnership I began to realize the

importance of Littlewood's influence upon Behan and thus decided to include a chapter outlining this influence. This chapter is placed after my examination of *An Giall* and before my examination of *The Hostage* in order to best represent the substantial influence Littlewood had upon the transformation of Behan's play.

Examining the Behan/Littlewood relationship greatly assisted me in comprehending the transformation of *An Giall* into *The Hostage*. But it was my work in November of 1996, as a dramaturg on the Grant MacEwan production of *The Hostage* which significantly developed my understanding of the text.

I met frequently with Ken Brown, the director of the show, and it was during one of these meetings that Ken and I agreed it was essential to document for the cast and production team, the numerous and specific references contained within Behan's text. Thus, I returned to the play and began making notes concerning these historical, political and cultural references with appropriately researched explanations outlining their importance while also proposing why Behan chose to use them. This data grew very quickly and became a time-consuming task. When this document was finished it was distributed to the cast of the play, who then better understood aspects of their characters, while for me it represented a crucial step in my understanding of the play. I had never before attempted to document Behan's numerous references - having done this it became clear to me that Behan's play was even more complex than I had initially assumed. I have documented several of these references in the body of my chapter on *The Hostage* when I feel it is crucial to the understanding of a specific moment.

Next, I concentrated on locating the music and songs contained in Behan's play. Along with these songs, I also located additional music for the cast to listen to. This was done in

order to assist the actors in forming an understanding and appreciation of the themes and traditions contained within Irish folk music.

The production of *The Hostage* at Grant MacEwan was given four weeks to rehearse. For the first two weeks of this period I attended every rehearsal. I found it necessary to be present during this initial exploration of the text since I was called upon quite often to give further explanations of references, pronunciation of Gaelic lines, and when asked to give my interpretation of particular moments in the play. I felt comfortable enough in this process to volunteer a thought when it appeared the director was struggling to articulate his vision to the actors.

The last two weeks of rehearsals I attended all of the run-throughs, which usually occurred every other day. I watched these run-throughs, making notes about the performance when necessary. The dramaturgical log I kept during the rehearsal process contains further detailed descriptions of my preparations and responsibilities on the production.

Through this dramaturgical experience I have come to develop my interpretation of *The Hostage* by applying the fundamental rule of dramaturgy, which is not to simplify a play but rather to clarify it. By studying, interpreting, and being a part of the staging of each one of Behan's scenes I have been able to clarify my ideas on this often "absurdist" work.

I have found the fictional and autobiographical works written by Behan himself to be of enormous use when attempting to interpret Behan's motivation for writing several of the songs contained within: *The Quare Fellow*, *An Giall* and *The Hostage*. I often refer to the writer and quote from his non-dramatic works: *Borstal Boy*, *Brendan Behan's Island*, *Confessions of An Irish Rebel*, *Hold Your Hour and Have Another*, and *After the Wake*.

For me, Behan's use of song in his plays is a crucial element to understanding his work. How can one claim to fully understand Behan's work without considering the plenitude of songs and musical interludes contained within his plays? It is one of the aspects of Behan's writing that I most admire and am most interested in exploring.

NOTES:

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[1] Brendan Behan, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (London: Hutchinson and Co Ltd, 1965) 219-220.

[2] Brian Behan, *Mother of All the Behans* (London: Hutchinson and Co Ltd, 1984) 57.

[3] Brendan Behan, *Borstal Boy* (London: Arrow Books Ltd, 1958) 87.

[4] Brian Behan, *Mother of All the Behans*, 108.

Chapter One: *The Quare Fellow*

Brendan Behan's first full length play *The Quare Fellow* is based primarily upon the playwright's experiences while he was a prisoner in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, from April 1942 to December 1946. The play is set in Mountjoy prison where a man convicted of murder is expected to be hanged. The prisoners in the play discuss and await the upcoming execution of the Quare Fellow, a character we never see but whose spirit and struggle is dramatically tangible upon the stage. Behan's play is serious in its condemnation of the death penalty yet the play is also very comical. These prisoners are not hardened one-dimensional criminals, rather they are three-dimensional men who love, lust, hate, entertain and consequently underline their vitality as human beings. Behan presents original men for his audience in order to portray the horror of the death penalty. In *The Quare Fellow*, the world of steel bars, punishment cells and eminent death is exposed for Behan's audience to experience. The seriousness of the situation is constantly juxtaposed with the comedy of the prisoners' exchanges. Operating within this obvious juxtaposition is Behan's use of song.

The play contains several songs which help to illustrate the prisoners who sing them and the situations they are experiencing. The thematic song "Along the Banks of the Royal Canal" often punctuates the action of the play, returning it to the seriousness of the present situation of awaiting an execution. Behan makes a dramatic choice to have the condemned prisoner, the play's namesake, never appear upon the stage. This character is continuously referred to; we hear of his past deeds, his present circumstances, and his certain future. Similarly, the character

in the depth of the punishment cells, never seen but often heard singing "Along the Banks of the Royal Canal," is then paralleled with his fellow absent prisoner, the Quare Fellow.

The personal nature of Behan's writing is undoubtable when one takes into account that Behan directly draws upon his own experiences in prison and those of his fellow prisoners. Often these personal experiences have been outlined through Behan's choice mode of communication: song. Certainly Behan's personal stamp is evident in this play through his use of "Along the Banks of the Royal Canal." This particular song often returns us to the serious situation at hand; similarly, the other songs in the play serve to highlight the characters who sing them while also reinforcing the seriousness of capital punishment. Singing is a right of the characters in this play, a right they strive to preserve. The musicality of these prisoners is a vivid example of their vitality.

Song is also used by Behan as a means of affecting his audience. He draws his audience into his world and assists them in viewing the death penalty as an unjust punishment. Behan undoubtedly utilizes song as a means of appealing to emotion. Song operates at a thematic level that I will presently explore in *The Quare Fellow*.

What is obvious in the first few minutes of the play is Behan's keen sense of the dramatic. The audience is plunged into darkness, there is a moment of silence which is ended by the haunting singing of the lonely prisoner in the punishment cell. He sings a song composed by one of Behan's former fellow prisoners in Mountjoy:

> A hungry feeling came o'er me stealing
> And the mice were squealing in my prison cell,
> And that old triangle
> Went jingle jangle,
> Along the banks of the Royal Canal. '

The prisoner sings as the audience discerns the jail setting: "on *the wall and facing the audience is printed in large block shaded Victorian lettering the word 'SILENCE.'*" [2] The prisoner in the punishment cells is defying the edict of silence as he eloquently informs the audience of a prisoner's sometimes pathetically lonely existence:

> To begin the morning
> The Warder bawling
> Get out of bed and clean out your cell,
> And that old triangle
> Went jingle jangle,
> Along the banks of the Royal Canal.[3]

The daily prison routine begins and the prisoner's song continues. The very actions that occur are those previously described in the song. As commented upon by Peter René Gerdes, the prisoner's lyrics foreshadow the daily drudgery of prison life:

> The lines convey the dreadful feeling of routine: every morning brings the same procedure, the bawling of the warders, the cleaning of the cells, while the old triangle goes on jingling day after day, for months and years.[4]

The Warder enters and the triangle "*is beaten, loudly and raucously*"[5] in fact it "jingle jangles." Despite the Warder's activities the singer continues with his song unperturbed. The singer arrives at the third verse, a comment upon the present stage action:

> The screw was peeping
> And the lag was weeping ...[6]

At this point, the Warder tires of the song and its singer, perhaps because the song is too realistic. The Warder shouts down the stairs to the punishment cell:

> The screw is listening as well as peeping, and you'll be bloody well weeping if you don't give over your moaning. We might go down there and give you something to moan about. *[the singing stops]*[7]

This song of realities and sentimentalities is quickly halted by the real and dangerous threat of the Warder. These first two and a half stanzas serve to outline a prisoner's lonely existence,

highlighting and indeed, validating the ideas in the song is the abrupt and threatening behavior of the Warder. The audience immediately trusts the prisoner's song since it has been revealed to be factual. Through song Behan has begun to reveal the true nature of prison existence.

Prisoners A and B come out of their cells to start their morning chores and discuss the current situation of the two condemned men in the prison. The two prisoners suspect that one man has been given a reprieve. The prisoners call Dunlavin to give them more information on the situation and Dunlavin responds from his cell with a song:

> There are hands that will welcome you in
> There are lips that I am burning to kiss
> There are two eyes that shine...[8]

Dunlavin sings of private yearning and strong desire while he is interrupted by the call of Prisoner A, despite this interruption he continues singing the love song:

> Far away where the blue shadows fall
> I will come to contentment and rest,
> And the toils of the day
> Will all be charmed away.[9]

This song "The Little Grey Home in the West" was written in 1889 by D. Eardly-Wilmot with music by Hermann Löhr and was a music-hall favourite in Dublin.[10] As Dunlavin sings his song of how classic love is able to free one from daily routine and drudgery, his present act is interpreted as quite humorous: *"Dunlavin appears in the door of the cell polishing a large enamel pot with a cloth."*[11] Behan juxtaposes the loving tenderness of Dunlavin's song with his hilarious stage presence with a chamber pot. In this instance, song does not confirm the audience's expectations but comically undermines them.

The prisoners and Dunlavin discuss the events concerning the two condemned men. Dunlavin is the purveyor of much information in the prison since his cell contains hot water pipes upon

which prisoners tap to communicate with one another. We learn from Dunlavin that one of the condemned men has been given a reprieve; he will not lose his life but spend it in prison. The other prisoner, the Quare Fellow, has been denied such a chance and is still scheduled to be executed.

Dunlavin and the two prisoners go through the last few hours of a condemned prisoner's life. They are meticulous in their details of the prisoner's actions and those of the Warders who are assigned to guard him. Behan discloses to his audience several unflinching details of a condemned man's final moments alive. After he shocks his audience with the gruesome details, he then plainly calls for a real examination of such events, "DUNLAVIN: anyone that says a condemned man would be better off hung than doing life, let them leave it to his own discretion."[12] Through the course of the play Behan, himself a former prisoner, makes his discretion plain.

In the midst of this morbid conversation song is given a quick footnote:

> PRISONER B: I'll lay odds to a make that Silver-top [reprieved prisoner] isn't half charmed with himself he's not going with the meat-chopper in the morning.
>
> DUNLAVIN: You could sing that if you had an air to it. [13]

In this instance, song is suggested by the lyrical quality of Prisoner B's words. Dunlavin's response indicates the constant readiness of song in this current situation. Singing would be assumed to be the last occupation to be taken up by prisoners in jail, yet Behan's prisoners are full of life and, as such, recognize an opportunity for entertainment. Behan uses song as a means of highlighting these prisoners' individuality and importance.

Two Young Prisoners enter the scene with sweeping brushes and singing "softly and in unison."[14]

Only one more cell inspection
We go out next Saturday,
Only one more cell inspection
And we go far, far away.[15]

The importance of song in this Behan-created world is undoubtable. These two Young Prisoners enter the scene asserting their vitality and their hope, through song. The older prisoners question their reasoning for entering and are told that the "mots"[16] (women) in the female prison, across from this prison, will soon be hanging out the laundry.

The reprieved man, called the Lifer, enters the wing and is shocked to find the prisoners to be men performing their daily cleaning routine. The Lifer cannot yet contemplate what spending the rest of his life in prison will be like. The kindness of his fellow prisoners surprises him; Dunlavin gives the Lifer a cigarette butt to smoke, while the others keep guard for the Warder bringing the other new cell mate, a sex offender. Dunlavin's preference for a murderer as a cell neighbour rather than the sex offender, the Other Fellow, is ironic. Adding to this irony is the Other Fellow's surprise and distaste at finding himself in the company of murderers.

The two Young Prisoners re-enter the scene singing their song:

Only one more cell inspection
We go out next Saturday
Only one more cell inspection
Then we go far away.
[*They are sweeping near the Lifer]*
Only one more cell inspection
We go out next Saturday
Only one more cell... [17]

They only get this far into their celebratory song before the Lifer halts their singing. He yells: "For God's sake shut up that squeaking..."[18] The Young Prisoner's song reinforces for the Lifer the hopelessness of his present situation, their expectant happiness underlines the pathetic

inevitability of the long days before the Lifer. The other prisoners quickly defend the young singers and their right to vocalize their happiness through song.

The Young Prisoners have returned to look out the cell window at the women hanging out the laundry in the exercise yard. Desire is strong in all of these male characters as they each vie for a look at the women; indeed, they fight over who is able to look at them for the longest amount of time. The oldest prisoner, Neighbour, loudly argues his right for a look. The elder prisoners call up their seniority over the Young Prisoners who are left standing by while the "dirty old eyebox[es][19] wave at their women.

The Young Prisoners have no choice but to leave the wing. While doing so they take their revenge through their song outlining their expectant release:

> Only one more cell inspection
> We go out next Saturday
> Only one more cell inspection...[20]

The Lifer again silences their singing: "Shut your bloody row, can't you."[21] Once more the right to sing is defended by the other prisoners in the wing who reprimand the Lifer. In response to the Lifer's demands the two young singers outline the monotonous, lonely future ahead of the Lifer: "you going to the Bog to start life in a couple of days, where you won't see a woman... a child... a dog... a fire."[22] The Young Prisoners happily leave the wing, *"They samba out with their brushes for partners, humming the Wedding Samba."*[23] The vitality of these Young Prisoners is not only ascertained through song but also through dance. Behan uses song to juxtapose these two generations of prisoners and reveals the obvious conflict between young and the old. He also reveals the strongest common element between these two generations; the avid use of song. Despite the vast difference in age between these many prisoners, song is the one element that serves to unite them.

As the scene continues, Behan uses an exchange between Neighbour and Dunlavin as an opportunity to reveal these prisoner's ironic application of the bible. The bible is of some consolation to these men; they use it as rolling paper for cigarettes. Behan's observation upon religion is matched with an ironic comment upon Ireland's historical Free State status: "the Free State didn't change anything more than the badge on the warders' caps."[24] Behan reveals his opinion to be that Ireland's Free State status changed nothing for the country's struggle towards independent control.

We soon learn Dunlavin and Neighbour have concocted a routine of getting their legs rubbed with methylated spirit by one of the warders. While the warder rubs, the prisoners drink. These are not beaten men but rather ingenious survivors. Behan introduces us to Warder Regan, a character who eloquently states he can see no sense in legalized murder. Warder Regan discusses the fate of the Quare Fellow with a representative from the Department of Justice, Holy Healy. Healy says of the execution: "A sad duty."[25] To which Warder Regan replies: "Neck breaking and throttling, sir? [*Healy gives him a sharp look.]* You must excuse me sir. I've seen rather a lot of it. They say familiarity breeds contempt."[26] Indeed, Regan views the death penalty with contempt. Behan leads his audience into a world of real people with immediate concerns. He displays those who must stand by and watch vitality be stripped away. One must certainly recognize that Behan has started his call for the abolition of the death penalty.

Act One concludes with the attempted suicide of the Lifer. The familiar triangle is sounded as the warders attempt to restore order in the wing of the prison. The curtain falls as the unconscious Lifer is placed on a stretcher.

Act Two begins in the prison yard on a *"fine evening,"*[27] the voice of the off stage Prisoner is heard singing the first stanza of his song:

> A hungry feeling came o'er me stealing
> And the mice were squealing in my prison cell
> And that old triangle
> Went jingle jangle
> Along the banks of the Royal Canal.[28]

During the Prisoner's song, Warder Donelly directs on the other prisoners for exercise. The song continues:

> On a fine spring evening,
> The lag lay dreaming
> The seagulls wheeling high above the wall,
> And that old triangle
> Went jingle jangle
> Along the banks of the Royal Canal.
> The screw was peeping
> The lag was sleeping,
> [*The prisoners wander where they will; most go and take a glance at the half-dug grave.]*
> While he lay weeping for the girl Sal [29]

The song resembles the actions of the prisoners who are currently hearing it. As an example, the fine evening is sung about and simultaneously seen on stage. Behan's keen dramatic sense is evident here, the Prisoner in the punishment cell is singing about the Quare Fellow and while the audience hears this song they also see the physicalization of the Quare Fellow's fate: the half-dug grave. The song continues while Warder Donelly shouts: "Who's the bloody baritone? Shut up that noise you. Where do you think you are?"[30] Singing is not defended by all the prisoners for example Neighbour informs the warder who the singer is: "It's not up here, sir; it's one of fellows in the basement, sir, in the solitary."[31] Warder Donelly continues:

> He must be getting bird seed with his bread and water. I'll bloody well show him he's not in a singing house. *[song is still going on]* Hey, shut up that noise! Shut up there or I'll leave you weeping. Where do you think you are?

[song stops][32]

Warder Donelly hears the words of the song but cannot appreciate the sentiment contained within the verses. The song functions as a means of highlighting the vast differences between this particular warder and particular prisoner. The Prisoner sings of "weeping" for one's love, while Warder Donelly uses the word as a means of threatening physical abuse. These differences are clearly demonstrated for the audience to digest. Through song Behan begins to expose the hypocrisy surrounding the practices of "correctional" institutions.

Neighbour is later attacked for having told the Warder who the lonely singer was: "PRISONER A: shopping the poor bastard that was singing in the chokey. He was only trying to be company for himself down there all alone and not knowing whether it was day or night."[33] Thus, one's right to sing is defended by Prisoner A who rebukes Neighbour for assisting Warder Donelly in halting the lonely singer. The majority of the prisoners in this wing realize the importance of the Prisoner's song as a lament for the Quare Fellow as well as a reflection upon all of their prison existences. Prisoner A also reveals song to be a means of comforting oneself when comfort appears to be far away.

As the prisoners mill around the Quare Fellow's half-dug grave they reflect upon the condemned man's fate. The prisoners place bets upon whether or not the Quare Fellow will indeed be "topped,"[34] while Neighbour is determined to make trouble for all of his fellow prisoners. After an English Prisoner and Mickser, another prisoner about to leave the jail, make a deal beneficial to both, Neighbour intervenes and comically unsettles the English Prisoner. For his punishment Neighbour is thrust into the Quare Fellow's awaiting grave while the other prisoners gather around shouting their support. Neighbour is given a brief impression of the Quare Fellow's sentence.

The prisoners' attention is directed away from Neighbour as an anxious Cook attempts to make his way across the stage with the Quare Fellow's dinner. The prisoners engage in "an excited chorus"[35] as they crowd around the cook and his tray of food:

PRISONER A: Rashers and eggs.

PRISONER B: He got that last night.

MICKSER: Chicken.

NEIGHBOUR: He had that for dinner.

PRISONER B: Sweet cake.

PRISONER A: It's getting hung he is, not married.

NEIGHBOUR: Steak and onions.

MICKSER: Sausages and bacon.

PRISONER B: And liver.

PRISONER A: Pork chops.

PRISONER B: Pigs feet.

PRISONER A: Salmon.

NEIGHBOUR: Fish and chips.

MICKSER: Jelly and custard.

NEIGHBOUR: Roast lamb.

PRISONER A: Plum pudding.

PRISONER B: Turkey.

NEIGHBOUR: Goose.

PRISONER A, PRISONER B, NEIGHBOUR: Rashers and eggs.

ALL: Rashers and eggs, rashers and eggs, and eggs and rashers and eggs

and rashers it is.[36]

This chorus of excited greed uses stichomythia in a musical form. The prisoners' excitement causes their dialogue to take on a chant-like form resembling a musical movement rather than standard dialogue. This musical chant culminates in a chorus of all four voices "singing" as one. In such an instance Behan's use of song appears to be instinct to these characters, they simply resort to a song-like form unconsciously. It is my proposal that Behan makes this choice in order to reveal the prisoners' natural instinct to communicate musically. Warder Donelly arrives and assists the Cook with his charge leaving the prisoners to return to the "monotony in a kip like this."[37] The prisoners are searched and sent back to their cells.

As the prisoners file back into their cells and "bang out" their cell doors another verse of "Along the Banks of the Royal Canal" is sung by the Prisoner in the punishment cell:

> *the last door bangs lonely on its own and then there is silence.*
> Voice From Below: *[singing]*
> The wind was rising,
> And the day declining
> As I lay pining in my prison cell
> And that old triangle
> Went jingle jangle
> *The triangle is beaten, the gate of the prison wing opens and the Chief and Warder Donelly come down the steps and approach the grave.*
> Along the banks of the Royal Canal.[38]

"The banging in particular stresses the element of isolation, which is conveyed through the song."[39] This particular verse of the song examines the ending of the day and then parallels it with the Prisoner: it is the Quare Fellow who is most likely "pining" as the day is "declining." The moving eloquence of these lines is juxtaposed to the actions of the Chief and Warder Donelly who peer into the Quare Fellow's grave. Behan dramatically presents the audience with a sense of both of these worlds. The world of the warders is there before them to see, but

even more effectively presented is the world of the Singer/Prisoner. His lonely voice wafts up to the stage while his lyrics allow the audience to form a moving image in their minds. This image is potentially more powerful than anything staged.

Once again the singer is halted:

> CHIEF: *[resplendent in braid].* Who's that singing?
>
> WARDER DONELLY: I think it's one of the prisoners in the chokey, sir.
>
> CHIEF: Where?
>
> WARDER DONELLY: In the punishment cells, sir.
>
> CHIEF: That's more like it. Well, tell him to cut it out.
>
> SONG: In the female prison
> There are seventy women...
>
> WARDER DONELLY: *[goes down to the area and leans and shouts].* Hey, you down there, cut it out, or I'll give you jingle jangle. *The song stops.*[40]

Behan's audience witnesses the uninterested Warder's interpretation of the moving song again as a means of threatening physical abuse. The song's sentiment draws the audience into the singer's experience while the Warder's abrupt termination of the song leaves the audience feeling sympathetic for the prisoner's plight. Behan involves his audience emotionally in order to assist them in viewing the prisoners as human beings rather than as hardened convicts. He is aware of how to use song as a means of directing audience response, thus allowing his condemnation of the death penalty to fall upon responsive ears.

Behan encourages his audience to be hopeful for the lonely singer as the Chief Warder shouts down the stairs to singer: "Hey you down there. You in the cell under the steps. You do be singing there to keep yourself company?"[41] We know this to be the case, the song functions as both a lament for the Quare Fellow as well as a means of comforting oneself in the darkness of

a punishment cell, a practice Behan himself indulged in frequently while he was a prisoner in Borstal Detention and later in Mountjoy Prison. The audience is lead to hope that the Chief will help this isolated prisoner:

> You need't be afraid, it's only the Chief. How long you doing down there? Seven days No.1 and twenty-one days No.2. God bless us and love us, you must have done something desperate. I may be able to do something for you, though God knows you needn't count on it, I don't own the place. You what? With who? Ah sure, I often have a bit of a tiff with the same man myself. We'll see what we can do for you. It's a long time to be stuck down there, no matter who you had the tiff with.[42]

By witnessing this conversation we learn that the Prisoner is receiving seven days punishment of a diet of bread and water and twenty one days naked in a completely stripped cell. This severe punishment deepens our sympathy for the singer, strengthens our sympathy for the sentiment contained within the song, and it reinforces our desire to have the Chief help the isolated singer. Unfortunately this is not to be the case. The Chief later informs Warder Donelly:

> I took the name of the fellow giving the concert in the punishment cells. In the morning when we get this over [execution], see he's shifted to Hell's gates over the far side. He can serenade the stokehold wall for a change if he's light enough to make out his music. *Warder Donelly copies the name and number.* [43]

We are deceived, as is the Prisoner, into believing that the Chief is sincere in his offer of help. This further punishment of the Prisoner's use of song serves to strengthen audience empathy for the lonely singer and consequently the song and its message.

Warder Regan and Crimmin enter with a working party consisting of Prisoners A, B, C, and D. They are told to dig the Quare Fellow's grave a couple of feet deeper and are given a few cigarettes for their trouble while the Warders go on a break. As the prisoners smoke they discuss the occasional friendship that develops between a warder and a prisoner. Prisoner D, an

"educated" man, in jail for embezzlement, takes offense at such friendships: "How can there be proper discipline between warder and prisoner with that kind of familiarity?"[44] The other prisoners reveal that they do not always distinguish between the two. Prisoner C and Crimmin, both from County Kerry, often talk in Gaelic to one another exchanging news about their homes. While discussing this occurrence the importance of song is once again highlighted. Prisoner B reveals:

> The lad here [Prisoner C] sings an old song betimes. It's very nice. It makes the night less lonely, each man alone and sad maybe in the old cell. The quare fellow heard him singing and after he was sentenced to death he sent over word he'd be listening every night around midnight for him.[45]

Prisoner C sings as a means of entertaining and comforting his fellow prisoners, especially the Quare Fellow. Song functions on such a level as to act as a means of viable communion for these men. The importance of this evening's song is stressed by Prisoner A: "You better make a bit effort tonight, kid, for his last concert."[46] In such circumstances song functions as a form of last rights for the Quare Fellow. As he prepares for his execution, song is the comfort he has requested. The collection of Behan plays edited by Alan Simpson does not contain a section of dialogue that in his book *The Major Works of Brendan Behan,* Peter René Gerdes quotes as follows:

> PRISONER A: ... I heard you singing myself last night, and, honest to God, you're a credit to your schoolmaster or whoever learned them songs.
>
> PRISONER B: He didn't learn them off any schoolmaster. He learned them at home, on the island [Aran Islands].
>
> PRISONER A: Faith, and he's not the only one learned songs on an island. I learned a couple, myself, at Parkhurst university on the Isle of Whight.
> *(Sings)* 'The Governor's a filthy old bleeder,
> And 'e should be bleedin' well shot,
> And tied to a public urinal,
> And left there to bleedin' well rot.'[47]

This bawdy verse added by Prisoner A resembles the Young Prisoners earlier song due to its simplicity in construction. Behan portrays his wide knowledge of traditional and crude songs. Why it is not included in the collection of Behan plays edited by Simpson is a mystery.

As the scene continues we are given more information about the Quare Fellow. We learn of his perpetration of the gruesome murder of his brother and we also discover that he functioned as a sensitive listener for another prisoner who mourned the death of a close family member. Just as Behan provides his audience with further details about the off-stage singer, we now receive further details about the off-stage Quare Fellow. Such details allow the audience to form clearer pictures of these two characters.

As the prisoners march off having completed their work the Hangman enters. He disguises himself as a warder and goes off-stage to observe the Quare Fellow's size and shape. When this is completed the Hangman exits and Warder Regan and Crimmin prepare for their night duty, guarding the Quare Fellow, by taking off their watches. From their cells the prisoners briefly talk to one another as the Prisoner in the punishment cell sings:

> The day was dying and the wind was sighing,
> As I lay crying in my prison cell,
> And that old triangle
> Went jingle jangle
> Along the banks of the Royal Canal.[48]

The song once again serves to highlight the previous action on stage. The Quare Fellow's grave is now fully dug and awaiting its occupant. The singer reveals he is at a breaking point, the day is nearly over and as the long night looms before him he is reduced to tears. Behan has prepared his audience to picture the Quare Fellow being occupied in such a manner and leaves them with this haunting image as the curtain falls. Song functions as a means of expressing

eloquently the precarious position of both of these men; song aligns the two characters, while also portraying their vitality.

Act Three, scene one, begins later the same night as Warder Donelly and a less experienced warder listen to the prisoners' continuous tapping on the water pipes. The prisoners use this method to discuss the Quare Fellow's approaching execution. The use of song as an alternate means of communication, perhaps a less committal means, is suggested as the two warders discuss the prison Canon. Warder Donelly relates: "He was silenced for something before he came here and this is the *only* job he can get. Something terrible he did, though God forgive us, maybe its not right to talk of it."[49] The other warder makes a suggestion: "You might sing it."[50] Thus, singing is suggested as an alternate means of conveying information. Yet Warder Donelly's hesitation is perfunctory, since he quite readily continues with his gossip concerning the Canon's activities. The Chief Warder enters and scolds the lazy warders for not fulfilling their duties by patrolling the prison's wings.

Warder Donelly is sent off stage to stop the prisoners tapping on the hot water pipes and the Governor of the prison enters. We learn from the Governor that there is to be no reprieve for the Quare Fellow. The Chief Warder and Warder Regan discuss the night ahead and the execution.

Behan now combines the powerful lyrics of "Along the Banks of the Royal Canal" with disturbing observations on capital punishment. Regan is uncomfortably candid in his remarks to his superior:

> REAGAN: You're not going to give me that stuff about just shoving over the lever and Bob's your uncle. You forget the times the fellow gets caught and has to be kicked off the edge of the trap hole. You never heard of the warders down below swinging on his back when the drop was too short.[51]

Behan presents the gruesome details of legalized murder and the audience is left to ponder the validity of the sanctioned occurrences.

During a transitional moment in the scene the young Warder Crimmin strolls around the prison yard while sounds from the outside world drift over the confines of the prison walls and are heard on stage. One of these far-off sounds is that of "a drunken crowd heard singing."[52] This singing wafts onto the stage as a reminder of the outside world and the gaiety of common people who are unconcerned or unaware of the events about to transpire in the jail. This particular example is even more poignant when one considers that it is an event Behan himself experienced while a prisoner in Walpole Prison, awaiting sentencing to Borstal. In *Borstal Boy*, Behan describes this:

> The night was broken with shouts and thumps, curses and drunken singing. Some of the other prisoners shouted, 'Shah-rap, you baa-a-stad,' in their English accents ... I didn't mind the noise and singing. It made me feel as if I was not altogether removed from Saturday nights.[53]

This example of singing in *The Quare Fellow* functions as a means of representing the off stage world in relation to the world of prison. Thus, another reason for these prisoners to sing is because they wish to maintain some resemblance of the normalcy of the outside world.

The Hangman and his assistant Jenkinson enter and the Hangman sings:

> She was lovely and fair like the rose of the summer,
> Though 'twas not her beauty alone that won me,
> Oh, no, 'twas the truth in her eyes ever shining,
> That made me love Mary the Rose of Tralee.[54]

Ironically, Behan has this English hangman sing an old Irish love song. The lyrics of the song describe the singer's beautiful love, quite a contrast to what the singer has come to do. The lyrics of the song entitled "The Rose of Tralee" are as follows:

> The pale moon was rising above the green mountains,

> The sun was declining beneath the blue sea,
> When I strayed with my love to the pure crystal fountain,
> That stands in the beautiful vale of Tralee.
> She was lovely and fair as the rose of the summer,
> Yet 'twas not her beauty alone that won me,
> Oh no! 'twas the truth in her eyes ever dawning,
> That made me love Mary, The Rose of Tralee.
>
> The cool shades of evening their mantle were spreading,
> And Mary, all smiles, sat list'ning to me,
> The moon thro' the valley, her pale rays were shedding,
> When I won the heart of the Rose of Tralee.
> Though lovely and fair as the rose of the summer,
> Yet 'twas not her beauty alone that won me,
> Oh no! 'twas truth in her eyes ever dawning,
> That made me love Mary, The Rose of Tralee.[55]

The song is based upon the story of two young lovers William Pembroke Mulchinock and Mary O'Connor:

> 'The Rose' is said to have been a servant in the house; his parents sent him abroad in order to keep them apart; Mary had died of consumption on his return but he never forgot her, and wrote the song late in life when he was blind and lonely.[56]

The romance occurred in Tralee, County Kerry and today there still stands a monument to Mulchinock in the Town Park where the song's references to Kerry's mountains and River Lee are available for all to witness. "The Rose of Tralee" is now the name of an annual beauty competition in Ireland. By using this traditional love song as a means of introducing the Hangman Behan dramatically alters his audience's expectations. Any preconceived idea that the audience might have had as to the character of the Hangman are confused by his choice of song. He comments about the song: "Lovely song in't it? ... I'm very fond of the old Irish songs."[57] It appears that he uses the song as a means of distracting those around him from thoughts of the execution. Initially one may expect Behan is fulfilling the stereotypical vision of the hangman as the enemy, he is an English man arrived to execute and Irish felon. But Behan

uses song as a means of deflating this initial suspicion. The Hangman is portrayed not as a villain but as a real person. Thus, Behan does not give his audience an opportunity to "blame" the Hangman, for the execution of the Quare Fellow. Instead Behan has begun to encourage his audience to suspect their own complacency towards capital punishment as blameworthy.

The Hangman urges his religious assistant to similarly participate in some entertainment via song: "go and fetch your concertina and sing 'em that hymn you composed ... Go on. It's a grand tune, a real credit to you. Go on, lad."[58] The reluctant Jenkinson complies. The Hangman describes Jenkinson's hymn as such: "this hymn's very moving about hanging and mercy and so forth. Bring tears to your eyes to 'ear Adam and Christmas singing it."[59] We learn that Jenkinson and a friend, Christmas, once belonged to a religious organization with which they sang on street corners, until people learned of these two men's deadly trade. Jenkinson returns and sings his song, which the Quare Fellow will never hear, while the Hangman interjects details concerning the imminent hanging:

> JENKINSON: My brother, sit and think,
> While yet some time is left to thee
> Kneel to thy God who from thee does not shrink
> And lay thy sins on Him who died for thee.
>
> HANGMAN: Take a fourteen stone man as a basis and giving him a drop of eight foot...
>
> JENKINSON: Men shrink from thee but not I,
> Come close to me I love my erring sheep.
> My blood can cleanse thy sins of blackest dye,
> I understand if thou canst only weep.
>
> HANGMAN: Every half-stone lighter would require a two-inch longer drop, so for weight thirteen and a half stone -- drop eight feet two inches, and for weight thirteen stone -- drop eight feet four inches.
>
> JENKINSON: Though thou hast grieved me sore,
> My arms of mercy still are open wide,

I still hold open Heaven's shining door
Come then, take refuge in my wounded side.

HANGMAN: Now he's only twelve stone so he should have eight foot eight, but he's got a thick neck on him so I'd better give him another couple of inches. Yes, eight foot ten.

JENKINSON: Come now, the time is short.
Longing to pardon and bless I wait.
Look up to me, my sheep so dearly bought
And say, forgive me, ere it is too late.

HANGMAN: Divide 412 by the weight of the body in stones, multiply by two gives the length of the drop in inches.[60]

The obvious juxtaposition of Jenkinson's song and the Hangman's words is dramatic. Behan has Jenkinson sing a song outlining Christian forgiveness while the Hangman forms his murderous calculations aloud. The contrast between these two sections is highlighted by Behan through his set up of the exchange. Jenkinson begins singing about a sinner who is paralleled with Christ and presented before a loving God. The Hangman interjects his calculations on the size of a standard man and the necessary drop to break his neck. Jenkinson continues with the voice of God welcoming the sinner back into his fold. The Hangman proceeds with his meticulous details concerning the act of hanging a human being. Jenkinson's next verse preaches forgiveness for the sinner and an ever-lasting life in heaven while the Hangman arrives at the specific details concerning the Quare Fellow's hanging. Jenkinson's last verse anxiously urges the sinner to repent his sins as time is running out while the Hangman has the last word about the hanging.

The irony of Jenkinson's song and his practice is surely intentional. His song has a personal aspect: the sentiment contained within the song outlines the form of support Behan as a prisoner himself, longed for, but never received. Behan uses song to clearly expose hypocritical

Christian thought that preaches forgiveness but does not actually practice it. At the tender age of sixteen Behan was captured in England with the contents of a bomb. While awaiting his sentencing he was able to have a meeting with a Roman Catholic Priest; what transpired horrified the traditionally religious Behan. He explains the event in *Borstal Boy:*

> I smiled at him and said, 'Good morning, Father.' 'When are you going to give up this business?' His two eyes glared at me from behind his glasses ... I shivered and hadn't been expecting this, but now it happened that this priest, too, was part of Walton Prison ... 'I don't know what business you're talking about, Father,' said I. 'You know all right - your membership of this murder gang - the I.R.A.... the Hierarchy of England have issued pastorals denouncing the I.R.A., and while you're here I cannot let you come to the altar unless you tell me once and for all that you're giving up having anything to do with this gang.' 'Why should the Bishops of England be supposed to have the right to dictate about politics to an Irishman, Father?'[61]

After this incident Behan had very little to do with the Catholic Church and took every opportunity available to him to criticize and expose the hypocrisy he experienced first-hand. Jenkinson's song is a choice example of such an opportunity. The song preaches love and forgiveness while Jenkinson's Christian duty requires him to punish this sinner by participating in his sanctioned murder. The audience is presented with a representative of the church and a representative of the law and both are seen to be participating in the murder of another human being. Behan's means of structuring this song with the Hangman's interjections shows his keen knowledge of how to effectively comment upon such a dramatic situation. The drama is highlighted through song.

The Hangman and Jenkinson exit leaving Warder Regan and Crimmin to their thoughts until the voice of Prisoner C is heard singing. One may assume that it is now midnight in the world of the play and the Quare Fellow is in his cell listening for the Prisoner's song. He sings in Gaelic:

PRISONER C: *[sings from his cell window].*
Is e fath mo bhuartha na bhfhaghaim cead chuarta.
[It is the cause of my sorrow that I have not permission to visit.]

WARDER REGAN: Regular choir practice going on round here tonight.

CRIMMIN: He's singing for ... for ...

WARDER REGAN: For the quare fellow....

PRISONER C: *[sings]* gaoth adthuaidh ann. Ni'l sneachta cruaidh ann ...
Mo mhuirnin bhan...
[There is no north wind there, There is no hard snow there ... My white darling mavoureen. . .]
His song dies away [62]

This song that Behan includes in the text is sung in Gaelic by the County Kerry native, Prisoner C. The verses of the song fit the Quare Fellow's situation, he cannot meet those he loves but instead must content himself with thoughts of the hereafter. Prisoner C's song is offered up to the Quare Fellow as a farewell lament. This lament singing for a condemned prisoner is something that Behan was familiar with and in his book *My Brother Brendan*, Dominic Behan relates an account Behan told him when in prison with a condemned man Bernard Kirwan: "He used to ask the screw to get me to sing for him so that he'd hear a nice young voice when he was goin' for the long drop."[63] As such, song is interpreted by Behan as a means of real consolation.

Scene two begins with the prison yard on the morning of the off-stage execution. Mickser gives a running commentary on the Quare Fellow's walk to the gallows and his subsequent hanging. The spoken observations resemble those of a sports commentary. The tone of the scenes leading up to this execution walk can be interpreted as somber and dark, the tension surrounding the execution is clearly tangible. Yet Behan's prisoners refuse to give in to this tension of the looming grave. By turning the Quare Fellow's walk to the gallows into a

symbolic "last mile" these prisoners avoid the painful tears and choose to laugh. Just as song serves to affirm their vitality so too does their laughter.

Prisoners A, B, C and D are called out to fill in the grave and carve the "official" number for the Quare Fellow's headstone; their reward for doing so is two bottles of stout. After Warder Regan has deposited the Quare Fellow's last letters into his grave the Prisoners snatch them up and argue over who is to have them to sell to the Irish papers. The image of the men standing over the grave arguing for the dead man's last belongings harkens back to the image of the soldiers gambling for Christ's robes as he was led to his execution.

The last image of the play is that of an empty stage and the voice of the Prisoner in the punishment cell. His voice drifts above onto the stage as he sings the final stanza of his song:

> In the female prison
> There are seventy women
> I wish it was with them that I did dwell,
> Then that old triangle
> Could jingle jangle
> Along the banks of the Royal Canal.[64]

This final stanza is surprisingly hopeful. Behan leaves his audience with the image of the vitality of this prisoner, and indeed of all of those in the prison. The prisoner sings about his natural desire and longing to be with a woman. Behan chooses to leave his audience with a strong image of these prisoners and he does so through song.

Behan's skillful use of music and song in *The Quare Fellow* adds dramatically and thematically to his play. The songs included in the play serve to add depth to the characters who sing them. The musicality of the characters is an example of their indomitable spirit and their singing is a physical example of their vitality. Song also is continuously presented as a very

valid form of communication. The type of sentiment and feeling that is difficult to express in conversation is often easily accessible through song.

"Along the Banks of the Royal Canal" is used by Behan in a very deliberate manner. Verses of the song drift up to the stage and comment upon the action of the play, a prisoner's life, and indeed, the indomitable human spirit. This particular song is the primary stage presence for its singer. The audience never sees this prisoner but they frequently listen to his poignant expression of wants and desires through the song. Song is also the primary element the audience has to interpret the Quare Fellow since he too is never seen on stage. His request for the Gaelic song to be sung by Prisoner C allows the audience to interpret his character as a man guilty of murder, but a man capable of feeling as well. Behan highlights his humanizing qualities in order to encourage a more sympathetic ruling for his sentence. Song is presented as the primary means of interpreting both of these characters, and through Behan's controlled use of song a sympathetic picture of prisoners is painted for the audience.

In *The Quare Fellow* song is presented by Behan to be an effective, legitimate and moving means of communication. Thus, he uses it to reach his audience and through his use of song effectively draws his audience into the world of cold steel, punishment cells, and human suffering, he exposes judicial hypocrisy. After Behan has engaged and entertained his audience through song, he makes his plea for the cessation of capital punishment.

NOTES:

[1] Brendan Behan, *The Complete Plays* (London: Methuen Ltd, 1978) 39.

[2] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 39.

[3] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 39.

[4] Peter René Gerdes, *The Major Works of Brendan Behan* (Frankfurt: Herbert Lang Bern, 1973) 30.

[5] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 40.

[6] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 40.

[7] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 40.

[8] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 40.

[9] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 40.

[10] Gerdes, *The Major Works of Brendan Behan*, 59.

[11] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 41.

[12] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 45.

[13] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 46.

[14] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 47.

[15] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 47.

[16] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 47.

[17] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 53.

[18] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 53.

[19] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 57.

[20] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 57.

[21] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 58.

[22] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 58.

[23] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 59.

[24] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 59.

[25] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 67.

[26] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 67.

[27] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 72.

[28] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 72.

[29] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 72.

[30] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 72.

[31] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 73.

[32] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 73.

[33] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 74.

[34] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 76.

[35] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 83.

[36] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 84.

[37] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 85.

[38] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 87.

[39] Gerdes, *The Major Works of Brendan Behan*, 34.

[40] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 88.

[41] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 88.

[42] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 89.

[43] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 89.

[44] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 95.

[45] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 96.

[46] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 96.

[47] Gerdes, *The Major Works of Brendan Behan*, 53.

[48] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 104.

[49] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 108.

[50] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 108,

[51] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 113.

[52] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 114.

[53] Behan, *Borstal Boy* (London: Arrow Books Ltd, 1958) 19.

[54] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 115.

[55] James N. Healy, ed, *The Second Book of Irish Ballads* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1962) 76-77.

[56] Healy, *The Second Book of Irish Ballads*, 76.

[57] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 116.

[58] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 117.

[59] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 117.

[60] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 117-118

[61] Behan, *Borstal Boy*, 63-65.

[62] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 119.

[63] Behan, Dominic, *My Brother Brendan* (London: Leslie Frewin, 1965), 102.

[64] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 124

Chapter Two: *An Giall*

In 1956, Gael Linn, an Irish language organization, opened a small theatre in Dublin and in March 1957, Brendan Behan began to write a play for this theatre. Behan felt indebted to Gael Linn since the Gaelic society had given his early work substantial support. When completed, *An Giall* was a naturalistic tragedy. The play's immediate origin was an incident during the British invasion of the Suez Canal Zone in 1956. A British Officer had been captured and held hostage by Egyptian forces. The hostage was later found dead, suffocated in a cupboard. This particular event caused Behan to contemplate how large, public incidents reduce individuals to objects. Behan believed it was imperative for individuals to resist this diminishment. In Rae Jeffs' study of Brendan Behan; *Man and Showman*, Behan describes *An Giall* as such:

> It is basically about the ordinariness of people - which is an extraordinary thing at such times. The only solution I suggest in it is for people not to allow themselves to be fooled by the Establishment of any side. Some people say they've got friends on both sides. I'm proud to have enemies on both sides. I won't bore you with talk about Partition and all the killing that's going on up on the border now, but I cannot be indifferent to the fact that young Irishmen on both sides are being killed. All that I am trying to show in my play is that one man's death can be more significant than the issues involved.[1]

An Giall revolves around Irish politics. An I.R.A. Volunteer: Michael Kevin O'Neill, is captured and sentenced to death after having shot two policemen. In response to this, the I.R.A. take an English soldier as a hostage and demand that O'Neill be released or the hostage will be executed. This hostage, Private Leslie Alan Williams, is brought to Dublin and kept in a questionable rooming house called "The Hole." While in this surprisingly welcoming Irish environment, Leslie forms an attachment to a young Irish girl in the house, Teresa. Later in the same evening the house is raided by Police who suspect the English soldier is being held there.

Leslie is put into a closet until the Police vacate the house, unable to find him. When the closet is opened Leslie is found dead due to suffocation. The final scene of the play presents Teresa mourning her love and holding the politics of her country responsible for Leslie's death: "*An Giall* dramatizes the tension between those who see political martyrdom as something glorious and those who see human life as too exorbitant a price for any political objective."[2]

When *An Giall* premiered the importance of Behan's play was great since it marked a step towards the revival of Gaelic theatre. Many companies wishing to explore the realm of Gaelic drama have performed English translations of Behan's simple yet poignant play using the title: *An Giall.* Yet many of these performances are blended versions of the original text combined with the drastically modified English version which became known as: *The Hostage.* Indeed, a television adaptation of the Gaelic play blended these two texts. The producer of the adaptation, Pádraig Ó Siochrú, states: "We read and re-read the original Irish script and the published Littlewood text and in *festina lente* fashion the television version took shape."[3] The text I am analyzing is a translation based upon the original Gaelic text of *An Giall* published by the National Drama Council under the Gaelic League, Dublin 1958, which I was ecstatic to find at Trinity College Dublin. I will be closely examining Behan's use of song and music in *An Giall* as a means of interpreting the text.

Before analyzing *An Giall* independently it is essential to make a brief comparison of the texts of *An Giall* and *The Hostage,* since such a comparison reveals many crucial differences. There are ten characters in *An Giall,* while *The Hostage* contains fifteen. The characters within *An Giall* are as follows: Patrick, age 60, the "caretaker" of The Hole; Kate his companion, age 38; Monsúr age 70, the owner of The Hole; Teresa, an eighteen year old servant girl; Leslie the English hostage, also eighteen years old; an I.R.A. Officer, age 26; an I.R.A. Volunteer, age

24; the Broy Harrier (a Special Branch Detective) age 55, and two other I.R.A. Volunteers. While in *The Hostage*, Pat's companion is named Meg, Kate is the name given to the on-stage pianist, Monsúr is renamed Monsewer, Teresa and Leslie are nineteen, the I.R.A. Officer and Volunteer remain the same but the Broy Harrier is developed into a major character called Mr Mulleady, a decaying civil servant who later admits he is a Secret Policeman. The two other I.R.A. Volunteers are eliminated from *The Hostage*. Added are Rio Rita, a homosexual labourer, Princess Grace, his black boyfriend, two prostitutes: Colette and Ropeen, a Russian Sailor, and Miss Gilchist, a hypocritical social worker. Such additions greatly alter the tone of the play and inevitably, to a certain extent, its content. As an example in *An Giall* the innocent romance that develops between Leslie and Teresa marks a direct contrast to the violent world that it takes place within. In *The Hostage* this romance is less prominent and more bawdy. Further substantial contrasts between the two plays will be presented during the course of my analysis of the songs and music contained in *An Giall.*

The initial stage directions of Act One of *An Giall* read:

> *[Before the curtain is raised the beating of drums is heard. Then, the pipes are heard as well playing "Flowers of the Forest." As the curtain is raised the drums cease, but the music of the pipes continues.]*[4]

Before the curtain even rises the audience is confronted with the disturbing beating of drums and the traditional Scottish pipe lament, "Flowers of the Forest." This lament is primarily played at funerals and as such is referenced in the well-known song by E. Bogle, "The Green Fields of France." A popular Irish group called "The Fureys" cover the song and the initial lyrics are as follows:

> Well how do you do young Willie MacBride
> Do you mind if I sit here down by your graveside
> And rest for a while 'neath the warm summer sun

I've been walking all day and I'm nearly done.
I see by your gravestone you were only nineteen
When you joined the great fallen in 1916.
I hope you died well and I hope you died clean

Or young Willie MacBride was it slow and obscene?
Did they beat the drum slowly
Did they play the fife flowly
Did they sound the death march as they lowered you down
Did the band play the last post and chorus
And did the pipes play "The Flowers of the Forest."[5]

Such a beginning foreshadows the upcoming death and the lament for life soon to be gone. Behan uses a traditional funeral dirge to establish the often deadly tone of the play. As Patrick and Kate begin to talk Patrick's first lines are those of explanation of the music:

PATRICK: Monsúr is practising his music, getting ready to lament that boy in Belfast prison when he's hanged.[6]

Not only does this initial "lament" introduce the story of the Irish young man soon to be executed in Belfast, the senseless death of another young man is also forshadowed, the English hostage in the play. Kate and Pat briefly discuss the state of affairs in "The Hole" when Monsúr takes up his pipes again,

[Sound of pipes again, but now playing "O'Donnell Abu."]

KATE: Here comes Monsúr now.

PATRICK: *[Puts his two hands on his ears.]* I feel him. Christ, hasn't he got me deafened.
[Enter Monsúr, He is wearing a kilt and clasping his pipes. He blows a long last note on the chanter][7]

The song Monsúr now plays on his pipes, "O'Donnell Abu," is not a lament but a popular patriotic march literally titled "O'Donnell to Victory."[8] In *Borstal Boy,* Behan describes an incident while he was a prisoner in Walton Jail in England. Behan met a fellow Irish man whom

he described as "a mad Republican"[9] named Callan. He had a peculiar gift of being able to throw not only his voice but any noise from his mouth:

> He was able to roar in a whisper. When we'd go on the exercise yard, he'd start: 'First Cork Brigade, fall in, by the left! Belfast Number One Brigade! Quick March Third Tipperary Brigade ... By the time the screw was standing on the steps and scratching his head and wondering where the muttered roars were coming from, Callan had finished drilling the entire Irish Republican movement from the thirty-two counties of Ireland ... He did it so well that the others started marching round the exercise yard in step to his piping, even despite themselves.

> Proudly the note of the trumpet is sounding,
> Loudly the war cry arise on the gale,
> Swiftly the steed by Lough Swilly is bounding,
> To join the thick squadrons by Saimear's green Vale,
> On! Every mountaineer, stranger to fright and fear!
> Rush to the standard of dauntless Red Hugh!
> Bonnoght and gallowglass, rush from your mountain pass.
> On for old Erin, O'Donnell abu![10]

This incredible "march" to Wolfe Tone's grave cast Callan in the role of martyr, one that the song's namesake also assumed. Peader O'Donnell was a socialist minded member of the I.R.A. In 1925 when O'Donnell discovered his Donegal neighbours were being served with summonses for non-payment of land annuities from the times of the "Troubles" (basically from 1916 on) O'Donnell supported his neighbours in a land annuities dispute:

> O'Donnell organized a campaign to help people hide their cattle so that they couldn't be seized by bailiffs ... O'Donnell's Donegal agitation, which later spread to adjoining counties west of the Shannon . . . generated sufficient support for Fianna Fail to take it up.[11]

In November of 1926 O'Donnell also wrote a resolution to be read at the General Army Convention. O'Donnell felt the I.R.A. should separate from the formal Irish Government known as the Dáil:

> The Army of the Republic sever its connection with the Dáil, and act under an independent Executive, such Executive be given the power to declare war when,

> in its opinion, a suitable opportunity arises to rid the Republic of its enemies and maintain it in accordance with the proclamation of 1916.[12]

Peader O'Donnell retired from the I.R.A. in the 1930's due to lack of support for his leftist ideas. Monsúr sings a song of support for the I.R.A. rebel who attempted to maintain the ideals set forth by 1916 heroes such as Patrick Pearse. As such the song symbolizes the changed feeling of the play. Monsúr is filled with the excitement of renewed action by the I.R.A. and his choice of song exemplifies it. He discusses with Patrick the arrangements concerning the forthcoming "prisoner," the English soldier snatched from the Northern border. Monsúr explains that the prisoner is to be housed in The Hole by the I.R.A. as an act of defiance against the execution of Irish prisoner Michael Kevin O'Neill. Monsúr's parting line reveals his euphoric state:

> MONSUR: It is wonderful.
> *[He hoists the pipes again and blows on the chanter starting the tune, "O'Donnell Abu." He sweeps out the door on the right blowing the pipes full blast.]*[13]

Not only is Monsúr practising his pipes to lament O'Neill's upcoming execution he also plays his pipes to celebrate his renewed involvement with I.R.A. activities.

Kate returns and is told by Patrick to prepare a room for a visitor. She is similarly excited to hear of Republican activities and she applauds the actions of the I.R.A. of the 1950's while Patrick bitterly reflects upon his disenchantment with the organization. During this discussion Patrick reveals to Kate that Monsúr believes everyone in The Hole is a patriot on the run from the law. He encourages Monsúr to believe this while he collects rent from the thieves and prostitutes who live there.

> PATRICK: But, as I was telling you, Monsúr doesn't know anything about those things. Monsúr thinks the War of Independence is going on always..

> KATE: Oh, I know that Patrick. Don't I remember the day Colette was after Ropeen to hurry herself-- the two of them were going down to the North Wall the time the Polish coal boats were in -- and Monsúr said to them that the cause required the work of the women also . . . he began to sing "Soldiers of Cumann na Mban" after them.[14]

"Cumann na Mban" literally translated means "Association of Women"[15] and is used to refer to the women's auxiliary of the I.R.A. The song "Cumann na Mban" praises the work of these courageous Irish women. Established in the early 1900's, Cumann na Mban was an organization which raised funds and carried out propaganda for the I.R.A. Many members were active participants in the Easter Rising of 1916. The organization was officially disbanded in the 1970's when the I.R.A. returned to its policy of strict secrecy and at this time many of its members became secret Military Administrators within the I.R.A.[16] Monsúrs confusion in referring to the two prostitutes as female patriots is perhaps a comment by Behan upon the often undesirable work of this female organization but more likely a joke at the expense of I.R.A. supporters.

Patrick continues with another example of Monsúrs haze:

> PATRICK: It was even worse when Clod came out of the "Joy" the last time. I went looking for the room rent from him a week later. He said he wouldn't pay any rent at all, and that Monsúr said he was a Felon of Our Land, and that there would always be a welcome for him to stay here without hindrance or rent for the rest of his days.[17]

Monsúr confusedly believes that "Clod" has spent time in Mountjoy Jail, Dublin, due to I.R.A. involvement and thus identifies him as a "Felon of Our Land." "The Felons of Our Land" is the title of a patriotic song by Arthur M. Forrester.[18] While in Walton Jail in England, Behan sang verses of this particular song in order to console himself with thoughts of the privileged treatment he would receive as a man who has completed jail time for "the cause."

> I walked up and down in my slippers and was not in a bad humour, but whistling

softly to myself the songs that many an Irishman had whistled or whispered to himself in those kips ...

In boyhood's bloom and manhood's pride,
Foredoomed by alien laws,
Some on the scaffold proudly died,
For Holy Ireland's cause;
And brothers say, Shall we, today,
Unmoved by cowards stand,
While traitors shame and foes defame,
The Felons of our Land ...

Some of the convict's dreary cell,
Have found a living tomb,
And some unseen untended fell
Within the dungeon's gloom,
But what care we, although it be
Trod by a ruffian band,
God bless the clay where rest today
The Felons of our Land . . .[19]

Let tyrants mock and traitors sneer, little do we care,
A felon's cap is the noblest crown an Irish head can wear.
And every Gael in Inisfail who scorns the serf's vile brand,
From Lee to Boyne, would gladly join the Felons of our Land. [20]

Yet, in this instance in the play it is a much older and more experienced Behan who ironically has Monsúr identify these criminals as patriots and greets them accordingly with traditional patriotic songs. Perhaps Behan is commenting upon the I.R.A. of the 1950's identifying a percentage of its members as individuals more interested in personal gain than communal success. Behan is using song as a method of exposing the hypocrisy surrounding a great deal of "patriotic" fervor.

Teresa enters and informs Patrick there is a man waiting to see him. As she describes what the man looks like Patrick concludes he is an I.R.A. Officer and tells Teresa to send him in. While he awaits the Officer, Patrick sings: "*[to himself]* Oró sé do bheatha 'bhaile! Oró sé do bheatha 'bhaile!"[21] The song that Patrick sings is one written by Patrick Pearse, the historical

leader of the Easter Rising of 1916. The title of the song and the two lines that Patrick sings are literally "Oho! You are welcome home!"[22] the song is never sung in English. The irony of using this popular, patriotic, Gaelic ballad is obvious. The I.R.A. Officer has come to secure a temporary "home" for the English hostage. Patrick's song is an ironic comment upon the preparations for this arrival. While Leslie Alan Williams will be a hostage forcibly kept in this house he will ironically enjoy himself; as such he is welcomed to the open atmosphere of The Hole. We later learn that Leslie has never had a "proper" home since he is an orphan and as he becomes more comfortable in his room a part of him comes to view it, somewhat ironically, as a home.

As Kate and Teresa prepare a bed for the expected visitor Patrick questions Teresa as to her past employment and reason for leaving. As Teresa divulges her unfortunate experiences working in a rooming house for "student priests," she reflects upon how happy and safe she now feels to be working in a house like The Hole. Behan is obviously making a joke at the expense of the Catholic Church. As they converse, Monsúr's pipes function as a means of returning the conversation to the sad state of Michael Kevin O'Neill, awaiting execution. In this instance music and political action are aligned.

> PATRICK: Now, words don't feed the brothers, nor the fathers, nor the mothers. What about a little work? [*The pipes are heard playing "O'Donnell Abu."*] Oh. . . [*Patrick lets out a sigh.*] Here he comes. The Gobán Saor. [*The music stops. Monsúr comes in with his pipes in his hand. Kate goes to him.*]
>
> KATE: Isn't it a terrible thing Monsúr, they are after refusing mercy for that poor boy in Belfast. He will be hanged tomorrow morning, at eight o'clock.[23]

Monsúrs patriotic song returns the action of the play to thoughts of political turmoil and its victims. Patrick ironically refers to Monsúr as "The Gobán Saor" a clever craftsman in Irish

folklore.[24] Patrick despises Monsúr's ability to live in a past world of martyrs and heroes epitomized in the song "O'Donnell Abu."

Patrick and Monsúr discuss the fate of the young man in Belfast while Kate and Teresa listen. Patrick's comments are bitterly sardonic while Monsúr's are blatantly earnest:

> PATRICK: I say that this young man will be in the company of Patrick Pearse and the other heroes a couple of minutes after eight tomorrow morning.
>
> MONSÚR: He will. He will be that with the help of God. In the company of the heroes. It fills my heart with joy. [*He blows a note on the pipe, and he gets a musical note. Then, he begins to sing.*]
>
> Patrick, my friend, did you hear the cries,
> did you hear the noise, the shouting and the tumult?
> Did you hear the guard as you came to Ulster,
> so strong, numerous, and powerful on the road?
> The Fianna young, faithful supporters of the Irish Republic,
> and soldiers of the country, both men and women,
> And little girls in their bright Gaelic costumes,
> bands playing music and a host of flags.[25]

Monsúr's song summons the ghosts of historical republicans such as Patrick Pearse. Monsúr refers to the Northern state of Ulster, the collective name for the six counties still under British rule, and the violence that surrounds this border "The Fianna" is the Irish equivalent to the boy scouts and it is the main recruiting body for the I.R.A., Behan himself was a member and later joined the I.R.A. Monsúr pictures young Irish dancers accompanied by bands and flags, all culminating in a historical march to a graveyard. The song itself is a paraphrase of Behan's Gaelic poem: "Filleadh Mhic Eachaidh" (The Return of the McCaughey). Behan's poem outlines the life and death of Sean McCaughey, the I.R.A. Chief of Staff who was sent to Portlaoise Prison in September of 1941. As a political prisoner he refused to wear a convict uniform and was kept in solitary confinement for over two years without being allowed any visitors. On April 19, 1946, McCaughey went on a hunger and thirst strike for release. He died

three weeks later. At the inquest under cross-examination a Prison Doctor admitted that he would not treat a dog in the manner that Sean McCaughey was treated.[26] He was returned to his home in Belfast for burial. As explained by Richard Wall:

> In May 1946, a few months before Behan was released under a general amnesty from the Curragh Military Internment Camp, County Kildare, a fellow Republican prisoner, Sean McCaughey ... died on hunger strike ... This event inspired Behan to write a poem in Irish, "Filleadh Mhic Eachaidh" which was published in Comhar (Co-operation) an Irish-language journal ... Eleven years later when MacGóráin [editor] commissioned Behan to write a play in Irish for Gael-Linn ... Behan recalled his poem on McCaughey and assigned an untitled paraphrase of parts of it to Monsúr.[27]

Behan was extremely moved by the death of Sean McCaughey and in his book *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* he recalls the exact moment when he learned of his fellow Irish Rebel's death. In true Behan style he marked the moment through song:

> Now I knew a number of things about this young man and one of them was that when he was lying in his bed after ten or twelve days with neither a bite to eat nor a sup to drink, the warder came into his cell and threw buckets of water over him saying: 'Now, you bastard, if you won't take water one way, you'll bloody well take it another.' On the day of his death . . . I sang all sorts of rebel songs, including one about the coronation:
>
> It was on July the twenty-eighth,
> In the year of thirty-seven,
> That a fire was lit without e'er a grate
> And the flames leapt up to Heaven.
>
> The King and Queen came sailing down
> The loch in the best of order,
> And we welcomed them to Belfast town
> With a bonfire on the border.
>
> The King walked up and down the deck
> Surrounded by his G-Men,
> The Queen put a muffler round her neck
> Assisted by her weemen.
>
> When asked, 'What glare is that I see?'
> The reply was there in order,
> "T's Ireland united in loyalty
> With a bonfire on the border.'

Some said the flames were Ulster's own,
And more they were extraneous,
But a Down man swore they lit their lone,
That combustion was spontaneous.

A man that loves his King and Queen,
And stands for law and order,
Said the flames were orange, white and green,
In the bonfire on the border.[28]

Behan chooses to sing a song of defiance to parallel the acts of Sean McCaughey in life and through his death. By including a paraphrase of his poem on McCaughey in *An Giall,* Behan provides the struggle introduced by Monsúr with historical substance.

Perhaps Monsúr does not sing this song in *The Hostage* because of the difference in tone between these two plays. Behan's poem is a sad and personal lament written in earnest yet within the context of *The Hostage* it may not be interpreted in such a manner.

Kate and Teresa are left alone to discuss the fate of Michael Kevin O'Neill and take solace in music:

KATE: The poor lad. Well they'll be breaking his young white neck at eight o'clock tomorrow morning.

TERESA: God preserve us, we can't be thinking about it. Turn up the radio – oh, the Blackbird.

KATE: Yes, lets do that. It's not right to be lamenting the young man beforehand.

[They turn on the radio and "The Blackbird" is heard. They look at one another and a smile appears on Teresa's mouth. She moves out on the floor and begins to dance. She extends her hand to Kate in an invitation to dance. Kate comes out slowly and shyly at first, but in the end the two of them are dancing fast and lively.][29]

The two women take solace in the music and are able to cast off thoughts of death to engage in a spirited dance. While they dance to "The Blackbird" a traditional Irish hornpipe piece,

another level to the writing is evident. Behan has inserted a double meaning by using this particular song. While the women dance to the Irish tune the song prepares the audience for another interpretation of the events: the Gaelic word for blackbird "londubh" is also a metaphor for a hero.[30] The scene continues:

> RADIO: The Blackbird...
>
> [*The door on the right is opened unknown to the two dancing, and we see a young man in the khaki uniform of an English soldier standing in the doorway looking at them. Teresa sees him first, and gives a start. She stops. Kate continues, looks at the door and then she stops.*]
>
> SOLDIER: Don't stop it. I like to dance.[31]

While Kate and Teresa dance to the Irish melody they are interrupted by the appearance of the English soldier and his captors. An audience familiar with the Gaelic language could then recognize Leslie as the "Blackbird," the hero. In *The Hostage* Meg and Teresa are joined by everyone else in the house and while they all dance a wild Irish jig, the English soldier is thrown into the middle of this dancing. This act being symbolic of his hasty presence within Dublin. In both of these scenes the obvious juxtaposition of the hostage and the dancers is maintained. And the soldier's plea for the dancers to continue is also maintained securing his acceptance by the majority of the members of the household.

Along with the traditional hornpipe version of "The Blackbird," there also exists an Irish ballad of the same title. "The Blackbird" is said to be the earliest known Irish ballad written in the English language. It is believed the song has existed verbally since 1728.[32] According to Daniel D. O'Keeffe, the term "Blackbird" was the name "Bonnie Prince Charles" was secretly known as. It is believed the song was written by an Irish soldier forced to fight the cause of the Prince and thus, it is considered the earliest rebel song created. The lyrics are as follows:

Once on a morning of sweet recreation,
I heard a fair lady a-making her moan,
With sighing and sobbing, and sad lamentation,
Aye singing, 'My Blackbird for ever is flown!
He's all my heart's treasure, my joy, and my pleasure,
So justly, my love, my heart follows thee;
And I am resolved, in foul or fair weather,
To seek out my Blackbird, wherever he be.

'I will go, a stranger to peril and danger,
My heart is so loyal in every degree;
For he's constant and kind, and courageous in mind:
Good luck to my Blackbird, wherever he be!
In Scotland he's loved and dearly approved,
In England a stranger he seemeth to be,
But his name I'll advance in Ireland or France.
Good luck to my Blackbird, wherever he be.

'The birds of the forests are all met together
The turtle is chosen to dwell with the dove,
And I am resolved in foul or fair weather,
Once in the spring-time to seek out my love.
But since fickle Fortune, which still proves uncertain,
Hath caused this parting between him and me,
His right I'll proclaim, and who dares me blame?
Good luck to my Blackbird, wherever he be.[33]

This legendary version of "The Blackbird" establishes a historical background for the play and appears to me to be an initial alignment of the two English figures of "Bonnie Prince Charles" and Leslie Alan Williams. But what Behan reveals through the course of the play is that Williams is as much a servant of the English crown as the Irish soldier who first composed "The Blackbird."

Act two opens with the hostage, Private Leslie Alan Williams, examining the confines of his room. He is brought a meal by Teresa and the two engage in coquettish conversation. They discover that Leslie is Teresa's senior by six months, as compared to *The Hostage* in which Teresa is the eldest. During the quiet talk of the young couple a parade for the Belfast prisoner

enters the world of The Hole by passing the house on the street below. Once again everyday life is interrupted by republican ideals in the form of music.

> KATE: Have they gone by yet?
>
> PATRICK: Have who gone by yet?
>
> KATE: The demonstration, for the poor boy up in Belfast Prison.
>
> TERESA: *[Parting from Leslie and going to the window.]* Oh, we forgot about him -- the poor boy.
>
> KATE: Yes, the English, the English always, hanging poor people and manipulating them always . . . the dirty murderers. [*She sees Leslie.*] Oh, saving your presence, me boy, pardon me, I forgot.[34]

Kate's words are greatly altered through the character of Meg in *The Hostage.* Meg does not apologize for her anti-English comments, indeed she boldly sings an anti-English rebel song "Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week" outlining the brutalities endured by Dublin's old and poor who were attacked by English forces in 1916. In *An Giall* such songs are not included giving the play a more varied tone. The scene continues: *"[The music of the pipes is heard out in the street. Everyone looks out of the widow, Leslie as much as anyone.]"*[35] Through the songs and music contained in *An Giall* there appears to be a more obviously drawn parallel between Leslie Alan Williams and Michael Kevin O'Neill. The two prisoners are more easily paralleled in their situations due to the absence of the overt references to Irish and English fighting, which are contained within *The Hostage*. Instead the characters of *An Giall* appear to sympathize more readily with Leslie and his situation. The parade continues:

> *[The music comes closer and gets louder. Then, when it is higher yet, Monsúr comes in playing the same music on his pipes. Everybody turns from the window no wonder - and Monsúr marches around the room playing the pipes and then he goes out again, his music diminishing in time with the music out in the street.]*[36]

In this instance Behan is using song as a method of reinforcing the immediacy of the political situation at hand. Monsúrs playing of the pipes within the house brings the force of the music of the parade one step closer to the inhabitants of The Hole. Not only do they hear the music in the streets but they witness it before them. Monsúr brings the emotional tune closer to them all while Behan obviously brings the politics behind executing a prisoner closer to them all as well. Just as the music has pervaded The Hole so has a deadly situation, the parallel between the Irish prisoner and the English prisoner is evident.

Everyone vacates the room and Leslie is briefly left to his own thoughts when they are interrupted by the sound of Monsúr's pipes once again,

> *[They leave and he is left pacing up and down the room. The pipes begin playing "Flowers of the Forest" and the music rises, sorrowful and plaintive. Leslie looks around inquisitively. The door is opened and Teresa comes in with two cups of tea.]*[37]

Leslie asks Teresa why the music is being played and is told that Monsúr is practising for the morning. Leslie does not yet realize "Flowers of the Forest," the before mentioned Scottish lament most often played at funerals, may serve to lament the deaths of both O'Neill and himself.

As Leslie and Teresa converse the two discover they are both orphans. This discovery serves to initiate a greater relationship between them. Their attraction to one another grows through similarities. In contrast in *The Hostage*, the couple have very little in common and often mis-interpret each other. Consequently the differences between the two young people complicate their attraction to one another. Teresa in *An Giall* is very sensitive and naive in comparison to the coarse and strapping Teresa in *The Hostage*. Leslie in *An Giall* is similarly lonely and gentle while in *The Hostage* he is loud and suggestive. The relationship that

develops between Leslie and Teresa is surprisingly innocent. A few kisses are exchanged as the extent of the physicality of their relationship, in comparison to *The Hostage* in which the couple presumably consummate their relationship. Thus, one may conclude in *An Giall* the attachment that develops between Teresa and Leslie is overtly innocent, while in *The Hostage* their relationship is more carnal.

Leslie asks Teresa for a picture of herself and she exits to retrieve it,

> *[She goes to the door, knocks on it, and it is opened. She leaves. Leslie remains on the bed throughout. Again we hear the music of the pipes: "Flowers of the Forest." Teresa returns. The door is opened and she comes in.]*[38]

Behan utilizes music to remind his audience of the potentially deadly situation, fueled by political action, unfolding before them. This innocent relationship is continuously interrupted by political remembrances. Monsúr's piping is like a clock chiming to signify that time is running out not only for the Belfast prisoner but for Leslie as well.

After Teresa presents Leslie with a picture of herself and a religious medal she turns on the radio:

> RADIO: Oh, there's only one way of singing the blues da di ah da dee ah de dee, etc.
>
> LESLIE: That's Tommy Steele. Are you able to do Rock and Roll?
>
> TERESA: Well, we'll give it a try.
>
> *[They dance for a couple of minutes.]*[39]

At this moment Leslie and Teresa could be any young couple in the world enjoying their youth and the blossom of young love. While the couple laugh and dance to the singing of the British rock singer the reality of their situation is presented to them via the radio. The music is halted for a news bulletin during which the fate of Michael Kevin O'Neill is sealed. The connection

between the Belfast prisoner and Leslie is reinforced when the bulletin continues with the news that the I.R.A. intend to kill their English hostage if the Irish prisoner is executed. The dumbfounded couple are left standing in silence as a bold juxtaposition to their previously light-hearted dancing. Patrick rushes into the room to turn the radio off and is met by Leslie: "You're late. We heard it."[40] The curtain descends.

At the start of Act Three Leslie is alone on stage attempting to comfort himself through song.

> [*When the curtain is raised Leslie is sitting on the bed and humming to himself.]*
>
> LESLIE: Um-um-um-um [*"God Save the Queen" is the tune but he stops and begins again on another tune.]* Um-um-de-umdum-um-de-umde, Rule Britannia. *[He changes the tune again.]* There'll always be an England.[41]

All three of the verses Leslie fitfully hums are from patriotic British songs: "God Save the Queen" the British National Anthem, followed by "Rule Britannia" and "There'll Always Be An England." Leslie attempts to sing these songs as a means of comforting himself while also establishing a decided English presence for himself, which had been lacking before. Previously Leslie had quietly fit into the Irish atmosphere of music by paying it little attention. Later he and Teresa found a common music "Rock and Roll" which they danced to. Now in the face of danger Leslie asserts his English ancestry through traditional songs that he erratically hums. Conceivably Leslie's pre-occupation with his present situation prevents him from fully remembering the entirety of any of the three songs or perhaps he is searching for his own lament yet the songs that come to mind are quickly cast off as not appropriate. Regardless of why Leslie doesn't sing any of the songs in their entirety the audience is presented with a quick cluster of staunch English tunes within the Irish confines of this play. These songs establish a distinct English stage presence which inevitably comes into conflict with the established Irish stage presence.

Patrick enters and attempts to console Leslie and assure him that he will not be killed as the radio news bulletin had reported. It does not appear that Leslie is convinced of his safety, when Patrick leaves Leslie returns to song:

> *[Patrick leaves. Leslie sits on the side of the bed and starts humming "Rule Britannia" again.]*
>
> LESLIE: Dum dee dum...
>
> *[The door is opened and Teresa comes in with two cups of tea and a plate of bread and butter. The door is closed behind her.]*
>
> TERESA: You are singing.
>
> LESLIE: I'm not. I'm trying to remember a certain English song.
>
> TERESA: You probably know thousands?
>
> LESLIE: Well, yes, but they're not fit for the occasion I want them for.
>
> TERESA: What occasion?
>
> LESLIE: That I might sing a certain English song before my death. *[Silence.]*
>
> TERESA: Before your death? You'll probably sing thousands of songs before you die, and do thousands of dances as well.
>
> LESLIE: I'm not sure about that.[42]

In the face of Monsúrs lament practising, Leslie is attempting to prepare his own lament. Teresa avoids any admission of Leslie's perilous state and deliberately misinterprets his search for a proper song. Teresa is successful in drawing Leslie's mind off death by promising to visit him in Armagh at his barracks. The young couple anxiously discuss a future time when Leslie will be safely restored to his post in Northern Ireland and Teresa will be free to visit him.

Teresa attempts to get fish and chips for Leslie and is stopped at the door by Patrick who refuses to let her out of the house. Patrick's suspicion, as well as the audience's, is that Teresa

will attempt to save Leslie by informing the Guards of his location. A dejected Teresa returns to Leslie who is similarly upset.

Leslie compares his situation to that of the Belfast prisoner awaiting execution and he is jealous of the treatment that O'Neill will receive in comparison to himself,

> LESLIE: He has priests and nuns and all the things they can do.
> I'll have to make my own peace. I don't know if I have the words still.
>
> *[He sings.]*
>
> Onward Christian Soldiers,
> Marching as to war
> With the Cross of Jesus
> Going on before,
> Christ, the royal Master,
> Leads against the foe
> Forward into battle ...
>
> TERESA: *[She burst out crying]* Oh Leslie . . . Leslie . . .
>
> *[He puts his arms around her and tries to comfort her, whispering to her.]*
>
> Oh, Leslie.[43]

Leslie quietly sings his own lament the traditional Christian hymn; "Onward Christian Soldiers." The following references in the song can be interpreted dramatically because of the singer's present situation. Leslie, the English soldier, was sent off to "war" in Northern Ireland not by God but by the English Monarchy. As Leslie marched "forward into battle" on the Irish Northern border he had no idea that he would become the war's next victim.

The sorrowful situation reduces Teresa to tears. Through song the deadly reality of the situation is finally conveyed to her and consequently she weeps. Ironically Leslie's hymn is sung by the hypocritical duo Miss Gilchrist and Mr Mulleady in *The Hostage*, any pious meaning within the song is overshadowed by their lustful behaviour.

Teresa is summoned out of the room by Patrick and told to help Kate with the dinner. Leslie is alone on stage lying on his bed when he begins to sing again:

> LESLIE: *[Singing to himself.]*
> Onward Christian soldiers,
> Marching as to war
> With the Cross of Jesus. . .
> *[Suddenly gunfire is heard and cars coming into the street.]*[44]

The audience can briefly believe that Leslie's musical appeal to the forces above has resulted in a rescue effort. As the Police begin their raid of The Hole, Patrick, the I.R.A. Officer and Volunteer quickly enter and seize Leslie. They tie him up and gag him before putting him into the bedroom wardrobe after which Patrick turns on the radio to mask any noise of struggle that Leslie may make. Ironically, the young man was only previously finding solace through song and now it is his enemy.

In the middle of the Police raid Monsúr takes up his pipes: *[Pipe music is heard Monsúr enters.]*[45] Monsúr is similarly hoping to mask any suspicious sounds by taking up his pipes, he believes he is maintaining his loyalty to the Irish struggle.

> MONSUR: Listen, here they're coming back. [*He begins to play the pipes. The detectives are seen to leave, noise, etc.]* The raid is over they're going.[46]

While the radio is on and Monsúr is playing his pipes the overflow of music deafens Leslie's presumed struggle for life. Because of this, one may suggest music and song combined with stubborn political action result in the death of Leslie Alan Williams. After the Police leave, the door of the wardrobe is opened and Leslie is discovered lifeless. Teresa, broken-hearted over the loss of her love laments:

> TERESA: I'll be a mother to you, a sister to you, a lover to you, and I will not forget you. *[Bursts out crying.]* Never. *[Voice broken with sorrow.]* Oh, my Leslie.
> CURTAIN[47]

In *Confessions of an Irish Rebel,* Behan very eloquently describes the sad incident of the death of a friend of his. The young man was riding his bike home when he was the victim of a drunken Irish Special Branch Officer who shot him in the back. The injustice of the situation inspired Behan to sing a song of lament for the boy's family. This encourages me to propose Behan uses song as a creative outlet and an effective representation of his often chaotic life. After having read the lament I feel it contains the sentiments of Teresa's final plea, and as such is not only a lament for Behan's friend, or for the character Leslie, but for all of the unfortunate taken before their time due to political turmoil:

> Oft times I sit by my lone and ponder
> On the times we had in the days now gone,
> When I see a smile on your picture yonder,
> I hear your voice in a well-loved song.
> But now you're lying where the breeze is sighing
> Through the cold wet grass that is growing o'er
> The lonely grave where yourself is laid,
> My friend has left me and my heart is sore.
> No more we'll argue the high thought of ages,
> Or join his voice in a roaring song,
> For one is but half a pair of sages,
> And the bass is dumb when the tenor's gone.
> He'll not confound me, with wise words drown me,
> In discourse down me, for he's no more.
> Our speech is lonely with one voice only,
> My friend has left me and my heart is sore.[48]

As the curtain descends upon the play the final image of *An Giall* is musically thematic: *"[The drums come in with the music of the pipes.]"*[49] The closing music harkens back to the opening of the play when the same instruments and tune were played. These foreboding drums and lamenting pipes serve to musically frame the action of the play while also commenting upon the inevitability of the deaths contained within its pages. Behan, moved by a true account, presents a powerful example of violent political activity.

Music and song is used by Behan in An *Giall* to achieve several dramatic ends. Initially the pipes playing "Flowers of the Forest" foreshadow the eminent death in the play. Music such as "O'Donnell Abu," played by Monsúr, harkens back to the days of patriotic action and fills the stage with anticipation of the fight. Behan also uses music to highlight the irony of this particular hostage situation through such songs as Patrick Pearse's "Oho! You are Welcome Home!" Behan similarly utilizes music as a means of distracting oneself from unpleasant thoughts. Kate and Teresa dance to "The Blackbird" in order to postpone thoughts of the Belfast prisoner, only to have the English hostage enter their dancing. Likewise later in the play Leslie fitfully hums English songs as a means of comforting himself.

In many instances music functions as a means of reminding the on-stage characters of the political situation at hand, in Ireland. Quite often Monsúr's pipes interrupt the action of a scene causing a change of focus. His piping of the Scottish lament "Flowers of the Forest" throughout the course of the play symbolizes Leslie's time running out and his approaching death. This lament, meant to mark the death of Michael Kevin O'Neill, ironically concludes by marking the death of Leslie Alan Williams. Often, through music the Belfast prisoner and Leslie are paralleled.

Song also results in acceptance in the play, for example, not until Leslie sings "Onward Christian Soldiers" does Teresa comprehend his seriousness in lamenting his own death. Only through song is the true nature of Leslie's deadly situation successfully presented to Teresa.

With Leslie's death at the end of the play the music that returns is that of the harrowing drums and lamenting pipes heard at the beginning of the play. This music frames the play and its deadly contents. As such one may conclude Behan utilizes song and music as a means of humanizing deadly political activity. As explained in *Brendan Behan's Island*, Behan was

deeply moved by humanity coming into conflict with the often senseless violence encountered while at war. This thought stayed with him while writing *An Giall:*

> At the back of my mind, was a story I heard from the leader of a Flying Column [a mobile section of the I.R.A.] about something that happened during the War of Independence ... This man told me how he found out about a train that was traveling from one place to another somewhere in County Kerry along a stretch of railway where there were no arches or no bridges. It was a warm summer's day and the troops - boys of seventeen and eighteen - sat out on top of the train as they went along. Suddenly they ran into my friend's ambush. He told me it was like as if they were on holiday. They were singing away and all of a sudden they found themselves in the midst of a war. At the time I heard this story, I thought it was tragic and I still think so. I mean, the fellows who shot them had nothing against them and they had nothing in particular against the people that were shooting them. But that's war. It's only the generals and the politicians that are actively interested in it.[50]

Behan uses music in *An Giall* in a variety of ways for a common purpose: to dramatically present the deadly seriousness of political action that does not distinguish between the politics of a country and the people of a country.

NOTES:

[1] Rae Jeffs, *Brendan Behan, Man and Showman* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), 35.

[2] Colbert Kearney, *The Writings of Brendan Behan* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Ltd, 1977), 120.

[3] Richard Wall, *Introduction to An Giall* (Washington: Colin Smythe Gerrards Cross, 1987), 6.

[4] Brendan Behan, *An Giall* (Washington: Colin Smythe Gerrards Cross, 1987), 29.

[5] The Fureys, *When You Were Sweet Sixteen* (Dublin: Banshee Records Ltd, Ireland, 1985), #3.

[6] Behan, *An Giall*, 29.

[7] Behan, *An Giall*, 30.

[8] Wall, *An Giall*, footnotes, 30.

[9] Brendan Behan, *Borstal Boy* (London: Arrow Books Ltd, 1958), 124/

[10] Behan, *Borstal Boy*, 125-126.

[11] Tim Pat Coogan, *The I.R.A.* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 62-63.

[12] J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army* (London: Sphere Library, 1972), 70-71.

[13] Behan, *An Giall*, 31.

[14] Behan, *An Giall*, 38.

[15] Wall, *An Giall*, footnotes, 38.

[16] Cooney, *The I.R.A.*, 467.

[17] Behan, *An Giall*, 38.

[18] Wall, *An Giall*, footnotes, 38.

[19] Behan, *Borstal Boy*, 84-85

[20] Behan, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, 63.

[21] Behan, *An Giall*, 40.

[22] Wall, *An Giall*, footnotes, 40.

[23] Behan, *An Giall*, 45.

[24] Wall, *An Giall*, footnotes, 45.

[25] Behan, *An Giall*, 46.

[26] Coogan, *The I.R.A.*, 200.

[27] Wall, *Introduction to An Giall*, 1.

[28] Behan, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, 75-76.

[29] Behan, *An Giall*, 48.

[30] Wall, *An Giall*, footnotes, 48.

[31] Behan, *An Giall*, 48.

[32] Daniel O'Keeffe, ed, *The First Book of Irish Ballads* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1955), 58.

[33] Daniel O'Keeffe, ed, *The First Book of Irish Ballads*, 58.

[34] Behan, *An Giall*, 54.

[35] Behan, *An Giall*, 54.

[36] Behan, *An Giall*, 55.

[37] Behan, *An Giall*, 56.

[38] Behan, *An Giall*, 61.

[39] Behan, *An Giall*, 62.

[40] Behan, *An Giall*, 63.

[41] Behan, *An Giall*, 65.

[42] Behan, *An Giall*, 67-68.

[43] Behan, *An Giall*, 70-71.

[44] Behan, *An Giall*, 72.

[45] Behan, *An Giall*, 72.

[46] Behan, *An Giall*, 73.

[47] Behan, *An Giall*, 74.

[48] Behan, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, 97.

[49] Behan, *An Giall*, 74.

[50] Behan, *Brendan Behan's Island* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1963), 16.

Chapter Three: Joan Littlewood and Brendan Behan

Successful partnerships in the theatre often occur when two artists realize their work is taken to new heights through co-operative association with one another. One such partnership was initiated in 1956 when director Joan Littlewood received a script from playwright Brendan Behan. This partnership remained intact until Behan's death in 1964. Before approaching Behan's plays one must take into account the enormous influence Littlewood had on the Irish playwright's work. Indeed, a brief history of Theatre Workshop and its mandate as upheld by the work of Joan Littlewood, can be greatly informative when studying Behan's work. Examining the theatrical methods of Joan Littlewood and her influence upon Behan's play, *The Hostage*, provides an important context for an analysis of the songs and music contained in that play.

Howard Goorney's book: *The Theatre Workshop Story* describes in great detail the evolution and history of the Theatre Workshop. The following is an overview based upon the events described in Goorney's book.

After graduating from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Joan Littlewood was particularly interested in exploring controversial issues in her English society and decided to use theatre as a means to reach the working class in England. In 1954 with fellow artist Gerry Raffles, Joan Littlewood formed Theatre Workshop, asserting its goal would be to create a popular theatre reflecting the lives of the working class. In order to do this, Littlewood felt that a complete break with "conventional" theatre was necessary. Thus, she encouraged those in the new

company who had any preconceived ideas about their art to abandon them, since these ideas served the needs of the theatre of the time and had little relevance to Littlewood's style.

The Theatre Workshop group consisted of artists, technicians, and actors who were enormously dedicated to experimenting with stage-craft. Between the years of 1945 and 1953 the Theatre Workshop company toured England extensively, bringing theatre to the working classes. While on tour there were often fewer people in the hall than on the stage, yet this enormously dedicated company continued to perform despite their near-poverty condition. Littlewood's inspirational direction and the company's collaborative ground-breaking work sustained the group.

During 1946 and 1948, small houses and growing expenses resulted in the temporary disbandment of the company and Joan Littlewood and Gerry Raffles moved to Manchester hoping to establish a base there. Littlewood soon urged company members to move to Manchester and to get day jobs, which would allow their evenings to be free to rehearse. In *The Theatre Workshop Story,* Harold Goorney quotes a section of the letter he received from Joan Littlewood:

> What we are living and going through hell for is a great theatre and such things were never born easily. Compromise is no way out -- we must do great plays even though people would say it is impossible to exist in this society without compromise. At the moment they appear to be right but we shall come together again and the Company will be stronger than ever. It is always like that.[1]

The company reassembled in Manchester and saved up enough money to rehearse full time and take movement classes at the Art of Movement Studios with Rudolf Laban. Despite the group's efforts to bring theatre to the working class they ultimately realized they were attempting to convert generations of non-theatre-goers. The people whom Theatre Workshop wished to reach lived in communities where theatre had never been integral in any real sense.

In 1953 the company moved to Theatre Royal, in Stratford East and established a permanent theatre of their own. This location was preferred by the company since the east end of London provided the possibility of building up a working-class audience. As Goorney relates: "If it was not taking theatre to the people, as we had tried to do in the past, we might, instead, become part of a working-class community."[2]

The first two years at Theatre Royal were spent by the Company in a concentrated period of intense training during which 36 plays were performed. In 1955, Theatre Workshop was invited to Paris to represent Great Britain at the Théâtre des Nations where they performed *Arden of Faversham* and *Volpone*. Theatre Workshop was the success of the Festival and the Paris reviewers wrote articles praising the work of the company. Morvan Lebesque wrote in *Carrefour*:

> Theatre Workshop came, installed themselves in the Herbertot Theatre, and carried off the biggest, the most unexpected, the most extraordinary success that a British company has known in France . . . My admiration for Theatre Workshop can be expressed in a few words: we do not possess a single company in France comparable to this one. [3]

Despite such widely publicized success in France, Theatre Workshop failed to receive any form of funding at home in Britain. Goorney theorizes that this was the case since "in its style and with the content of its productions it owed nothing to English theatre and ... came into being as a reaction against it."[4] Indeed, Theatre Workshop drew upon left-wing political theatre and European theatrical forms, such as the "dance theatre" style of production, while conventional British theatre seemed to ignore these unique forms.

However, by 1956, the work of the company was beginning to be noticed by Britain's national critics. Due to financial constraints Theatre Workshop became dependent upon these critics. For example: a good review resulted in full houses and the possibility of a transfer to the

West End of London where shows had the potential to earn considerably more money. Unfortunately this long overdue recognition had negative affects upon the consistency of the company. Theatre Workshop's collective method of functioning was now being threatened since key actors in the company were being lured away by offers in bigger theatres. The result was a Theatre Workshop with less stability and high actor turn-over. Thus, the focus of the company changed. There was little emphasis placed upon group discussion (this had been an integral part of the company's work for over ten years), attracting new writers to the company became essential and consequently there was a switch from performing new intriguing interpretations of classical plays to soliciting and performing contemporary plays.

Due to these changes Joan Littlewood acquired the role of outright leader of the company. The days of collective theatrical work dissipated since many of the company's new actors had been trained in conventional styles. "Much had to be re-learned, and the emphasis was now on learning from Joan rather than on learning together as previously."[5] At this point in the company's history Littlewood received a copy of *The Quare Fellow* from Brendan Behan.

Joan Littlewood employed an improvisational approach to new play development. This impressive director consistently encouraged actors to think on their feet believing it was essential for a play to work in action and not simply on paper. In Littlewood's words she strove to "take the arse out of a play,"[6] taking that which had been written sitting in front of a typewriter and replacing it with the same ideas expressed by actors on their feet. This particular form of adaptation was generously applied to Behan's later play, *The Hostage*; but for all distinct purposes *The Quare Fellow*, as performed by Theatre Workshop, was the play Behan had written.

Theatre Workshop was a theatre known for exploring political concepts. Thus, the group was interested in examining *The Quare Fellow* since it was rumored to be a condemnation of judicial hanging, a practise still employed in Great Britain. As examined in Chapter One, *The Quare Fellow* takes place in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, and the character after whom the play is titled is awaiting execution. Behan introduces his audience to the reactions of the other prisoners as they too anticipate the Quare Fellow's end. As a former prisoner himself, Behan tells this story in order to raise social consciousness by revealing the barbaric nature of judicial hanging. Littlewood admittedly "cut and shaped"[7] the play, urging Behan to remove several sub-plots in order to more concisely focus upon the Quare Fellow's story. But Littlewood's influence upon this play was considerably more dramatic in her style of direction. As recounted by an actor in the original cast Littlewood chose to begin rehearsing the play before the cast were given scripts,

> For the first week of rehearsals of *The Quare Fellow* we had no scripts ... We knew it was about prison life in Dublin, and that was enough for Joan. None of us had ever been in prison, and although we could all half-imagine what it was like, Joan set out to tell us more -- the narrow world of steel and stone, high windows and clanging doors, the love-hate between warder and prisoner, the gossip, the jealousy, and the tragedy -- all the things that make up the fascination of dreariness. She took us up onto the roof of the Theatre Royal. All the grimy slate and stone made it easy to believe we were in a prison yard. We formed up in a circle, and imagined we were prisoners out on exercise. Round and round we trudged for what seemed like hours -- breaking now and then for a quick smoke and furtive conversation. Although it was just a kind of game, the boredom and meanness of it all was brought home . . . It began to seem less and less like a game, and more like real. By degrees the plot and the script were introduced ... The interesting thing was that when she gave us the scripts we found that many of the situations we had improvised actually occurred in the play. All we had to do was learn the author's words.[8]

This type of improvisational style of rehearsing was used by Littlewood to further the company's understanding of the play while also assisting the actors in locating the

Stanislavskian super-objective of the play. Establishing such an atmosphere early on certainly furthered the depth of the performed piece since these actors learned to think of themselves as prisoners and experience prison life first hand - rather than through the eyes of an assumed character. Behan welcomed this method of working and commented upon the finished play on opening night: "Christ, I'm a bloody genius ... Miss Littlewood's Company has performed a better play than I wrote."[9] Behan's admission of Littlewood's evident understanding of his writing underlined the success of the show and the creation of a lasting and influential artistic partnership between this English director and Irish playwright.

In the years after Behan's first production at Theatre Workshop the company began to receive moderate funding from the Arts Council. However, a financial crisis engulfed the company in June of 1958 when the Arts Council withdrew its grant. A fight ensued during which Littlewood denounced the Council in the columns of *The Times.* Theatre Workshop patrons came forward offering support and the Arts Council relented, restoring the thousand-pound grant and the theatre re-opened in October of 1958 with Brendan Behan's *The Hostage.*

As examined in Chapter Two, Behan first wrote the Gaelic play *An Giall,* a naturalistic tragedy, as an examination of political violence. Behan's Gaelic play was well received in Ireland yet in his book *Brendan Behan's Island,* the playwright admits to wanting something different for the piece:

> I saw the rehearsals of this version and while I admire the producer, Frank Dermody, tremendously, his idea of a play is not my idea of a play. I don't say that his is inferior to mine or that mine is inferior to his -- it just so happens that I don't agree with him. He's of the school of Abbey Theatre naturalism of which I'm not a pupil.[10]

Thus, Behan brought *An Giall* to England to be produced by Theatre Workshop. The act of translation and subsequent transformation that turned *An Giall* into *The Hostage* was done by Behan, Littlewood, and the entire Theatre Workshop company.

Littlewood and Behan were in continued contact after Theatre Workshop's production of *The Quare Fellow.* Behan informed Littlewood of the nature and style of *An Giall* and she was anxious to stage the piece in London. However, Littlewood did not want a simple rendering of the Gaelic piece into English, "she had much more than a straight translation in mind."[11] Behan similarly wished to alter the play once he began the translation; his wife Beatrice recounts:

> Early one morning I heard him telephone Joe McGill [an artist], who lived on the other side of London. 'Joe, if you painted a picture and some [one] made you paint it a second time would you paint it the same way or would you want to paint it differently?'[12]

Behan translated the first act of *An Giall* and avoided translating the remaining acts claiming he was willing to turn his play over to Littlewood since they shared similar opinions on theatre:

> Joan Littlewood, I found, suited my requirements exactly. She has the same views on the theatre that I have, which is that the music hall is the thing to aim at for to amuse people and any time they get bored, divert them with a song or a dance. I've always thought T. S. Eliot wasn't far wrong when he said that the main problem of the dramatist today was to keep his audience amused; and that while they were laughing their heads off, you could be up to any bloody thing behind their backs; and it was what you were doing behind their bloody backs that made your play great.[13]

Behan's willingness to collaborate to such an extent can also be traced to his inability to rewrite the play himself as a result of his excessive drinking. Between the years of 1954 and 1960 Behan's exorbitant drinking made him legendary in the eyes of the public, while it also resulted in the degeneration of his health. By 1961 Behan had developed extensive liver damage and spent the remaining four years of his life in and out of hospital.

The rehearsal process for *The Hostage* began and Behan spent time in the theatre "surrounded by bottles of Guinness ... regaling the cast for hours with anecdotes [and] songs ...Out of all this wealth of meandering entertainment would emerge the material which could be incorporated into the script."[14] Thus, the actors fueled by Behan's stories and songs were left to improvise a second act. Avis Bunnage, who played the character Meg in *The Hostage*, relates: "Joan was getting desperate, so one night Gerry [Raffles] sat Brendan down, pointed a gun at him and told him to write. It probably wasn't loaded, but it did the trick."[15] Thus, Behan produced a loose incomplete translation that was left in the hands of Littlewood and the Workshop's improvisational practices.

The question remains how exactly did Behan's naturalistic tragedy, *An Giall*, become the spirited absurd-like musical *The Hostage?* An examination of some of the major differences between *An Giall* and *The Hostage* will serve to outline the obvious influence Joan Littlewood had upon the play.

In Chapter Two, my analysis of *An Giall* described the historical occurrence Behan identified as his motivation for writing the play; an incident during the British invasion of the Suez Canal Zone. For *The Hostage*, Behan used a different historical occurrence as his motivation for writing. In *Brendan Behan's Island* he gives further explanation for the evolution of the situation in *The Hostage:*

> Not far away is Nelson Street where I happened to set the scene of *The Hostage.* The incident of the British Tommy occurred actually in Belfast but, in real life, I'm happy to say, he wasn't shot. As a matter of fact, he said later that he spent the best four days of his life in the hands of the I.R.A. ... He wasn't taken as a hostage at all but he'd been around by accident when the I.R.A. were raiding the place [Ballykinlar Camp in County Down] for arms, so they brought him home with them for a while. They kept him in a house on the Falls Road in Belfast and he wasn't at all upset because he knew he wasn't going to be shot. The incident moved me and remained in my mind because I thought it was tragic for young

fellows from England to be stuck in Northern Ireland.[16]

Added to Behan's original cast of characters is a host of prostitutes, homosexuals, transvestites, and hypocritical religious types: Ropeen, Colette, Rio Rita, Princess Grace, Mr Mulleady and Miss Gilchrist. "The Hole" is a recognizable "knocking shop"[17] housing all the "outcasts of this world."[18] And the piece "takes the mickey"[19] out of the I.R.A. past and present, as well as the Roman Catholic Church. Leslie's tragic death at the end of the play is not from suffocation but ironically from a bullet fired by the Police while raiding the house in an attempt to rescue him. Leslie's death is not treated naturalistically, as in *An Giall*, but rather he "rises from the dead" and sings "The Bells of Hell."

These substantial changes occur within a "music hall" mode of presentation, a form that was often used by Littlewood in Theatre Workshop productions. In *The Hostage* everyone in the cast is called upon at some point to entertain the audience with a song or a dance. Pat, the "caretaker" of this house resembles the manager of a music hall calling various acts to centre stage or performing himself if he is so inclined. Indeed it is believed Behan supported this music hall mode of presentation for his play since it also allowed himself to join in with the action of the play when he felt so inclined. Howard Goorney, who played Pat in the Theatre Workshop production, was the individual responsible for dealing with and incorporating Behan's improvised appearances in the theatre:

> When he was only moderately drunk, it wasn't difficult; he was expansive and witty, and our exchanges over the footlights all added to the fun of the evening, providing the audience with a unique form of author participation. At the end of the show he would join us in the curtain call, and dance his celebrated Irish jig. There was no "fourth wall" between the actors and the audience, and the music hall style of production made it easy to involve anything untoward that happened in the auditorium . . . In the earlier part of the run, Brendan's interruptions were positive, and made a contribution to the general chaotic enjoyment of the evening ... Later in the run, however, he would turn up really drunk, and then it was

> a different story. His interruptions were destructive and it was impossible to get through to him. One awful night he started bellowing out the lines before the cast could speak them and then started on an interminable, mournful Irish ballad.[20]

Behan's earlier stated objective to prevent his audience from ever becoming bored, undoubtedly is fulfilled through the style of play itself, and also through his improvisational appearances. The songs that interrupt the action of the play often expand out from the action of the play, Irish history and, more generally, life itself. Most important however, these many plot additions and stylistic differences, certainly encouraged by Littlewood, serve to further highlight Behan's intent of revealing the futility of patriotic fervor when it leads to hatred and violence.

The overall difference between *An Giall* and *The Hostage* is grounded in treatment. The characters within *An Giall* are believed to be embodiments of Behan's own opinions,

> In the Officer and Volunteer one senses that extreme idealism which fired Behan at Glasnevin [where Behan shot and wounded a Police Officer]. Monsewer is an exaggeration to absurdity of Behan's own inability to free himself from the imagery of his childhood. Patrick may be seen as projection of what Behan might have become as a result of his political affiliations ... The younger people in the play give some indication of Behan's hopes of a fresh future.[21]

Thus, Behan's very personal treatment of these characters is the characteristic most dramatically altered by the Theatre Workshop production. Behan's characters became not only the embodiment of his own opinions but also those of the artists in the company as well.

While the hostage situation in *An Giall* is treated naturalistically this is not the case in *The Hostage*. Many critics have called *The Hostage* absurdist theatre since "the outrageous humour and disconnected music-hall plot are ... certainly designed to shock people."[22] One may safely assume that Joan Littlewood encouraged Behan to explore the absurdist genre since Theatre Workshop was known for advocating and working with such experimental styles. *The*

Hostage contains many of the absurdist concepts that Martin Esslin defines in *Theatre of the Absurd*:

> If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings.[23]

Obviously, when compared to conventional theatre, plays considered "absurd" use distinctly different means to pursue different ends. This unique form and its ultimate purpose echoes the Theatre Workshop's unique mandate:

> We want a theatre with a living language, a theatre which is not afraid of the sound of its own voice and which will comment ... fearlessly on Society ... Theatre Workshop is an organization of artists, technicians and actors who are experimenting in stage craft.[24]

Many unconventional, notably absurdist techniques are seen to operate in *The Hostage*. The traditional pattern of cause and effect is abandoned in absurdist theatre and this is evident in *The Hostage*, where often there is no reasoning for incidents. As an example the innocent relationship between Leslie and Teresa is advanced quite suddenly when the demure young couple decide to "pretend [they're] on the films,"[25] and literally jump into bed with one another. Surprising behaviour such as this is explained by Esslin, "The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being -- that is, in terms of concrete stage images."[26] This spontaneous act in Behan's play is even more shocking since Leslie and Teresa sing their way to bed.

Another concept central to absurd theatre that is evident in *The Hostage* is the abandoning of problems rather than solving them. When Teresa and Meg discuss the fate of the condemned prisoner in Belfast the somber mood of the play is quickly dismissed and just as quickly inverted when Meg replies "Come on Kate, give us a bit of music; let's cheer ourselves up."[27] The problem is simply abandoned and in true Behan style it is abandoned through song.

In *Theatre of the Absurd,* Esslin suggests that anger is often the underlying theme in absurdism and this is another concept shared with *The Hostage.* The hostage situation these people are forced to deal with causes them to reflect upon and react violently against the politics of Ireland and England. As an example, Teresa attempts to explain to Leslie the mandate behind I.R.A. actions, "What about the boy in Belfast jail? Do you know that in the six counties the police walk the beats in tanks and armored cars ... It's because of the English being in Ireland that he fought."[28]

Behan is said to have understood the basic absurdity of the human condition: "he realizes that man [and woman] is thrown into a world which he can neither control nor understand; and Behan's answer, like that of his contemporaries, is laughter."[29] Behan was not interested in exploring the naturalistic stage world of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, instead he explored the absurdist possibilities of the Theatre Workshop stage under the direction of Joan Littlewood. Esslin devotes a chapter of *Theatre of the Absurd* to the Irish writer Samuel Beckett and it appears that Behan and Beckett were of the same opinion on Abbey naturalism,

> In his last will and testament, Murphy, the hero of Samuel Beckett's early novel of that name, enjoins his heirs and executors to place his ashes in a paper bag and take them to 'the Abbey Theatre, Lr Abbey Street, Dublin ... into what the great and good Lord Chesterfield calls the necessary house ... and that the chain be there pulled upon them, if possible during the performance of a piece.' This is a symbolic act in the true irreverent spirit of the anti-theatre, but one that also reveals where...[Beckett] received his first impressions of the type

> of drama against which he reacted in his rejection of what he has called 'the grotesque fallacy of realistic art - "that miserable statement of line and surface" and the penny-a-line vulgarity of a literature of notations.'[30]

Similarly Behan was interested in having his work performed in a very unique style. *The Hostage* cannot simply be labeled "absurdist," rather it is a play that contains several characteristics of absurdist theatre but in a particular manner. Behan's songs often serve to remind his audience of the thematic images contained in his plays. Song often is used in *The Hostage* in an apparently "absurd" way, when compared to "conventional musicals," Behan's songs comment, not only upon the stage action, but upon the lives of the audience members. Littlewood's significant influence upon the transformation of the original naturalistic play into the "absurd" music hall piece, which often contains Littlewood's popular-theatre mark, is evident.

Harold Goorney hypothesizes

> Brendan Behan had a much more easy going attitude towards what happened in rehearsals . . . he didn't mind seeing it [his play] altered, re-shaped or even cut. If the result worked in theatrical terms then, however it was arrived at, he was more than happy to go along with it. He believed Joan would remain faithful to what the author wanted to say, and tended to leave her get on with it."[31]

Indeed, the Theatre Workshop was recognized by all to be a genuine workshop within which the playwright was simply another member of the creative team. Behan's script was by no means inviolable but used as a base which could be potentially altered by all of the performers. Littlewood explained in a radio interview in 1959 why this type of process was necessary and how it benefited all involved,

> I believe very much in a theatre of actor-artists, and I think the trust that comes out of team work on what is often a new script, cleaning up points in production, or contact between actors, is essential to the development of the craft of acting and playwriting. I feel that the playwrights have got to be in the theatre. If they are there, working with the fabric and problem of theatre every day, then perhaps out

> of our type of play, which has a great deal of improvisation in them, we shall get better plays.[32]

Through this collective method of working, *The Hostage* evolved to be a piece that embodies more than a naturalistic treatment of a hostage situation. As explained by Colbert Kearney:

> The twin aims of the Theatre Workshop were to divert and instruct. *The Hostage* is an epitome: behind the whirl of song and dance and slapstick national, religious, moral and political prejudices are mocked ...The Theatre Workshop knew that *An Giall* condemned political prejudice; it was up to them to communicate this to their audience.[33]

The play entertains its audience with a music hall mode of presentation, reveals the sometime absurdity of human existence, and dramatically presents Behan's main point: the absolute need to distinguish between the politics of a country and its people.

Littlewood's connection to Behan's play was ongoing as the play was remounted, in May of 1972 the original production of 1958 was re-written at points to reflect the changes and events for which the I.R.A. were since responsible. These types of changes have been permanently sanctioned by footnotes included in *The Hostage* such as: "This extract is varied to keep it as topical as possible within the context of the scene."[34] This type of variation benefits Behan's play since it allows the work to continuously be relevant to contemporary concerns. Some of the actors from the 1960 production of *The Hostage* did not approve of Littlewood's alterations in 1972. Patience Collier states:

> I thought it would be nice to have a refresher with Joan, but I did not know she'd decided to re-write it, to de-Brendanise it a lot, many of the things I had treasured went. We were always experimenting with the words and making them up, and I thought what happened was a nightmare. Some people loved it, but I didn't.[35]

But for Littlewood it was not only a question of including more recent events into the performance as it was her desire to always create something new, she refused to simply imitate a previously successful show.

When Brendan Behan and Joan Littlewood began rehearsal on *The Hostage* both of these individuals were working towards a piece of theatre that would become more than a naturalistic tragedy examining the volatile political situation in Ireland. Joan Littlewood's vision for the piece evolved due to her improvisational approach to dramaturgy. Experimentation with absurdism and music hall structure served to transform *The Hostage* and better present Behan's ideas on the Irish political situation.

In the course of my research I have repeatedly come across Joan Littlewood's name in a negative context. Behan recognized his experience with Littlewood as a positive one; I firmly believe this formidable female director is entitled to the necessary credit. While studying Behan's plays *The Quare Fellow* and *The Hostage*, it is evident that Joan Littlewood's influence upon Behan's work was considerable. She encouraged Behan to experiment in style and form and such experiments benefited Behan's work by adding new dimensions. By moving *The Hostage* closer to the absurd-surreal genre Littlewood symbolically assists Behan's play in capturing the absolute horror of the violent Irish political situation all the better. Joan Littlewood is a director who can not only accurately assess an actor's capabilities but also a playwright's, "No-one could fail to be enriched by the experience of working with Joan."[36] Indeed, the partnership between Joan Littlewood and Brendan Behan was one that enabled both of these artistic individuals to grow and expand their reference points while also being true to their exploration of art.

NOTES:

[1] Harold Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), 65.

[2] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 88.

[3] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 151.

[4] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 152.

[5] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 103.

[6] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 113.

[7] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 104.

[8] Charles Marowitz and Simon Trusslier, eds, *Theatre At Work* (London: Hill and Wang, 1967),116.

[9] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 105.

[10] Brendan Behan, *Brendan Behan's Island* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1963), 17.

[11]Colbert Kearney, *The Writings of Brendan Behan* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Ltd, 1977), 129.

[12] Beatrice Behan, *My Life With Brendan* (London: Leslie Frewin Publishers Ltd, 1973), 139.

[13] Behan, *Brendan Behan's Island*, 17.

[14] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 110.

[15] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 110.

[16] Behan, *Brendan Behan's Island*, 16.

[17] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 17.

[18] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 226.

[19] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 110.

[20] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 116.

[21] Kearney, *The Writings of Brendan Behan*, 127.

[22] Ted E. Boyle, *Brendan Behan* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc, 1969), 89.

[23] Martin Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Anchor Books edition, 1969), 22.

[24] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 42.

[25] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 199.

[26] Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 25.

[27] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 169.

[28] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 186.

[29] Boyle, *Brendan Behan*, 61.

[30] Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 29.

[31] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 112.

[32] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 114.

[33] Kearney, *The Writings of Brendan Behan*, 132.

[34] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 181.

[35] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 139.

[36] Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, 192.

Chapter Four: *The Hostage*

Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* is a work that can be quite overwhelming when first encountered since the play contains numerous pointed sarcastic insinuations, a plenitude of historical references and a great deal of musical interludes. *The Hostage* is the play the Theatre Workshop company helped to create and perform, the loosely translated version of Behan's Gaelic play, *An Giall.* A noble old house that has historically lodged many heroes but has degenerated into a brothel is the central location for this play. The downfall of this noble house is an allegory of idealistic Ireland fallen upon materialistic days. Within the play an eighteen year-old Irish boy has been sentenced to die in a Belfast jail for the killing of an Ulster police officer; while he awaits execution the I.R.A. take a young English soldier hostage. This hostage, Private Leslie Alan Williams, is housed in the brothel while the I.R.A. threatens to kill him in retaliation for the Irish prisoner's expected execution. The Irish boy is put to death and the I.R.A.'s hostage is also killed, but by accident. At the end of the play the body of Williams rises and in Behan style closes the play with a song from the grave.

The Hostage has been criticized as an absurdist play since critics recognize the play to be a farcical treatment of a tragic subject, yet this is what I interpret absurdism precisely to be: a merging of farce and tragedy into one medium in order to portray the flawed human condition. In this particular play Behan explores the idea human beings are absurd but continue living despite the influence of destructive forces. As revealed in one of the thematic songs in *The Hostage*: "No One Loves You Like Yourself" this survival is due to

human self-centred existence. After experiencing *The Hostage* one must recognize the songs contained within the play make many social comments and judgements, and as such provide Behan with another level of communication with his audience.

A more in depth examination of the songs and music contained within *The Hostage* elaborates upon the theme: humans are both absurd and alive. Through song and music Behan makes pointed observations about human existence and more precisely about Irish existence. My hypothesis is that Behan uses song and music in this play as a means to demonstrate the futility of patriotic fervor when it manifests itself as violence.

The play opens with a rousing Irish song and dance routine which establishes the convention of musical interludes in this play. These interludes quickly become a means of escape for all of the "prisoners" of this situation, while also strategically accentuating the action of the play. Song is Behan's method of highlighting the importance of the play's action. This musical opening prepares the audience for what is to come: the emergence of music and song at any point. The scenes in this play are consistently coupled with song and dance to such an extent one must conclude these characters are faithful to only one religion and that is entertainment.

The first jig is completed and the dancers vacate the stage leaving the characters Meg and Pat alone in silence for a few seconds when the *"blast of an off-key bagpiper"*[1] is heard. Pat explains the noise is Monsewer practicing his bagpipes in order to play a dirge for the young Irish boy who is to be executed in Belfast. Just as "Along the Banks of the Royal Canal" serves as a constant reminder of the Quare Fellow's approaching fate, Monsewer's lamenting pipes remind the audience of the politics of this present situation. Yet Behan's use of Monsewer's bagpipes is also satirical since Monsewer is unable to play

the instrument successfully, the noise his bagpipes make are described as *"belch-like."*[2] Behan is exposing the futility of the political situation that has brought the Belfast prisoner to such an end, while also through the element of contrast this humor serves to accentuate the seriousness of the Belfast Prisoner's fate.

The obvious centrality of music in *The Hostage* is not concealed by Behan and marks a progression from *An Giall.* As described in the stage directions: *"There is a pianist at one end of the passage area with the piano half on stage and half off. Pat signals to her and he sings."*[3] Behan makes no attempts to have the musical aspect of the play a hidden theatrical convention. He encourages a Brechtian removal of theatrical customs, making it clear the characters act with, and react to the obvious accompaniment of a band. The song sung at this point in the play is by Pat:

> On the eighteenth day of November,
> Just outside the town of Macroom,
> The Tans in their big Crossley tenders,
> Came roaring along to their doom.
> But the boys of the column were waiting
> With hand grenades primed on the spot
> And the Irish Republican Army
> Made shit of the whole mucking lot.[4]

Pat, via his song, can be interpreted as an individual concerned with Ireland in the days of old. He makes a reference to "Macroom" a town in County Cork often recognized as "the rebel county." His song refers to past historical events now glorified in the minds of Irish people. The stage directions during this song are important: *"whilst Pat is singing all the other inhabitants come on to the stage, join in the song, and stay for a drink."*[5] Song is used as a means of uniting this group of people, despite their varying political beliefs, by providing them the opportunity to sing together. This particular convention is maintained

throughout the play and as such can be interpreted as a means of communion for this group.

Once again the action of the play is interrupted, or rather punctuated, by Monsewer's pipes. Monsewer marches on stage in full piper dress looking much like *"Baden Powell in an Irish kilt."*[6] The stage directions describe Monsewer as one who *"lives in a world of his own, "*[7] and as such he and Pat make an engaging parallel. Both men concern themselves largely with the "glorious days" gone by, but Pat is aware of the present-day struggle and its many adaptations, indeed he is obviously resentful towards it. Monsewer, in contrast, appears not to be at all conscious of time passing.

Colette, one of the prostitutes in the house, forces her next customer, a Russian Sailor, onto the stage in disgust. Pat persuades her not to dislike the Russian because he is a communist, but rather because he doesn't have any money. The Russian Sailor then makes his plenitude of pound notes apparent by throwing the wad into the air and watching while the people of the house scramble to grab the stray money. At this point Monsewer makes another musical appearance. He is oblivious to the blatant greed around him and thunders his song from the stairs:

> Hark a voice like thunder spake,
> The west awake, the west awake.
> Sing Oh Hurrah, for Ireland's sake,
> Let England quake.[8]

"The West's Asleep" is an Irish song widely recognized due to its Republican fervor. Indeed, Irish-born writer Frank McCourt quotes the song in his book *Angela's Ashes*. McCourt describes his vivid childhood memory of his father drunkenly singing the Irish ballad while living in exile in America:

He's pushing in our door and singing,
and if, when all a vigil keep,
The West's asleep, the West's asleep!
Alas! And well my Erin weep,
That Connacht lies in slumber deep,
But hark! A voice like thunder spake
'The West's awake! The West's awake!
Sing, Oh, hurrah, let England quake,
We'll watch till death for Erin's sake!'[9]

The obvious traditional republican sentimentality of the song is a substantial contrast to the present greed of Behan's characters. By placing Monsewer's song in the middle of this avarice, Behan is making a statement about Republicanism at this time (1958). His statement concerns the selfishness of Republicans who have lost sight of their goal, an Irish Republic, and are more concerned with making a profit at Ireland's expense. Contradiction quickly becomes a thematic element of *The Hostage*.

Pat explains to the people of the house the Anglo-Irish Treaty, one of the many deeds accomplished by the historical I.R.A. leader Michael Collins. Meg's response is: "He should have been shot."[10] Pat explains that Collins was indeed shot and Meg laments "Ah, the poor man."[11] This contradiction in Meg's reaction towards Michael Collins embodies a prominent characteristic of Behan's characters: they are cynical in their observations of people yet can abandon this cynicism at a moment's notice. When Pat begins to sing his tribute to Collins, "The Laughing Boy," the people of the house join him, reveling in the opportunity to indulge themselves in the sentimentality of the song.

PAT: 'Twas on an August morning,
all in the morning hours,
I went to take the warming air
all in the month of flowers,
And there I saw a maiden
and heard her mournful cry,
Oh, what will mend my broken heart,

I've lost my Laughing Boy.

MEG: So strong, so wide, so brave he was,
I'll mourn his loss too sore
When thinking that we'll hear the laugh
or springing step no more.

ALL: Ah, curse the time, and sad the loss
my heart to crucify,
That an Irish son, with a rebel gun,
shot down my Laughing Boy.
Oh, had he died by Pearse's side,
or in the G.P.O.,
Killed by an English bullet
from the rifle of the foe,
Or forcibly fed while Ashe lay dead
in the dungeons of Mountjoy,
I'd have cried with pride at the way he died,
my own dear Laughing Boy.

MEG: My princely love, can ageless love
do more than tell to you
Go raibh mile maith Agath
[A hundred thousand thank-you's],
for all you tried to do,
For all you did and would have done,
my enemies to destroy,

ALL: I'll praise your name and guard your fame,
my own dear Laughing Boy.[12]

Through this song Behan captures many Irish people's contradictory feelings towards Michael Collins. Historically a considerable majority of the Irish Republican Army resented their country becoming a "Free State," due to Collins' signing of the Anglo Irish Treaty dividing Ireland into North and South. Yet the Irish public still felt the need to mourn the untimely death of such a giant in Irish politics. Critics agree Behan's song "The Laughing Boy" best presents the contradictory feelings surrounding Collins: "Thirty-six years later in his play *The Hostage* Brendan Behan summed up perhaps best of all the

mixture of emotions that surrounded Collins in life and death."[13] In *Brendan Behan's Island*, Behan shares his thoughts on the actions of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins:

> Collins and Griffith allowed themselves to be tricked into Partition at the Treaty negations ... Collins and Griffith were innocent men and honorable men,Collins was a brave man, a kind man, and one of the greatest guerrilla tacticians that ever lived ... After his death, the Irish made no song about him. Here, then is one, The Death of Michael Collins at Beal na Mblath (the gap or mouth of flowers, the name of the valley he died in).[14]

Behan then includes the song in its entirety in the text of his book. Ironically the "only" song written on the occasion of the death of Michael Collins is by far the most widely know song written about the historical rebel leader.

Into this world of jig dancing and sentimental singing enters the pseudo-pious hymn singing of Miss Gilchirst and Mr Mulleady. Behan satirizes this musical piety since the two Christians sing and pray in an attempt to "repent" their previous sinful-sexual behavior. The reaction of the house inhabitants towards this form of song is that of disgust. Meg categorically recognises it as noise lacking any musical quality at all. Behan continues this attack on musical piety when Miss Gilchrist and Mr Mulleady chime in together singing "Our Souls. Are Souls. Arseholes,"[15] presenting the degradation of their "piety." These two singers begin in earnest when temptation presents itself and they surrender to their desire, entirely corrupting their original intent. Just as Behan uses song as a means of satirizing corrupt Republicans, he uses song as a means of satirizing false holiness as the form of hypocrisy he detested the most.

Maintaining the element of theatrical song is once again prevented by Behan as Pat suddenly announces: "Meanwhile I'll sing that famous song, 'The Hound That Caught the Pubic Hair.'"[16] He is stopped by Meg who replies, "You're always announcing these

songs, but you never get round to singing them,"[17] leaving the audience to breath a sigh of relief considering the songs' title. Pat goes on to sing another song:

> There's no place on earth like the world
> Just between you and me.
> There's no place on earth like the world,
> Acushla [my best friend], astore and Mother Machree.[18]

Pat's song follows the tune and set up of the traditional Irish song "Mother Machree" most notably sung by the legendary Irish Folk Singer John McCormick. "Mother Machree" directly translated means "Mother of my heart." The term appears to be a summons for the spirit of old "Mother Ireland" as she mourns the loss of many of her Irish sons. Behan's song is strategically sung by Pat who cheerfully reveals to the audience that there IS no place on earth like the world being presented on this stage. This is a world of absurd reactions grounded in contradiction.

Teresa is introduced into the house and is described as a very "serious girl,"[19] further explanations of her character are left for one to interpret from her song.

> Open the door softly,
> Shut it - keep out the draught,
> For years and years, I've shed millions of tears,
> And never but once have I laughed.[20]

These first four lines support the interpretation of Teresa as a representative of "Mother Ireland" who cries for her sons killed during the struggle to free Ireland of her colonizers. This representation of "Mother Ireland" is one most noticeably established on the stage through the work of Irish writer William Butler Yeats (1865-1969) and his play *Cathleen Ni Hoolihan.*

This initial interpretation is then corrupted by the subsequent stanza of Teresa's song:

> 'Twas the time the holy picture fell,

> And knocked me old Granny cold,
> While she knitted and sang an old Irish song,
> 'Twas by traitors poor old Ulster was sold.[21]

From this stanza one gleans the surprising information that the only time this heroine has laughed was on the occasion her Grandmother was struck on the head and knocked out by a holy picture, while she sang a republican song. In these lines Behan presents aging Ireland through the form of the "old Granny" who is knocked out by religion. Religion and politics are coupled in these few lines as the two have been coupled historically. For hundreds of years British Parliament used religious discrimination against Ireland's Catholics as a means of suppressing the Irish nation. Between the years of 1695 and 1829 the Irish Catholic Church largely worked alongside Irish rebels, later known as Fenians, in order to liberate Ireland religiously and constitutionally. When the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 was passed, due to the work of Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847), Catholics were at last given sufficient rights. At this time the Catholic Church chose to distance itself from the political movement striving to free Ireland of British rule. Thus, religious loyalty and nationalism came to divide many Irish people. In 1858 when the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.) was formed the Catholic Church openly aligned itself with the British government and condemned the rebel group. Despite the pull of Church strictures, the pull of nationalism proved even stronger since recruitment into the I.R.B. continued to grow.[22] The lines of Teresa's song symbolize this conflict between Irish religion and politics. Behan summarizes the conflict: "There always has been a certain amount of anti-clericalism in Ireland ... It's the Church's own fault for always being against the people's political inclinations towards independence."[23]

The remaining two stanza's of Teresa's song concern more immediate earthly pleasures:

> So open the window softly,
> For Jaysus' sake, hang the latch,
> Come in and lie down, and afterwards
> You can ask me what's the catch.
>
> Before these foreign-born bastards, dear,
> See you don't let yourself down,
> We'll be the Lion and Unicorn,
> My rose unto your Crown.[24]

The last line of this song appears to be alluding to a love theme Yeats often wrote about. This earthly pleasure mentioned by Teresa takes on a mythological theme resembling the story of Cuchulain and his love for the goddess Fand. Cuchulain fell in love with Fand and was consumed by his desire for her. He wandered among the mountains of Ireland without food or drink, until he was cured by a Druid through the drink of forgetfulness.[25] As well as writing a series of plays on the story of Cuchulain, some of Yeats' poetry similarly calls upon the story. One of Yeats' most prominent images in his poetry on Cuchulain is that of the rose. The rose is coupled with images such as that of the cross: "To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time."[26] Teresa's final line leaves the impression of a calling out to a lover. She is testifying her fidelity to a love not yet presented on Behan's stage, but widely figured in Irish history.

As Meg and Teresa discuss the boy in Belfast jail and his approaching execution, the tone of their exchange becomes increasingly serious. As this political seriousness begins to resemble reality Meg calls for some music to "cheer ourselves up,"[27] music is utilized as a means of denial via escapism.

> *The pianist plays a reel and MEG and TERESA dance. Gradually everyone else in the house hears the music and comes to join in, until everyone is caught up in a swirling interweaving dance.*[28]

In the midst of this rousing Irish dancing and gaiety the I.R.A. hostage, Leslie Alan Williams, is forced into the room and thrown onto the floor. Once again political consciousness surfaces and symbolically silences the gaiety of these Irish people. Leslie's expected response: anger or fear, is not presented, instead he makes a gesture of inclusion into this group. He says "Don't stop. I like dancing."[29] He further affiliates himself with Behan's characters by singing a continuation of a song already begun by Pat earlier in the play:

> SOLDIER: There's no place on earth like the world,
> There's no place wherever you be.
>
> ALL: There's no place on earth like the world,
> That's straight up and take it from me.[30]

The movement of the people in the house to join Leslie in his song solidifies his initial alignment with them and restores the communion established through song. This communion is contradictory since Leslie, the English Soldier, becomes a temporary part of this Irish group.

> WOMEN: Never throw stones at your mother,
> You'll be sorry for it when she's dead.
>
> MEN: Never throw stones at your mother,
> Throw bricks at your father instead.
>
> MONSEWER: The South and the North poles are parted,
>
> MEG: Perhaps it is all for the best.
>
> PAT: Till the H-bomb will bring them together,
>
> ALL: And there we will let matters rest.[31]

The first four lines of the song can be interpreted as an allegory of Ireland in its divided state between North and South. Pat presents the idea that the fighting between these two areas may escalate to a stage of total destruction through the detonation of a H-bomb. The first act is ended on this note of unlikely communion between the English Soldier and the Irish inhabitants of the house, underlining the precarious political position that Ireland remains in.

The hostage situation in the play is developed in the second act as the initial tension between Pat and the I.R.A. Officer escalates. Each of these men attempt to establish their own control over the present situation. Leslie is not harmed by anyone in the house but conversely is showered with gifts as he is probed and examined by all. In the midst of this fascination with Leslie and tension between Pat and the I.R.A. Officer, a band passes the house marking the death sentence of the boy in Belfast jail. The sounds of music penetrate inside the house, interrupting Pat and the I.R.A. Officer and causing everyone in the house to enter and witness it.

> *Bagpipes have been playing in the distance and the sound comes steadily nearer. Everyone in the house crowds down into the passage area and stares out front as though they are looking through two windows, straining to get a sight of the precession in the street.*[32]

This particular treatment greatly resembles a scene in Sean O'Casey's play *Juno and Paycock:*

> *[Boyle arranges the gramophone, and is about to start it, when voices are heard of persons descending the stairs.]*
>
> MRS. BOYLE: *(warningly)* Whist, Jack, don't put it on, don't put it on yet; this must be poor Mrs. Tancred comin' down to go to the hospital - I forgot all about them bringin' the body to the church to-night. Open the door, Mary, an' give them a bit o'light.

[Mary opens the door, and MRS. TANCRED - a very old woman, obviously shaken by the death of her son - appears, accompanied by several neighbors.][33]

In this instance Behan appears to be continuing the tradition, begun by O'Casey, of dramatically highlighting the often deadly price of political turmoil. Behan was obviously influenced by O'Casey and often paid homage to the formidable writer. This example of music in *The Hostage* comes from outside the confines of this house and as such has different effect than that of the music played within the house up to this point. The parade and its band music causes the people of the house to fear for the Irish boy in Belfast who is sentenced to die. This reaction is the opposite to that of music played previously which was used as a means of forgetting this Irish boy and cheering-up themselves. Irish politics continue to invade this house through the music of the play.

Mrs Gilchrist presents the English Soldier with an article about the English Queen in an attempt to "comfort him."[34] As a contradiction to this assumption, Leslie explains that the English royalty does not interest him. Mr Mulleady however, takes great joy in reading the article as he and Miss Gilchrist reveal their desire to be "English." Miss Gilchrist and Mr Mulleady sing to Leslie and their song follows the tune of "Danny Boy."[35] Choosing this melody is a satirical comment by Behan upon the availability of this lamentable Irish ballad, he quite easily appropriates the song. Behan's lines mock the traditional lyrics since Miss Gilchrist and Mr Mulleady's song reveal their desire to be taken seriously by the English.

"Danny Boy" by Fred F. Weatherly[36] is written from the view-point of an ardent lover who has lost her sweetheart.

Oh Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling

From glen to glen and down the mountainside.
The summer's gone and all the roses falling,
'Tis you, 'tis you, must go and I must bide.
But come ye back when summer's in the meadow,
Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow.
T'is I'll be there in sunshine or in shadow,
Oh Danny boy, oh Danny boy I love you so.

And when you come and all the flowers are dying
If I am dead - as dead I well may be,
Ye'll come and find a place where I am lying,
And kneel and say an Ave there for me;
And I shall hear though soft your tread above me,
And all my grave shall warmer, sweeter be,
For you will bend and tell me that you love me,
And I shall live in peace until you come to me.[37]

Behan "adapts" the well-known song to express a very different sentiment. The opening lines sung by Miss Gilchrist and Mr Mulleady call upon two substantial sources of Western thought; the Bible, and the Greek classics.

You read the Bible, in its golden pages,
You read those words and talking much of love.
You read the works of Plato and the sages,
They tell of hope, and joy, and peace and love.[38]

The authority these works hold for people all over the world is undercut by Mr Mulleady's subsequent lines:

But I'm afraid it's all a lot of nonsense,
About as true as leprechaun or elf.[39]

After which Behan inserts a human realization these two characters sing together:

You realize, when you want somebody,
That there is no one, no one,
Loves you like yourself.[40]

This is a very different realization than the original singer's conclusion: "oh Danny boy I love you so."[41] This love has been altered by Behan in order to present it as self-centered.

This theme is one Behan highlights in the play through the lyrics of this song and also through the actions of the people in this house. Self-preservation is the key to survival in this world and realizing no one loves you like yourself is fundamental in establishing and maintaining one's existence, especially if one has been abused by the English.

Mr Mulleady continues singing and the next verse resembles a confession, he is exposing his loyalty to the English crown and is celebrating his traitorous activities towards Ireland. He sings,

> I did my best to be a decent person,
> I drove a tram for Murphy in thirteen.[42]

This particular reference holds great importance with regards to Behan's background and subsequent viewpoint. Mr Mulleady is admitting he was a scab during Jim Larkin's Unionist campaign in 1913. Before Behan joined the I.R.A. he was part of another group: Dublin's oppressed, the working poor. "He was first and before all, a Dubliner from that restricted area of North Dublin City to which true Dubliners confine the high title of the Northside."[43] The Behan household was not always poverty stricken but the fourteen year old Brendan Behan encountered no argument when he quit school in order to start working, since he would subsequently bring another wage into this working-class household. The working class of Dublin had a figure who spoke for them, one of their own, James Larkin (1876-1947). The social consciousness that Behan attempts to raise through his use of this song resembles the social consciousness that Larkin similarly attempted to raise. James Larkin was born of an Irish family who was forced, due to poverty, to emigrate to Liverpool. He is described as "A gigantic, simple man, he had a deep compassion for the poor and a furious hatred of the employers who exploited

them."[44] Larkin returned to Ireland in 1907 and set up Workers Unions in Belfast and in 1908 he moved on to Dublin where he organized strikes on behalf of the workers. Larkin's union spread across Ireland and its membership rose from 4,000 in 1911 to 8,000 in 1912 and to a staggering 10,000 by the middle of 1913.[45] In one of Behan's Gaelic poems written on the occasion of Larkin's death in 1947, Behan describes his connection with Larkin:

> He was me - he was every mother's son of us,
> Ourselves - strong as we would wish to be,
> As we knew we could be.
> And he bellowing battle and promising redemption,
> Following his coffin through the mouth of the empty city,
> In great roars fury.
>
> Following his coffin through the mouth of the city last night.
>
> Is it we who are in the coffin?
> Certainly not! We are in the streets marching,
> Alive - and thankful to the dead.[46]

The incident Mr Mulleady sings about refers to Larkin's attempt to improve working conditions for the workers of Dublin when the Unionists were locked out of their jobs. Walter J Murphy was one of the tram owners who refused unionized workers the right to work. The strike lasted six months before it was forced to end due to the massive poverty of the workers and their families.[47] The strike established the need for unions and proper representation for Ireland's poor. By admitting he was a scab worker, Mr Mulleady enables one to gain an interpretation of him as one who will turn his back on his fellow Irish workers. For Behan this appears to be among the worst representations of a human being.

Miss Gilchrist and Mr Mulleady sing the last stanza of their song together and serve to distance themselves even further from the Irish people around them.

> I really think us lower-middle classes,
> Get thrown around just like snuff at a wake.
> Employers take us for a set of asses,
> The rough, they sneer at all attempts we make
> To have nice manners and to speak correctly,
> And in the end we're flung upon the shelf.
> We have no unions, cost of living bonus,
> It's plain to see that no one,
> no one loves you like yourself.[48]

This self-indulgent whining on the part of the two singers uncovers the details of their isolation from the Irish, especially the Irish people in this household. Indeed Mr Mulleady and Miss Gilchrist recognize Irish people as "the rough" and condemn them accordingly. The song is completed with the through-line theme of "No one loves you like yourself."

After this thematic song, Leslie is visited by Teresa and the two are given an opportunity to develop the attraction between them. Into this scene of natural fascination enters Monsewer still attempting to adequately play his bagpipes. Monsewer and Pat march on stage towards each other as the bagpipes *"fade with a sad belch."*[49] This musical interruption prompts Monsewer's "weekly troop inspection."[50] Leslie is included in this inspection and afterwards is allowed to ask Monsewer questions. This contact with Leslie induces a musical moment for Monsewer, "Strange how this uncouth youth has brought back memories of summers long past. Fetch the pianist, Patrick."[51] One of the many stanzas he sings:

> By the moon that shines above us
> In the misty morn and night,
> Let us cease to run ourselves down
> But praise God that we are white.
> And better still we're English-

Tea and toast and muffin rings,
Old ladies with stern faces,
And the Captains and the Kings.
Old ladies with stern faces,
And the Captains and the Kings.[52]

Monsewer, earlier described by Pat as an English man who found his "Irishness" and consequently relocated to Ireland to help fight in the War of Independence, is presently singing a tribute to lost English Captains and Kings. Adding to the irony of the lyrics, Mr Mulleady, Miss Gilchrist, Ropeen, and Pat sit about gingerly drinking tea and joining in with the final two lines of each of Monsewer's stanzas. At the completion of this never-ending song (Behan's footnote discloses that Monsewer should never sing all of the stanzas included since *"there isn't time"*[53]) Patrick comments: "Well that's brought the show to a standstill."[54] Monsewer's song and its glaring English support strikes horror in the I.R.A. Officer who has entered and witnessed the musical tribute to English Empire Loyalty. Once again Behan uses contradiction to reveal the true absurdity of the human existence. It is a confused thing: Behan's characters have only recently finished singing "The Laughing Boy," a tribute to the legendary Republican Michael Collins, and now they are singing a song which depicts everything Collins fought against.

Teresa and Leslie develop their "Romeo and Juliet" relationship as their exchanges highlight the many cultural differences separating them. When Leslie attempts to take this relationship to a more physical level Teresa responds negatively. Leslie asks her "Let's pretend we're on the films, where all I have to say is 'Let me,' and all you have to say is 'Yes.'"[55] Teresa's response to Leslie contradicts her earlier response, she answers "Oh, all right."[56] The young couple sing:

SOLDIER: I will give you a golden ball,

To hop with the children in the hall,

TERESA: If you'll marry, marry, marry, marry,
If you'll marry me.

SOLDIER: I will give you the keys of my chest,
And all the money that I possess,

TERESA: If you'll marry, marry, marry, marry,
If you'll marry me.

SOLDIER: I will give you a watch and chain,
To show the kids in Angel Lane,

TERESA: If you'll marry, marry, marry, marry,
If you'll marry me.
I will bake you a big pork pie,
And hide you till the cops go by,

BOTH: If you'll marry, marry, marry, marry,
If you'll marry me.

SOLDIER: But first I think that we should see,
If we fit each other,

TERESA: *[to the audience].* Shall we?

SOLDIER: Yes, let's see.[57]

Their song is child-like in its repetition and tune, yet it is this child-like song which leads the duo to bed. Previously Teresa provided exposition of her upbringing in a convent where discipline and decorum were stressed to the point of obsessiveness. Her contradictory spontaneity in her exchange with Leslie is another example of Behan's thematic contradictions, in this case in order to fulfill natural desire.

As the lights go down on Teresa and Leslie in bed, Miss Gilchrist enters and is "horrified"[58] at the turn Teresa and Leslie's relationship has taken, and responds according to the standards of the "world" presented on stage. Miss Gilchrist sings:

Only a box of matches
I send, dear mother, to thee.
Only a box of matches,
Across the Irish sea.
I met with a Gaelic pawnbroker,
From Killarney's waterfalls,
With sobs he cried, "I wish I had died,
The Saxons have stolen my-

Pat rushes on to stop her saying "balls" and drags her off, curtsying and singing again-

Only a box of matches--.[59]

The fact that Miss Gilchrist is cut off by Pat before she can sing about the Gaelic pawnbroker's "balls" is crudely ironic considering what is presently occurring between Teresa and Leslie.

Leslie and Teresa are discovered in bed by Meg who doesn't scold them but instead states: "What's wrong with a bit of comfort on a dark night?"[60] Meg sits down and talks with Leslie who is beginning to fear for his future. He is met with historical rebuttals from Meg about the viciousness of English attacks upon Ireland and this history lesson is accentuated through music. The stage directions indicate that Meg *"chants rather than sings"*[61] her song about the events of the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916, perhaps since singing might be interpreted as making light of these events.

Who fears to speak of Easter Week
That week of famed renown,
When the boys of green went out to fight
The forces of the Crown.[62]

By 1916 the I.R.B. became convinced that physical force in the form of a military attack was necessary to show the British Parliament how serious the Irish movement had become. Led by rebels such as Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), Tom Clarke (1857-1916),

and Thomas Mac Donagh (1879-1916), 700 people presented themselves on Easter Monday 1916 prepared for war. The initial plan was to have people all over Ireland make their way to Dublin to fight together, but a series of events prevented this. The British Navy intercepted a German ship headed for Ireland that was carrying weapons and ammunition meant to arm this massive force.[63] Eoin MacNeil (1867-1945) the founder of the Gaelic League and Commander of the Irish Volunteers, took this to mean the attack would be canceled and sent couriers all over Ireland informing Volunteer Commanders to do nothing on Easter Sunday. MacNeill published his order in the Sunday Independent:

> Owing to the very critical position, all orders given to Irish Volunteers for Easter Sunday are hereby rescinded, and no parades, Marches, or other movements of Irish Volunteers will take place.[64]

The British authorities read the order MacNeill had written and relaxed their forces. Despite MacNeill's "traitorous" acts, the I.R.B. decided to press ahead. The people who gathered on Easter Monday were divided into various groups and told to take over a variety of city strong-points with the General Post Office used as the rebel headquarters.[65]

Meg's song continues with details surrounding the historical story and some of the people involved:

> With Mausers bold, and hearts of gold,
> The Red Countess dressed in green.[66]

The "Red Countess" referred to is Countess Constance Markievicz (1868-1927). As a member of Sinn Féin, the Countess was a woman acutely aware of Ireland's struggle. She similarly fought to extend women's rights as a member of Daughters of Ireland. The Countess was second-in-command at Stephen's Green during the Easter Rising and she refused to surrender to British forces.[67]

And high above the G.P.O.
The rebel flag was seen.[68]

During the Rising two flags were flown over the General Post Office, the Irish tricolor and a green flag with the words "Irish Republic" painted on it in gold and silver. Both of these flags represent an Independent Ireland.

Then came ten thousand khaki coats,
Our rebel boys to kill,
Before they reached O'Connell Street,
Of fight they got their fill.

They had machine-guns and artillery,
And cannon in galore,
But it wasn't our fault that e're one
Got back to England's shore

For six long days we held them off,
At odds of ten to one,
And through our lines they could not pass,
For all their heavy guns.
And deadly poison gas they used,
To try to crush Sinn Féin,
And burnt our Irish capital,
Like the Germans did Louvain.[69]

As Meg's song accurately states, the British first responded by sending in approximately a thousand troops to halt the Rising. These troops were sent in on Wednesday and they could not penetrate the streets around the G.P.O. By Thursday the British retaliated by sending in ten thousand troops to quell the Rising begun by 700 rebels. This massive British force began shelling the G.P.O. and burned down the center of Dublin City.[70]

During Meg's song the people of the house come on and listen as she recounts Ireland's rebel history. The pride felt for the Irish rebels is another example of communion within this group.

They shot our leaders in a jail,

Without a trial, they say,
They murdered women and children,
Who in their cellars lay,
And dug their grave with gun and spade,
To hide them from our view.[71]

The rebels surrendered on Saturday after holding Dublin city centre for six days and gaining international recognition for Ireland's fight for Independence. This recognition did not stop the British forces from sentencing 90 men to death. On May 3, 1916 Patrick Pearse was the first rebel to be executed. Tom Clarke and Thomas Mac Donagh were also shot, and on May 4, four more rebels were put to death.[72] These executions served to draw even more attention to the Irish struggle and turned the rebels into martyrs for Ireland's cause. After fifteen Irish rebels had been shot, the British realized they were serving to canonize these rebels and ceased the executions.

The last two lines of Meg's song can be interpreted in more than one manner.

Because they could neither kill nor catch,
The rebel so bold and true.[73]

This rebel referred to is most likely Michael Collins. Collins was active during the Rising but was able to avert the death sentence. While in prison Collins organized history classes and military instruction for Irish prisoners. Collins was released in a General Amnesty in December of 1916 and went on to reorganize the I.R.B. and Sinn Féin which rapidly grew under his and Eamon de Valera's leadership.[74] As ironic as it may be for Meg to be singing about Michael Collins, the Laughing Boy she previously did not know about, another interpretation of the "rebel so bold and true"[75] would be historically ironic. The reference could be to Eamon de Valera (1882-1975) who took part in the Easter Rising and averted the death sentence by claiming American citzenship.[76] After being the

President of organizations such as the I.R.A. and Sinn Féin, de Valera went on to be very active in licensed Irish politics. de Valera is very often recognized today as a traitor to the movement of the I.R.A. The irony surrounding this interpretation of "the rebel so bold so true"[77] is obvious.

Meg's song functions on three levels. The song communicates to Leslie just how deep the Irish/English antagonism is rooted, by giving a detailed historical explanation to support the hatred on both sides. It also provides the audience with the necessary exposition to understand the Irish struggle. "Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week" is a song meant to educate the audience and present them with the real details of the Irish conflict. This song also provides Behan with his own personalized stage presence. In *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, Behan quotes sections of the song while referring to his family connection with the Easter Rising:

> My Mother had two husbands, not at the one time, of course. She married the first a little time before the Easter week, 1916 and spent her honeymoon carrying messages for her husband, brother, brothers-in-law and generally running round with my aunts and her sisters in misfortune, shifting one another's dumps and minding one another's babies for a long time afterwards.
>
> The peaceful Quaker man that founded the business [Jacob's Biscuits] would be very surprised that, with the Post Office, where Uncle Joe was, and Marrowbone Lane, where Uncle Mick was, his biscuit factory was, to my childhood, a blazing defiance of mausers, uncles and my step-brother's father against
>
> ..... Odds of ten to one,
> And through our lines they could not pass,
> For all their heavy guns.
> They'd cannon and they'd cavalry,
> Machine-guns in galore,
> Still, it wasn't our fault that e'er a one,
> Got back to England's shore .....[78]

After Meg's song an argument ensues surrounding Brendan Behan and his motivation as an Irish writer. This argument quickly erupts into chaos as certain members of the house turn violently upon one another, while others use the chaotic opportunity to sing:

> *in the centre mêlée, MISS GILCHRIST is standing on the table singing "Land of Hope and Glory." The I.R.A. OFFICER has one chair and is waving a Free State Flag and singing "The Soldier's Song" while the RUSSIAN SAILOR has the other sings the Soviet National Anthem.*[79]

As the stage directions describe, in the middle of this chaos Miss Gilchrist is singing an undoubtedly English song, "Land of Hope and Glory" while the I.R.A. Officer directly contrasts her singing with the Irish National Anthem "The Soldier's Song." Instead of leaving the antagonism at this traditional binarism Behan inserts another level by having the Russian Sailor sing the Russian National Anthem, complicating the situation in true absurd style. This is an example of how music has a chaotic effect, each of the singers is oblivious to the other. Yet through all of this chaos the unifying piano playing continues and eventually serves to merge the group as they give up their singing and fighting in order to dance.

The wild dancing that takes over the room is interrupted by Pat who presents Leslie with a newspaper. Pat symbolically ends the gaiety by enabling political reality to enter in the form of a published I.R.A. Statement. Before Leslie can finish reading about his fate Miss Gilchrist interrupts him and states Leslie will be shot. She then breaks into song: "Only a box of matches-"[80] as a means of denying her own feelings, and the feelings of those around her, but she is unsuccessful at doing so and is quickly halted by Leslie. The young English Soldier pleads with those around him to let him go and is met with silence. As Leslie realizes no one will help him to escape, the reality of his hostage experience finally

begins to dawn upon him. Leslie vocalizes his anger and isolation from the Irish around him yet he chooses to do so in a way typical of this "world," he sings:

> I am a happy English lad, I love my royal-ty
> And if they were short a penny of a packet of fags,
> Now they'd only have to ask me.
>
> I love old England in the east, I love her in the west,
> From Jordan's streams to Derry's Walls,
> I love old England best.
> I love my dear old Notting Hill, wherever I may roam,
> But I wish the Irish and the niggers and the wogs,
> Were kicked out and sent back home.
>
> *A bugle sounds and he salutes.*[81]

Leslie's song is yelled angrily revealing his present turmoil. He asserts his loyalty to the English Crown (for which previously he expressed no interest in) as a means of alienating the Irish around him. Leslie's line referring to the immigrants in England: "But I wish the Irish and the niggers and the wogs, Were kicked out and sent back home"[82] is, among other things, a very serious accusation since the Irish are visibly calling for the exodus of the English from Ireland. But one cannot overlook the fact that this line also reveals blatant racist statements vocalized by Leslie. The inhabitants of the house back away from the desperate Leslie as a symbol of their inability to rescue him. He salutes as a means of marking his loyalty and the act ends.

As the third act begins the women of the house are mourning for Leslie by sounding a low insistent keening. The sound of their mourning and the stress of the hostage situation is visibly affecting Pat. He is obviously uncomfortable in this present situation and attempts to lighten the atmosphere by singing a song which previously managed to rouse the members of the house,

> One the eighteenth day of November,
> Just outside the town of Macroom.[83]

No one in the house joins him so Pat makes another attempt at communion with those around him, he brings Leslie a bottle of stout. Similarly, this attempt fails since Leslie is more concerned with the time than drink. Pat retreats to song again,

> The Tans in their big Crossley tenders,
> Came roaring along to their doom.[84]

Meg promptly responds with "Shut up, will you Pat!"[85] fearing the I.R.A. Officer will hear Pat's singing and come down to scold them all. The song full of rebelliousness and rigor is no longer a valid means of escape for the people in this house since the reality that they are all prisoners of this situation becomes clear. Song heightens the reality but does not offer an escape from it.

Meg and Pat quarrel, and obvious manifestation of the stress of their present situation. As their fighting subsides Leslie begins to sing a hymn. The stage directions read *"the SOLDIER is thinking about tomorrow morning and to cheer himself up, sings."*[86] The song Leslie sings to "cheer himself up" is a sad, mournful, dirge-like hymn,

> Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,
> The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide.[87]

During Leslie's song Miss Gilchrist begins keening as she lights a candle and continues mourning Leslie's death. Pat prevents her from fulfilling this act by blowing out her candle and telling Leslie "If you must sing, sing something cheerful."[88] Pat's genuine uneasiness marks him as the most sympathetic towards Leslie's condition.

Miss Gilchrist positions herself at Leslie's doorway informing him of her identification with his isolation. She explains she is no longer interested in saving Mr Mulleady's soul

and turns herself upon Leslie, literally. She sings "I love my fellow creatures,"[89] while attempting to show Leslie just how much she "loves" him, by climbing on top of him. Her singing and attempt at seduction are both halted by the Volunteer who drives Miss Gilchrist out of Leslie's room. Once again Behan uses song as a means of accentuating bogus piety.

Leslie attempts desperately to portray to those around him how little effect taking an English hostage will have on the British Government. He asserts the people that the I.R.A. are attempting to influence: British Government members, do not care about the fate of a National Service Soldier. It is his strongest appeal to those around him. He extends this appeal by trying to physically contact Meg, at which point Pat orders him back, drawing and confining Leslie to a chalk circle. Meg sings softly during Pat's action,

> I have no mother to break her heart,
> I have no father to take my part.
> I have one friend and a girl is she,
> And she'd lay down her life for McCaffery.[90]

The first two lines of this song can be interpreted as observations from Meg's personal history. She explained earlier in the play she did not know her mother and she makes no reference to knowing a father either. Meg's song also refers to Charlie McCaffery from county Tyrone, an important participant in the bombing campaign against Britain in 1939.[91] The heroine in her song claims she would readily sacrifice her life for the Republican movement. These lines make a clear statement about the commitment of people in the movement and can be interpreted as a warning for Leslie. The melancholy song is a tribute to Meg the singer but also a reflection on Leslie the hostage. As a hostage he is expected to make the ultimate sacrifice for his country, and as an orphan he

must die without anyone to help him. His "one friend," Teresa, has made it clear she will not betray her country to help him escape.

Behan makes reference to the phrases in this song in *Borstal Boy*. In this particular passage Behan is arguing with his fellow Borstal-internee, Tom Meadows, a convicted murderer and fellow worker. In Behan's book the close friendships developed between prisoners are acknowledged by calling one of your closest friends your "China." While Behan is friends with Tom, he quite often argues with him, and does not consider him to be his "China."

> Nor is anyone else your china, said I, in my own mind. And small blame to them, with your scrawny face and your red Anti-Christ's stubble on it, and the miserable undertaker's labourer's chat of you; wouldn't it be the eighth wonder of the world if anyone would go within the bawl of an ass of you, except for the judy [woman] that got within strangling distance, bejasus? Talking about a decent ponce, if he is itself, and has a dozen judies, it's not like the only one you had: I had no mother to break her heart, and I had no china to take my part, but I had one friend and a girl was she, that I croaked with her own silk stocking.[92]

In this instance Behan uses the phrases of the song to point out the self-induced isolation of this particular prisoner. In that sense he and Leslie are loosely paralleled since they both suffer from their obvious separation from those around them.

As Leslie laments about the expected arrival of the I.R.A. Intelligence to "question" him, Miss Gilchrist echoes Meg's words:

> I have no mother to break her heart,
> I have no father to take my part.[93]

This act is a futile attempt by Miss Gilchrist to belong and also to have her mourning for Leslie be accepted as Meg's previously was. Meg appeals to Pat to stop Miss Gilchrist's singing and Pat puts Miss Gilchrist in the chalk circle while removing Leslie. The

positions previously held by Leslie and Miss Gilchrist are exchanged and Miss Gilchrist is left to finish her song in the chalk circle alone, symbolic of her separation from those around her.

Pat and Meg encourage Leslie to put his upcoming execution out of his mind. Leslie informs them he has enjoyed being with then up to this point and as a tribute to his hosts and their traditional Irish hospitality he sings what he assumes to be an Irish song:

> When Irish eyes are smiling,
> Sure, it's like a morn in Spring,
> In the lilt of Irish laughter
> You can hear the angels sing.
> When Irish eyes are happy-."[94]

This song about Irish culture was written not by Irish, but in America in the early 1940's. Behan highlights this by making it obvious through the stage directions *"None of the Irish know the words, but they all hum and whistle."*[95] Thus, Leslie's attempt at communion through song is presently unsuccessful.

Miss Gilchrist is determined to have an opportunity to express her opinion about the situation around her and despite Meg's angry request for her to leave Miss Gilchrist announces "I stand fast by my Lord, and will sing my hymn now."[96] She sings,

> I love my dear Redeemer,
> My Creator, too, as well,
> And, oh, that filthy Devil,
> Should stay below in Hell.[97]

Miss Gilchrist is calling upon her "religiosity"[98] a bogus faith Behan has ridiculed extensively. She sets herself up as a faithful Christian who is pitted against the filthy Devil, which is directed towards Meg, whom she has been quarreling with throughout the play. In this instance the song serves to reinforce her loyalty as an English Loyalist who

detests the common Irish, whom she recognizes to be fiends. The chorus of Miss Gilchrist's hymn is as such:

> Don't muck about, don't muck about,
> Don't muck about, with the moon.[99]

Once again the people of the house join in the chorus of a song which has obvious English sympathies but this communion appears to be an unwilling one. The chorus can be interpreted as a call for the cessation of Irish rebelliousness towards its English colonizers and the hostage situation now occurring is a key example of what should not transpire. Miss Gilchrist's chorus then serves a warning to those who will listen.

Mr Mulleady has felt the effects of Miss Gilchrist's abandonment and has turned to the affection of the homosexuals in the house: Rio Rita and Princess Grace. As proof of their commitment to their "pact" with one another the homosexuals sing a flamboyant expose of homosexuality:

> RIO RITA, MULLEADY, PRINCESS GRACE:
> When Socrates in Ancient Greece,
> Sat in his Turkish bath,
> He rubbed himself, and scrubbed himself,
> And steamed both for and aft.
> He sang the songs the sirens sang,
> With Oscar and Shakespeare,
> We're here because we're queer,
> Because we're queer because we're here.
>
> MULLEADY: The highest people in the land
> Are for or they're against,
> It's all the same thing in the end,
> A piece of sentiment.
>
> PRINCESS GRACE: From Swedes so tall to Arabs small,
> They answer with a leer,
>
> ALL THREE: We're here because we're queer
> Because we're queer because we're here.[100]

The singers call upon the "authorities" on homosexuality: Socrates was the first philosopher to openly write and discuss the homosexual relationship, critics believe that many of Shakespeare's sonnets were inspired by homosexual attraction, and Oscar Wilde the Irish writer famous for his writing and his homosexuality, who was incarcerated due to the latter. The song's chorus establishes a circular theme: "We're here because we're queer, Because we're queer because we're here,"[101] presenting the idea there is no specific point of origin of their homosexuality, rather it is a state of being. The song functions as a means of validating their position in the household since the homosexuals approach Leslie and he responds to their approach with open curiosity. This attempt at contact is thwarted by Miss Gilchrist in one last attempt to gain Leslie's affection.

As Miss Gilchrist and Leslie sing a duet the stage directions specify *"the whores and queers sort themselves out into a dance for all the outcast of this world ... there is jealousy and comfort in this dance."*[102] These stage directions serve to outline the visual minorities represented. These minorities include, homosexuals, transvestites, prostitutes, Blacks, and of course Irish. All of these categories serve to label these characters as "outcasts." However, they are vocal, vivid, outcasts who fight to obtain and secure their rights as humans by fighting against being categorized and dismissed.

Miss Gilchrist sings in the form of questions,

> Would you live on woman's earnings,
> Would you give up work for good?
> For a life of prostitution?[103]

Leslie's reply is considered and then spoken by him:

> Yes, too bloody true, I would.[104]

It becomes apparent Leslie is comfortable with becoming a pimp who lives off of prostitutes, perhaps because it at least is a means of survival. Miss Gilchrist is faced with his "immorality" and decides she has no alternative but to wish Leslie good-bye. Yet while her words say good-bye, Miss Gilchrist clings to Leslie in an embrace; this movement leads one to the conclude Behan is revealing Miss Gilchrist's "religiosity" to be another form of prostitution.

Teresa and Leslie are allowed one last quiet moment together that is full of promises, broken and kept, but primarily is an opportunity for saying good-bye. Teresa exits leaving Leslie alone on the stage until there is a massive explosion within the house. The Secret Police have been watching the house and have chosen now as their moment of attack in order to save the English hostage. Ironically in the confusion of the charge the only casualty of the raid is the individual meant to be rescued, Leslie. The people of the house gather around Leslie's lifeless body and listen to Teresa's mournful cry over her dead lover. As everyone turns away from the body Leslie slowly rises and sings:

> The bells of hell,
> Go ting-a-ling-a-ling,
> For you but not for me,
> Oh death were is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling?
> Or grave thy victory?
> If you meet the undertaker,
> Or the young man from the Pru,
> Get a pint with what's left over,
> Now I'll say good-bye to you.
>
> *The stage brightens, and everyone turns and comes down towards the audience singing:*
>
> The bells of hell,
> Go ting-a-ling-a-ling,
> For you but not for him,
> Oh death, were is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling!

Or grave thy victory.[105]

Behan denies his audience the traditional heroic death and instead has Leslie rise from the dead to sing his parting song. Paradoxically, it is at this point in time the people of the house join in with Leslie's singing. It is only through death that Leslie can once again achieve successful communion with these people.

In the production at Grant MacEwan this song was performed as a rousing closing number. As such it functioned as a direct contrast to the deadly content of the final scene. While in Ireland this past summer, I was fortunate enough to see a production of *The Hostage* performed by the Punchbag Theatre Company in Galway. There were several minor variations in this production but the most significant difference I found to be in the treatment of this final song. The Punchbag Theatre cast performed "The Bells of Hell" very solemnly. Rather than sing his opening lines, Leslie somberly spoke them. When the rest of the cast joined him they similarly sang the final stanza in a very sober manner. I think the director of the production, David Quinn, wished to establish a contrast to the play's sometimes non-committal attitude. Through such a treatment the audience was left with the seriousness of the political situation accentuated.

The performance of *The Hostage* at Grant MacEwan accentuated the importance of song as a means of communion through the singing of Irish folk songs in the lobby. The cast of characters and the musicians went into the lobby each night before the performance and sang "The Cobbler," "Kelly the Boy From Killane," "Rosin the Bow" and "The Rising of the Moon." The singing was not performed in an exclusive manner but as a means of inclusion for the audience and as a means of preparation for the musicality of the performance.

Through songs like "The Bells of Hell" and the action of this play, exposed is the futility of patriotic fervor when it leads to violence and hatred. "Behan satirizes man's stupidity; at the same time, he says the human being will endure, is too vital to be destroyed even by his own foolishness."[106] Behan validates his conclusion through *The Hostage* by including songs such as "Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week" that call upon real events from Irish history. Also songs such as "No One Loves You Like Yourself" effectively highlight the absurdity of the human condition and the reality of human existence.

Song gives *The Hostage* another level of understanding human absurdity since the songs and music included in this play serve to punctuate and comment upon the action in true Irish style. Song and music are employed as a means of denial through escapism, to accentuate bogus piety, to contradict the forced gaiety of the play, to ironically expose the absurdity of the human condition. Song incites chaos and, conversely, song is a means of communion for these characters. The many absurd characteristics contained in the play allow it to be more than just a comedy or a tragedy, but rather a merging of both. Within *The Hostage* song is used by Behan as a means of highlighting the forces pulling these characters. They are never fully consumed by one force before they must pay homage to another. I believe Behan uses song in these many forms in order to effectively represent his examination of the absurdity of violence, fueled by political motivations, serves not to liberate but instead to enslave further generations of "patriots" who fail to delineate between the people of a country and the politics of a country.

NOTES:

[1] Brendan Behan, *The Complete Plays* (London: Methuen Ltd, 1978), 131.

[2] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 131.

[3] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 133.

[4] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 133.

[5] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 133.

[6] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 133.

[7] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 133.

[8] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 137.

[9] Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 111.

[10] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 144.

[11] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 144.

[12] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 144-145.

[13] John Ranelagh, *Ireland An Illustrated History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 247.

[14] Brendan Behan, *Brendan Behan's Island* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co, 1962), 87, 91.

[15] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 152.

[16] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 154.

[17] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 154.

[18] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 155.

[19] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 156.

[20] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 156.

[21] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 156.

[22] Robert Kee, *Ireland A History* (London: Abacus, 1995), 107.

[23] Behan, *Brendan Behan's Island*, 189.

[24] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 157.

[25] William Butler Yeats, *Selected Poetry*, Timothy Webb (ed.) (London: Penguin, 1991), 25.

[26] Yeats, *Selected Poetry*, 21.

[27] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 169.

[28] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 169.

[29] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 169.

[30] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 169.

[31] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 170.

[32] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 179.

[33] Sean O'Casey, *Three Plays: Juno and the Paycock. The Shadow of a Gunman. The Plough and the Stars* (New York: St Martins Press, 1957), 45.

[34] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 181.

[35] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 183.

[36] Bookmark, *The Words of 100 Irish Songs and Ballads* (Cork: Ossian Publications, 1992), 6.

[37] Bookmark, *The Words of 100 Irish Songs and Ballads*, 6.

[38] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 183.

[39] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 183.

[40] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 183.

[41] Bookmark, *The Words of 100 Irish Songs and Ballads*, 6.

[42] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 183.

[43] Benedict Kiely, "That Old Triangle." *The Sounder Few Essays from the Hollins Critic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 89.

[44] Peter and Fiona Somerset Fry, *A History of Ireland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 280.

[45] Peter and Fiona Somerset Fry, *A History of Ireland*, 280.

[46] Brendan Behan, "Two Poems: Jim Larkin, The Versemaker's Wish." *Atlantic Monthly*, No.227 (1971), 67.

[47] Kee, *Ireland A History*, 45.

[48] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 184.

[49] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 187.

[50] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 187.

[51] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 191.

[52] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 193.

[53] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 193.

[54] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 193.

[55] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 199.

[56] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 199.

[57] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 199.

[58] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 200.

[59] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 200.

[60] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 202.

[61] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 202.

[62] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 202.

[63] Kee, *Ireland A History*, 157.

[64] Michael Hodges, *Living Through History: Ireland From Easter Uprising to Civil War* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1987), 17.

[65] Ranelagh, *Ireland An Illustrated History*, 216.

[66] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 203.

[67] Hodges, *Living Through History*, 55-56.

[68] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 203.

[69] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 203.

[70] Ranelagh, *Ireland An Illustrated History*, 215.

[71] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 203.

[72] Ranelagh, *Ireland An Illustrated History*, 222.

[73] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 204.

[74] Ranelagh, *Ireland An Illustrated History*, 231.

[75] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 204.

[76] Hodges, *Living Through History*, 38.

[77] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 204.

[78] Brendan Behan, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 176-177.

[79] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 204.

[80] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 205.

[81] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 206.

[82] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 206.

[83] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 207.

[84] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 207.

[85] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 207.

[86] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 213.

[87] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 213.

[88] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 213.

[89] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 214.

[90] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 217.

[91] Tim Pat Coogan, *The I.R.A.* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 143.

[92] Brendan Behan, *Borstal Boy* (London: Arrow Books Ltd, 1958), 347.

[93] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 219.

[94] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 221.

[95] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 221.

[96] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 222.

[97] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 222.

[98] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 222.

[99] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 222.

[100] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 224.

[101] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 225.

[102] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 226.

[103] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 226.

[104] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 226.

[105] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 236.

[106] Ted E. Boyle, *Brendan Behan* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc, 1969), 60.

Conclusion

Through the songs contained in *The Quare Fellow*, *An Giall* and *The Hostage*, Behan presents his audience with his personal analysis of judicial and religious hypocrisy and the futility of violent action.

In Behan's first full length play, *The Quare Fellow*, the Irish playwright uses song in a variety of manners. Behan frequently uses song as a means of making the Quare Fellow's struggle tangible upon the stage since song is the dramatic presence for this unseen character. Behan utilizes "Along the Banks of the Royal Canal"[1] as a constant reminder not only of this approaching execution but also as a reinforcement of the needs and desires of all of the prisoners in the play. Within this prison atmosphere song is revealed to be readily available and as such song encourages a deeper interpretation of these characters. The importance of song in this world presented on stage is reinforced by the Quare Fellow's preference for song to function as his last rights. He requests Prisoner C to sing a Gaelic song to mark his death, while in comparison Jenkinson's song of "Christian forgiveness" is revealed by Behan to be a form of hypocrisy.

In *The Quare Fellow* Behan employs song as a means of reaching his audience and shaping their reactions to the judicial hanging looming at the end of the play. He is musically and eloquently calling for the cessation of the death penalty.

From the very beginning of Behan's Gaelic play *An Giall* the playwright utilizes song as a thematic reminder of the often deadly cost of violent political action. Many of the songs contained in the play are those made famous due to their political nature and content, two

such songs are: "O'Donnell Abu"[2] and "The Felons of Our Land."[3] Song is employed as a means of representing the political actions of Ireland's historical republicans while Monsúr's piping throughout the play functions as a constant reminder of the often deadly cost of political action. Song is a means of providing historical substance to the volatile situation represented on stage, for example: Monsúr's song "Patrick did you hear the cries"[4] eloquently makes reference to the I.R.A. rebel, Sean McCaughey and his fatal sacrifice. Behan's employment of song is complicated since most often a single song may have several layers of interpretation, such as "The Blackbird."[5] These songs better represent the similarly complicated nature of the Irish politics represented in the play.

Behan continues the political-musical metaphor in *An Giall* by allowing English songs to invade the Irish habitat. This English stage presence comes inevitably into conflict with the Irish stage presence. Ironically it is through the song "Flowers of the Forest,"[6] relentlessly piped by Monsúr as a lament for the Belfast prisoner, that Michael Kevin O'Neill and Leslie Alan Williams are paralleled. This song concludes by serving as a lament for both the Irish and English casualties. In both *The Quare Fellow* and *An Giall* song is a means of connection to the doomed character who does not appear upon stage: the actual Quare Fellow and Michael Kevin O'Neill.

Through the course of my research it became evident that Joan Littlewood's influence upon Behan's later work was substantial. Thus, I decided to explore the specifics surrounding Theatre Workshop's production/creation of *The Hostage* as outlined through the theatre's mandate. Unlike *An Giall*, *The Hostage* more readily contains the characteristics of a music-hall mode of presentation. Throughout the play characters are called on stage to "entertain" the audience while also dramatically illustrating the political

turmoil contained within the play. Littlewood had often utilized this form of performance and combined it with Behan's preference for musical presentation. The result was the music-hall structure of the work.

In *The Hostage* the importance of song and music is not conventionally masked by Behan but instead dramatically accentuated. Behan has a pianist visible on the stage and the characters openly engage in musical interludes with this pianist, named Kate. As seen in *The Quare Fellow*, Behan again utilizes song as a method of presenting a more in depth interpretation of the characters in the play. For example Pat sings songs such as "On the Eighteenth Day of November"[7] which hearken back to the "glorious" days gone by, Mr Mulleady and Miss Gilchrist sing a song of revelations: "No One Loves You Like Yourself,"[8] and Meg sings the rebellious song "Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week"[9] outlining specific historical occurrences during Ireland's struggle to free itself of its colonizers. All three of these examples serve to illustrate the individuals who sing them.

Song is also presented by Behan to embody a uniting quality. Often through song the varying inhabitants of the household are united as a group. Yet only through death can the English hostage, Leslie Alan Williams, achieve successful communion with this Irish group, through singing "The Bells of Hell."[10]

Within *The Hostage* song is used for a number of dramatic reasons all working towards a similar conclusion. Song emphasizes Ireland's religious and political turmoil. I propose Behan does this in order to more effectively examine and condemn absurd violence, fueled by political inclinations, which fails to discriminate between the politics of a country and its populace.

Behan's preference for song is a natural one. He was raised to view song as an adept way to reach those around him and he continues this tradition in his plays. His knowledge of Ireland's complex history and the similarly complex contemplations of its inhabitants and its colonizers is evident through his use of song. Behan was often known to quote T.S. Eliot's conclusion that a dramatist should entertain their audience while also making important statements amidst the laughter. What the dramatist did during the laughter is what made their play "good." Behan believed in following this style of writing and thus, often includes song in a humorous form. But underneath this humor is acrimonious irony.

I conclude that Brendan Behan utilizes song and music in his writing because of his personal preference to express himself musically. What is often considered "dangerous" in dialogue is acceptable in song since the underlying statements are not always clear to everyone. Behan uses song to speak to those in his audience whom he realizes will understand and appreciate his statements on and against the Irish state. Song allows Behan's thoughts to be not only engaging but also entertaining, he was always a "showman".

Through song Behan captures the ideas, thoughts, and sentiments not always effectively communicable through traditional dialogue. Song provides his plays with another level of presentation and identification of ideas. Within *The Quare Fellow*, *An Giall* and *The Hostage* Brendan Behan uses song to expose judicial, religious and political hypocrisy since it is revealed to destroy the individual. I think it appropriate that my thoughts on this Irish playwright are concluded with the song written to mark his untimely death: "The Lament for Brendan Behan"

Word has come from Dublin city,

word has come to our town.
Word has come from Dublin city,
they tell me 'Bold Brendan' is dead.

Born in '23 in a slum in Dublin,
with a tenement over his head.
Born with the spirit his flesh could not contain.
They tell me 'Bold Brendan' is dead.

He died at the Meath in far off Dublin,
in a cold white hospital bed.
In the Georgian tenements,
the children hushed their singing,
they know that 'Bold Brendan' is dead.

No stranger to life, he lived right enough.
No stranger to the glass in his hand.
No stranger to the cause he fought all his life.
Yet they tell me 'Bold Brendan' is dead.

Ireland has lost her sweet angry singer.
No longer his poems of fine design,
Will ring out in Gaelic her sound through the lines,
for alas 'Bold Brendan' is dead.[11]

NOTES:

[1] Brendan Behan, *The Complete Plays* (London: Methuen Ltd, 1978) 39.

[2] Behan, *An Giall* (Washington: Colin Smythe Gerrards Cross, 1987), 30.

[3] Richard Wall, *An Giall*, footnotes, 38.

[4] Behan, *An Giall*, 46.

[5] Behan, *An Giall*, 48.

[6] Behan, *An Giall*, 74.

[7] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 133.

[8] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 183.

[9] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 202.

[10] Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 236.

[11] Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, *The Makem and Clancy Collection* (Dublin: Polygram Records Ltd, 1970) 5.

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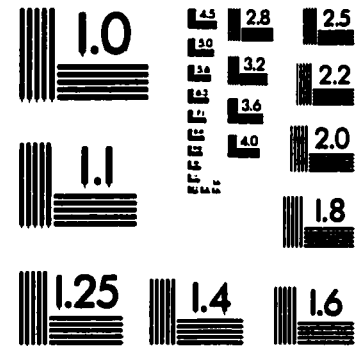

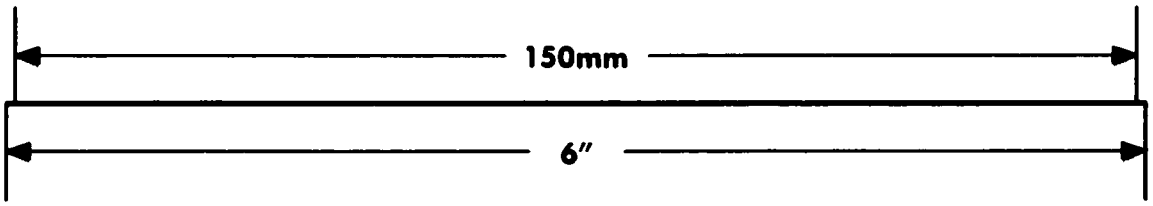

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