



The Letters of Brendan Behan

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Behan's friends and relatives, and people in his literary circle, have claimed he was not a prolific letter-writer. Even Behan himself has been quoted as saying, "Whoever writes my biography will get no help from my letters. I never write any." But in fact there is a substantial body of letters to and from Behan, who not only corresponded with seventeen periodicals but wrote to relatives, friends, IRA colleagues, civil servants, theatrical directors, publicans, and complete strangers. As in the case of Oscar Wilde, the search for Behan's letters has been hampered by their dispersal to widely scattered and unexpected places. The surviving letters that Mikhail was able to locate, however, proved well worth the trouble it took to uncover them. In addition to providing a vital record of one of the giants of Irish literature, Behan's letters -- especially those written without thought of publication -- give a far better sense of his exuberant verbal style than his plays or poetry. Mikhail introduces each letter and explains the circumstances in which it was written. He also annotates the letters, elucidating difficulties, noting the location and ownership of the letters whenever possible, and giving biographical information about the correspondents. The Letters of Brendan Behan also includes four poems that appear here for the first time, as well as extracts from early writings never before published. Numerous letters to editors, refused publication because of their outspokenness, are published here for the first time, and others, previously cut or censored, now appear in their original form. For anyone interested in Irish literature or contemporary drama -- and especially for readers and scholars of Behan's work -- The Letters of Brendan Behan is an invaluable collection.

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