Humour in the Prison: Brendan Behan Confesses
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Abstract
The essay explores the comical aspects of Behan's autobiographical writings. It focuses on how humour, especially black humour, often flourishes wherever we find conflicts and contrasts. Humour is always born out of oppositions, and it can be argued that it always functions as an act of resistance to outside tragedy. Brendan Behan, a writer of slum and working class background, is one of the leading Irish prison writers. He is in many ways an exponent of an Irish republican tradition based on the idea of prison endurance. Given Behan's notoriously flamboyant personality and his own talking gifts, it is not hard to imagine that the worst aspect of prison confinement might have been for him compulsory solitude and silence. His exuberant language and larger-than-life personality can be considered perhaps as a reaction to such partial deprivation of interpersonal relationships during his youth. In this context, where fictional and autobiographical truth are kept apart by an unstable divide increased by the abundance of comical interludes and jokes, the core of the essay analyses the second chapter of Confessions of an Irish Rebel in order to discuss the way in which Behan alternates funny accounts and tragedy in his own autobiographical reports.

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Brendan Behan’s genius was to strike a chord between critic and common man. When he died, at the age of 41, he was arguably the most celebrated Irish writer of the twentieth century. After the Wake is a collection of seven prose works and a series of articles. It includes all that exists of an unfinished novel, ‘The Caracombs’, and pieces together items whose comic and fanciful accounts evoke Flann O’Brien. Also featured are works of acknowledged excellence, ‘The Confirmation Suit’ and ‘A Woman of No Standing’. This writing bears all the hallmarks of the Brendan Behan - World Literature - is a resource for students who seek information beyond the simple biographical details of an author’s life or a brief overview of the author’s major works. Behan’s experiences as a prisoner at Hollesley Bay inspired his later autobiographical novel Borstal Boy (1958). Behan was released early under a general amnesty in 1946, but was almost immediately arrested again in Manchester, England, for his involvement with the attempted breakout of an Irish prisoner. He was lucky to receive only a four-month term of imprisonment. 1. In The Quare Fellow, how do the viewpoints of Regan and the prison governor differ on the issue of the death penalty? Why did each one bear that unique opinion?