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BRENDAN BEHAN'S "CONFESSIONS OF AN IRISH REBEL" —
A SAMPLE OF ANGLO-IRISH NOVELIZED AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Autobiography suggests comparison with biography, since both deal with the facts from an authentic individual's life. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century and sometimes nowadays there has been a tendency to regard autobiography as a specialized form of biography. Recently this opinion has been shared by such critics as P. M. Kendall¹ and A. Salska². According, however, to some other contemporary critics despite superficial similarities the two forms are quite separate. In his study on English autobiography W. Shumaker maintains that "Whatever the similarity of their purposes, biography and autobiography are, materially speaking, often nearly as widely separated as history and the novel. The one draws facts from reading, observations, and interviews; the other raises memories into consciousness"³. In his book *The Nature of Biography*, the American biographer and critic, J. A. Garraty, confirms this opinion and points out that "autobiography results from remembrance, biography from reconstruction"⁴. Neither of these ways of defining the relationship between biography and autobiography seems satisfactory alone. The two genres are certainly similar in intention and separate in method. The parallel of biography and autobiography is however close enough to justify regarding them as relative, „neighbouring” genres.

There is much ambiguity in the nature of autobiography which involves many different definitions of this genre. Its definition by W. Shumaker seems to be most reliable: "Autobiography is the professedly

¹ P. M. Kendall, *The Art of Biography*, London 1965, p. 29.

² A. Salska, *Autobiografia*, „Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” 1964, vol. 7, fasc. 2, p. 132.

³ W. Shumaker, *English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials and Form*, Berkeley 1954, p. 35.

⁴ J. A. Garraty, *The Nature of Biography*, New York 1957, p. 26.

'truthful' record of an individual, written by himself, and composed as a single work" ⁵.

Most of the critics agree to the wide divergence in this genre. There are, however, no consistent and adequate criteria which would make possible drawing detectable dividing lines between different types of literary autobiography. Since no type of autobiography is found in an absolutely pure state, any discussion of its characteristics necessarily involves a certain amount of schematic oversimplification.

In the absence of exact knowledge it has been customary to consider all the diverse types of autobiographical writings as belonging to full autobiographies, quasi-autobiographies, semi-autobiographies or proto-autobiographies. While former divisions were usually made according to the distinction between reality and illusion in autobiography, nowadays formal and aesthetic functions are also taken into consideration. In his study of autobiography an English critic, Roy Pascal ⁶, distinguishes between subject-matter and form and gives both much attention as the basis of classification into autobiographies, which he subdivides into semantical groups, and autobiographical novels, but this division can arouse many doubts. W. Shumaker points out how throughout centuries from the point of view of theme and form autobiography has usually been representing current historical and literary tendencies. He accordingly first divides autobiographical materials into "subjective" and "non-subjective" works, subdivides the latter group into "reminiscences" and "chronicles of res gestae", then classifies autobiographies into four modal types: expository, declarative, mixed and narrative.

To make the nature of autobiography plain it seems, however, advisable to adhere to a more universal division especially as the aim of this paper would be to give an overall view necessary for a full understanding of Brendan Behan's craft as an autobiographer. In this paper M. Jasińska's classification of biographies has been adopted in preference to somewhat mechanistic divisions of the authors of theoretical works on autobiography. In her works, mainly in *Problems of Literary Biography* ⁷, M. Jasińska clearly distinguishes between different types of biography. Her classification into biographical tale, novelized biography and biographical novel is particularly apt, because it is not only based on the relationship of fact and fiction but also on formal artistic determinants of the genre, and corresponds to the variety of biographies. It is comprehensive and so

⁵ Shumaker, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁶ R. Pascal, *Truth and Design in Autobiography*, London 1954.

⁷ M. Jasińska, *Zagadnienia biografii literackiej*, Warszawa 1970.

for convenience sake can be applied to the "neighbouring" genre, autobiography and its varieties as well.

Whereas in the autobiographical tale the author's emphasis is on factual material, in the autobiographical novel it is on aesthetic, novelistic quality and functions of a given work. The novelized autobiography can be considered as a genre in-between the two mentioned above, combining factual material with formal belletristic functions. Its intention is both faithful and vivid presentation of the author-hero and his world and application of artistic requirements of the adopted belletristic convention. Thus the characteristic features of the novelized autobiography are generally lack of stability caused by the contradictions inherent in the genre, authenticity of details, novelistic condensation or generalization, episodic structure, use of direct narrative, frequent repetitions.

All kinds of the twentieth century autobiography flourished in connection with the first and second world wars. In all Europe the years of the wars were a time of political and social upheaval. In many countries the world wars aroused explosive forces of liberation movements and brought working classes to the foreground. In Ireland the years immediately preceding World War I were marked by a national fight for independence and self-determination with a tragic end in the suppression of the Easter Rising of 1916. After the achievement of independence in 1921 there were still national issues unsolved and Irish national outlooks found way in the unionist and liberation movements. During World War II national feeling began to involve the working class and became still stronger. The central problems of the nation held a place of primary importance in the Irish literature and formed the features which determined it as national. To a great extent it was the autobiographers' merit. An outburst of Irish patriotism left its mark on the creative work of many outstanding Irish autobiographers. The Anglo-Irish literary autobiographical genre was brought into prominence by such writers as W. Gregory, M. F. Ryan, G. Moore, K. Tynan, A. Gregory, F. Harris, E. O'Malley, W. B. Yeats, J. Joyce, L. O'Flaherty, M. Gonne MacBride, E. Mannin, E. Dunsany, F. Reid, E. Bowen, F. Stuart, P. Kavanagh, L. Robinson, O. St. J. Gogarty, S. O'Casey, M. Colum, W. D. Johnston, P. O'Connor, L. A. G. Strong, the Behans, F. O'Connor and S. O'Faolain. In spite of differences there is usually a common link between all their autobiographies, which can be defined as a sense, an awareness of underlying tensions of the Irish existence, an obsession of "Irishness".

Up to the middle of the twentieth century the autobiographical tale is probably the dominant literary form in Ireland both in quality and quantity. Because of its emphasis on documentary material it seems to the Irish writers the most suitable means of conveying their ideas to the

readers. In the second half of the twentieth century assimilation of new literary trends produced also novelized autobiographies which permitted the authors to emphasize burning problems of Irish life.

Brendan Behan is one of the most eminent representatives of the novelized autobiography in the twentieth century Anglo-Irish literature. His life and literary activity cover a period of very complicated years, the 1940s and the second half of the twentieth century. His views were greatly affected by changes in the social, political, religious and cultural situation in Ireland and in the world, as well as by Irish and also foreign literature and movements of thought. Whatever the writer assimilates from outside is, however, always dominated by a mind saturated with the Irish way of thinking.

The elements of novelized autobiography persist in Behan's autobiographical attempts to describe life in general and life in Ireland in an era of uncertainty. His autobiographies have a great proportion of valuable informative material which must, however, be compared with other sources of information⁸ since at times the author tends to express contradictory opinions especially concerning his attitude to the I.R.A. and the British. The primary purpose and context of Behan's autobiographies is indicated by the titles of his successive works: (1) *Borstal Boy* (1958); (2) *Brendan Behan's Island. An Irish Sketch-Book* (1962); (3) *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (taped in 1964, publ. in 1965); (4) *Brendan Behan's New York* (1964). The first recognizable link between these volumes is their Irish theme. The first and third volumes deal with the political activities and prison experiences of Behan and other Irish compatriots. The second and the last volumes contain an insight into the tradition of the author's country and of the Irish in American New York, the city which gave him and other Irish personages an enthusiastic reception. Without discussing the factual material and the informative functions of these works no account of their main ideas can be complete.

Confessions of an Irish Rebel, one of the last volumes of Behan's autobiography, is a sequel to *Borstal Boy*, a lively reminiscence of the author's imprisonment in Borstal, a reformatory, for his membership and participation in the I.R.A. actions. Whereas *Borstal Boy*⁹ is a valuable novelized document which throws additional light on the current opinion

⁸ Some ideas of Behan's autobiographies are clarified in his collection of articles: *Hold Your Hour and Have Another* (1963), and plays: *The Hostage* (1958), *The Quare Fellow* (1960) and *Richard's Cork Leg* (1960, unfinished).

⁹ The former title of the book, *Bridewell Revisited*, suggests that it may also be a repartee to E. Waugh's satirical and affectionate presentation of youth and innocence in *Brideshead Revisited. The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder*, Harmondsworth 1951.

about the treatment of the young I.R.A. members and the conditions and atmosphere of Borstal¹⁰, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* is a prominent record of the dynamic life, adventures, different jobs and occupations and some political actions of the author as an unofficial or ex-I.R.A. man and of his imprisonment in Irish and English prisons for offence against authorities. It embraces the period from the time of its author's release from Borstal in 1941 up to 1955 and includes descriptions of his arrest in Dublin for the attempted murder of a policeman, his subsequent stay in Mountjoy jail¹¹ and the Curragh Internment Camp shortened from 14 to 4 years as a result of the political amnesty, participation in prisoner freeing action, violation of deportation order, and adventurous periods in-between his imprisonment in Strangeways and Lewes jails including his stay in France and various working experiences.

Confessions of an Irish Rebel is a typical example of "plebeian" novelized autobiographies which flourished at the time of the Second World War. The essential characteristics of the book are defined by its title and designation as a commemoration of past and actual activities, fate, patriotism and martyrdom of Irish political prisoners, fighters for all-Ireland union and independence¹², mostly representatives of the Irish working classes and the unemployed. These more or less virtuous or vicious people of different professions if not without any were magnificent in their lives and aims for the Irish cause, especially when they cheerfully challenged prison and preferred the gallows for the sake of their political views. The description of their activities is based on current oral accounts and the author's own record of prison experience and contacts with Irish "rebels" and political convicts, and is a suggestive and realistic picture of their discrimination and courage.

Besides descriptions of patriotic deeds and cult of the political history of his nation the idea of *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* includes Behan's presentation of heterogeneous structure of the Irish liberation movement at the time of the Second World War, his own strivings for a free and united Irish Republic of Workers and Small Farmers¹³, and efforts to

¹⁰ Cf. Autobiographical reports on Borstal routine by its prisoners: M. Benney, *Low Company*, 1936, N. Lucas, *Autobiography of a Crook*, 1925, and criminological sources: e.g. W. Sokalski, *Zakłady Borstalu w Anglii*, „Przegląd Więziennictwa Polskiego”, 1937, fasc. 5, pp. 235–245.

¹¹ Cf. P. O'Donnell's account of his experiences of an Irish rebel in Mountjoy prison in *The Gates Flew Open*, 1932.

¹² Some portions of *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* are pervaded with the atmosphere and commitment of Behan's favourite late eighteenth century Irish political autobiography by Theobald Wolfe Tone.

¹³ Cf. D. Behan, *My Brother Behan*, London 1965, p. 7.

show the necessity of uniting forces of all Irish communities in the mass democratic liberation and unionist movement. The author deplors a lack of unity and solidarity among the Irish, a great number of various societies without all-Ireland link-up, establishing an arbitrary and artificial border between Northern and Southern Ireland¹⁴. Above all he criticizes discrepancies in Ireland's liberation movement which comprised different and conflicting elements and groups. He indicates how after the separation of Ulster from Southern Ireland its leading organization, the I.R.A., was gradually becoming a divided and exclusive body who had common political ideas but who began to differ over ideology, republican outlooks and tactics¹⁵, lose contact with lower classes and associate politics with religion which only complicated the situation and gave the political fight a religious colour. Consequently Behan points out the absurdities of all religious controversies between Catholics and Protestants and religious fanaticism. He is also against all kinds of social divisions into classes and exploitation of workers, economic differences resulting from theft and dishonesty of ruling classes. Of all the efforts Behan made as autobiographer none was more important than his effort not only to end the absurd schisms but also to modify the Irish pseudo-republican government and its organs whose policy sanctified these schisms and general disorder.

Confessions of an Irish Rebel is a challenge and ridicule of existing governmental forms. It represents a multiple challenge to the traditional order of de Valera's state and its institutions which did not change much after the achievement of independence in 1921 and continued to suffer from conspicuous disorders, violated republican values, brought no betterment for the working classes and the unemployed. Behan suggests that the Republican Government should rule by consent of all the governed and not of the British authorities. He quotes executions of Irish fighters for independence performed "[...] not by the British and not by the Northern Ireland authorities, but by Mister Eamon de Valera's Republican Government, which [to the author's opinion] proves that statements like 'your own looking after you' are complete nonsense"¹⁶. His opinions are confirmed by historians, O. MacDonagh among others, who states that "Ireland was remarkable for its fidelity to British models after independence. Both the forms and activity of central government were practically

¹⁴ Cf. a similar mocking presentation of the problem in O. St. J. Gogarty's novelized autobiography *Rolling down the Lea*, London 1950, pp. 22–24.

¹⁵ Cf. T. A. Jackson, *Ireland Her Own: An Outline History of the Irish Struggle*, London 1971, p. 449.

¹⁶ B. Behan, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, London 1965, pp. 56–57.

unchanged and still more extraordinary the British parliamentary and party systems were substantially repeated" ¹⁷.

The author shows how in practice Irish governmental conservative policy was that of the English authorities — the royalty, the ruling oligarchy, the army, the church and the court. He maintains that although he is not against the English as such there is a tendency on his part "to be anti-English to the extent that I [he] dislike[s] the Tories" ¹⁸. His war upon authorities is above all an undisguised form of war upon the Tories in Ireland and still more in England. The author detests and parodies the Tory ruling class which tried to break up the Irish independence movement and was responsible for repressions, heavy sentences and executions of Irish "rebels" and all other harmful activities of Special Military Courts, Special Criminal Courts and other organs of English and Irish judicial authorities which it set to work under the Special Powers Act. He inserts the scenes showing how bourgeoisie tries to influence the elections and through victory at the polls to justify the English Tory policy in Ireland.

Of all types of discrimination Behan brought to the attention of his readers none was to his mind more paradoxical than that exercised by some church authorities. The author contrasts the true church with the false church and the true, ordinary priest with the false church official. His comparison of the Irish Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in Ireland implies that the former is less conservative than the latter. On the other hand, the author emphasizes that until quite recently the Church of England consisted in more purely spiritual qualities than the English Catholic Church which was guilty of excommunicating members of the I.R.A. for political reasons ¹⁹. Being a liberal Catholic himself the author feels compelled to condemn all acts of interference of clergy into political affairs ²⁰.

To the author's opinion the danger of frequent over-exercising governmental power was not only confined to higher authorities but also to their instruments. Defending man's personal freedom and his rights Behan exposes brutality of Irish policemen and their disregarding the dignity

¹⁷ O. MacDonagh, *Ireland*, London 1968, p. 95.

¹⁸ B. Behan, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁹ Cf. also M. Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature from Thomas Davis to W. B. Yeats*, London 1972, p. 206.

²⁰ Behan saw no point in attacking the Irish Catholic Church of the later period. His criticism was replaced by accepting the fact that the Catholic Church stopped being anti-nationalist and became "Irish speaking and national-minded". Cf. B. Behan, *Brendan Behan's Island. An Irish Sketch-Book*, London 1962, p. 190.

of man. He sourly attests that he was "badly treated in Liverpool, ironically enough by the Liverpool-Irish who were in the police there" ²¹.

The importance of *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* lies not only in its defiance and ridicule of governmental power but also in its statement of human liberty, equality and belief in people's right to throw off an authority which attempts to use arbitrary power over its subjects. Behan's contempt for the government, its institutions and tools is equalled by his faith in the Irish lower classes. He shows how changing attitudes towards the state affairs reflected changes in society, and how the Irish independence movement was becoming the emancipation of urban lower classes. It is in towns that political fight began to find its own morality and defenders who criticized the extremist ideology of the I.R.A., its alienation from the working classes and its lack of comprehension for their strength, social status and aims. Like G. B. Shaw and S. O'Casey, Behan is concerned with mistreated people, the unemployed, the underpaid, the slum dwellers and prisoners. He shows how majority of the Irish are forced into those categories.

From the technical point of view Behan's *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* also exhibits many of the characteristics of the new Irish prose as formulated by town and folk tradition. A further examination of autobiographical content requires discussing its formal functions.

Confessions of an Irish Rebel is based on Behan's tape recording by Rae Jeffs, his secretary and collaborator, and has all the freshness of immediate experience and oral accounts ²². It adopts the tone of fiction and is more belletristic than two other volumes of Behan's autobiographical works, *Brendan Behan's Island* and *Brendan Behan's New York*, which slightly resemble reportages. Its techniques approximate those of novelized autobiography. Especially its spontaneous, epic character, loose and fragmentary structure, use of belletristic abridgement, frequent recurrence of theme, passages, sentences and words, subjective grotesque means of characterization, great amount of folkloristic and "plebeian" elements, variety of digressions, lack of division into regular chapters with titles and numbers, no proper beginning and ending, introduction of conversations, silence fillers, common speech and "vulgar" English, linguistic freedom and sometimes exhibitionism, are of primary importance as they render the nature of *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* as that of the twentieth century novelized autobiography.

²¹ B. Behan, *Confessions...*, p. 101.

²² It can thus be regarded as part of oral criminal literature of which Henri Charrière's true or apocryphal autobiography, *Papillon*, Paris 1969, is a similar example.

The framework of the book is actually made up of a collection of brief tales and episodes, stories and anecdotes contained within a larger political tale, full of life, martyrdom, parody, irony and laughing at human weaknesses.

It is also a vast grotesque and picaresque tale of movement, action, road and prison. The author wanders from place to place, from one political action to another, from the Glasnevin Cemetery Commemoration Parade to Liverpool prisoner freeing action, from Mountjoy prison to Strangeways prison, as well as from job to job. He spends most of his time in prison, some on the road and the rest in the pubs and bars. This journey framework relies on coincidence and rapid shifts from incident to incident, and to a certain degree reflects journey motif in L. Sterne's, G. Moore's, O. St. J. Gogarty's and J. Joyce's²³ autobiographical works, and adventurous and situational elements of the eighteenth and twentieth century major picaresque and satirical novels, especially T. Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull*, *Confidence Man*, J. Hašek's *Schweik* and E. Waugh's *Decline and Fall*.

The shape of the framework is also outlined by the author's Irishness, his special use of the Irish folk tradition with a tint of Brechtian and music-hall influence, his imbedding of numerous digressions, accounts of political actions, prison punishments and executions, Irish street ballads and "songs, sneers, jeers and cheers"²⁴, military songs of the I. R. A. with the result of further division of shorter episodes from larger ones.

The dynamic relationship of the author and his characters provides another frame for the book. It keeps the author-hero and other secondary characters in interrelation owing to the introduction of some technical novelistic devices, mainly conversations and dialogues interrupting the course of the topic story. The author and his characters get drunk, quarrel and swear at a warder and a „cop”, a fellow prisoner and a fellow drinker: they interrupt, contradict one another and make unfavourable remarks on one another's character. These conversational links closely connect the author and the characters with them.

The role of the author as the main character, observer and narrator holds together the variety of the parts themselves and makes up the main framework. It consists of the author's record of prison experiences, some political activities and numerous adventures. It is thus in the line of the nineteenth century Newgate novels, of the criminal and picaresque autobiographies such as those of F. Villon, B. Cellini, F. Dostoevsky,

²³ Cf. frequent allusions to the peregrinations of Joyce's heroes in *Brendan Behan's Island*.

²⁴ B. Behan, *Confessions...*, p. 162.

F. L. Céline and especially J. Genet's *Journal du voleur*²⁵, and follows the long autobiographical tradition of Irish prisoners and "rebels". The book would present a confused pattern without that focus which makes the conventional base of *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* as a novelized autobiography. With that main skeleton it is a coherent whole.

Owing to the fragmentary autobiographical framework Behan brings together, without the limitations of ordinary rules of writing a novel, representatives of the Irish political, social and religious groups. Several trifling touches and details are enough for the author to create an extremely loyal, pedantic and "hungry-faced" but cowardly policeman or "screw", a belligerent and sophisticated prisoner who discusses world and national politics, a stiff, "desiccated" warder and devoted official or unofficial I. R. A. man, a Protestant who tells „story of Pawky Papists and funny Fenians”²⁶, and a Catholic who returns "the compliment with desperate amusing remarks of larky Lutherans and witty Wesleys”²⁷. The exemplifying presentation of characters and their features of the author's own selection in single episodes is one of the main aspects of novelized autobiography.

The author complicates his simple portraiture of characters by adding levels of irony above it. The abundant use of grotesque means of characterization is one of primary features of *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* as a type of modern novelized autobiography. Within the comic mode Behan obtains great diversity. His conception of grotesque can also be regarded as an illustration of Bergsonian²⁸ and Freudian²⁹ theories of humour, especially in showing antinomies within a human being between an inner man and his external mask. Similarly as Freud, Behan introduces the dialectics of farce, of the comic and the serious. To a large extent his presentation of the dialectics resembles that of Brecht and the Angry Young Men. Behan's characters including himself are usually clowns whose masks often come off and disclose their split personality³⁰. The author shows how life can become a constant rehearsal of one's chosen, false role. His recollection proceeds through different psychic material. In *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* numerous variants of clowns undergo

²⁵ J. Genet, Paris 1949. Cf. also *Miracle de la rose*, Décines, 1956.

²⁶ B. Behan, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

²⁷ B. Behan, *loc. cit.*

²⁸ H. Bergson, *Le Rire. Essai sur la signification du comique*, Paris 1956.

²⁹ S. Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*, Frankfurt a.M. 1958.

³⁰ In her biography *Brendan Behan: Man and Showman*, London 1966, p. 252, Rae Jeffs mentions this peculiarity of Brendan Behan's attitude to life. Cf. also J. Mitchel's views on man's split personality in his *Jail Journal*, Dublin 1921.

various transformations. The author does not spare himself either. He introduces himself as an honest man and fraud, rebel and loyal citizen, pimp, drunkard and family man, part-time house-painter, seaman and smuggler, writer of pornography and respected playwright. It is only through careful identifications his and his characters' true nature can be traced back. Their mutability possibly comes from the fact that they are part of a camouflage formation in which men play different roles and thus become a welter of contradictions. Their role-playing is nowhere more clearly manifested than in the reciprocal relations between subjects and authorities. Most of Behan's characters embody the elements of strain between compulsion and liberty, tyranny and rebellion, authorities and subjects. Since authorities treat subjects like cheats, drunkards and traitors, the subjects become confirmed in their own conception of themselves, and this in turn reinforces their interpretation of the authorities and their instruments as attitudinizers and dummies. Notwithstanding their real nature and convictions people who belong to one of those two categories try to live up to the image society has of them and act not as themselves but as their archetypes.

In *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* the author is splitting man into certain component elements — the brutish and the rational. Prisoners become an expression of primitivism and brutality their authorities sense in them, yet "the best of men in jails" show large-mindedness on comparison with "normal" self-confident and vile humanity. On the other hand different grotesque devices are used to suggest the unsocial behaviour, unimaginativeness and pedantry of various English and Irish officials. Behan's warders and "screws" consider themselves reasonable but they display moral pettiness which drives them to malice, jealousy, lust for power and, above all, hatred of real greatness. Ignorance and schematic rationality provide tragicomedy of their story. A witty train scene can serve an example in explaining the author's idea of camouflage in human reciprocal relations. Behan introduces himself to an English policeman in disguise not as an exile deported from England but as his own opposite — a volunteer on his way to join the English Navy in Liverpool. The scene is the clue to understanding Behan and his characters. The author reveals reality: the one of the outer world and its masks and the other of the inner world. It is the reality in which masking and de-masking form the basic interconnections of human existence.

Confessions of an Irish Rebel teaches man against the paradox of life in which man is conceived in the form of object and not as human activity and defined on the basis of the place he occupies in it. Behan's interpretation of the individual and his place in society illustrates Marxian statement that a man cannot be reduced to the sphere of objects and

forced into seemingly factual categories³¹. It is in their revolt against such reification men have to oppose the forces of social pressure which place them in definite surroundings.

In Genet's vein the landscape and the boundaries within which Behan and his characters act their tragicomedy are outlined by prisons, internment camps, reformatories, pubs, bars, empty houses, trains, stations, hospitals, and lavatories or "shit-houses". This concrete landscape brings up simple biological reactions: hunger, thirst and desire, and makes the characters aware of their having touched the bottom. Life is reduced to its lowest terms, all unnecessary conventions are rejected, all ballast and appearances of civilization vanish, what is left over is only the sense of lock-up. Outside there are prisoners' houses, families, personal affairs which exist but do not seem to be concerned with them. Behan's man is shut up, alienated and made a puppet in a strange world looking for his way out but always caught by governmental red-tape.

In *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* there is the comedy of intrigue which results from the man's attempts at getting away from that hopeless confusion. Prisoners' schemes in the terms of profit motive, the absurdities of controversies such as those between warders and prisoners or those between different political divisions of the Curragh Internment Camp, are pointed out. Intrigues involve numerous farcical scenes — especially those in prisons and bars. Mock epic appears in rows.

The author implies that the anecdote and laughter are the best ways to reveal the ridiculous vices of men. In part the author's anecdotes show the literary tendency of the fifties and sixties to entertain and satirize in the fashion of the Angry Young Men, and also the features of novelized autobiography in the direction of presenting reality by exposing funny but real incidents or adventures. Behan's anecdotes would probably lose much of their interest if they were not so genuine. Since, however, they reflect the comedy of retrospective situations, talks and rumours, their point and truthfulness may at times become over-emphasized or caricatured.

The vigorous, jovial style of the author, who constantly shifts from a joyful hint to grotesque, irony and paradox, dominates over his life-story and forms another characteristic of modern novelized autobiography. In Behan's book it also serves to point out the nature and relationship of characters. His characters exist in their own world and everything — vocabulary, point of view, general tone and "antics" — is consistently presented in such a way as to create the impression of their particular

³¹ K. Marx, *Selected Writings on Sociology and Social Philosophy*, Aylesburg 1963, pp. 178—179.

world. The author shows how the talk of a group of society is a guide to its emotional and mental processes. He devotes much place to describing the language and habits of different professional groups, especially of the house-painters he has known so well from his own experience and literature³². His humorous and slightly sentimental grasp of the world of the working classes can be paralleled with E. Waugh's presentation of the middle classes³³.

The author has an ear for different kinds of speech, especially for common speech and the audacities and vulgarities of cant and prison language. His style is, however, often spoiled by the use of almost perverse epithets and the banality of his heavy and "vulgar" idiom is at times tiresome. Behan's emphasis upon vulgarities may be the expression of his revolt against the linguistic canons accepted by the bourgeois society as part of the make-believe of their lives. Its „plebeian" quality is one of the most distinctive features of novelized autobiographies which flourished after 1930³⁴.

The author's language also has its basis in the Irish idiom and Dublin dialect. The impact of the Irish street songs and ballads, of accounts of prison punishments and executions in the language of sentiment, rough humour and primitive horror — is striking.

Behan's ingenious fusion of the syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation of Irish and English languages is so naturally handled that one may not be quite aware what an uncommon device of writing it presents. His autobiography with its use of language and stylistic devices is peculiar in its Irish flavour which resembles the Irish tradition of Joyce and the theatre of Synge, Boucicault, Yeats and O'Casey, whom Behan strongly admired.

Confessions of an Irish Rebel, viewed as a whole, is a vigorous and successful striving towards synthesis of definite theme and spontaneous form. It has eventually taken the shape of novelized autobiography in its efforts to reach the truth about the serious problem and paradox in Irish life.

The author's contribution to the development of world novelized autobiography came from his fidelity to life and experience partly achieved

³² Behan's favourite books about house-painters are R. Tressall's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, London 1914, and J.T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan*, New York 1958.

³³ Cf. Behan's own opinions on the subject in *Brendan Behan's New York*, London 1964, p. 120.

³⁴ Cf. A. Hutnikiewicz's statements on the drive towards authenticity in the plebeian literature of the 1930s in: *Od literatury czystej do literatury faktu (From Pure to Factual Literature)*, Toruń 1965, pp. 191—199.

by naturalistic, neo-realistic and folkloristic methods. His naturalistic assumption is probably that the purpose of art should be to depict life with objective honesty notwithstanding its coarseness. Therefore the author attempts at telling the truth about life instead of blanching it over. Also his experiments with plebeian language are undertaken in the naturalistic spirit. Behan's naturalistic approach to life reflects in many ways the thoughts of G. Moore, R. Tressall and J. T. Farrell.

Confessions of an Irish Rebel with its criticism and disillusionment with reality, pose, utilization of grotesque, paradox, music-hall techniques and common speech communicates with the neo-realistic tendencies of the Angry Young Men and the corresponding Dublin McDaid's group.

In his descriptions and judgments about prison and vagabond life the author explores criminal and picaresque folklore in the fashion of the eighteenth and twentieth century picaresque novels and their Brechtian adaptations, Newgate novels, the criminal autobiographical tradition, and especially Irish prisoners' and rebels' writings such as those by T. Wolfe Tone, J. Mitchel, J. O'Donovan Rossa, M. F. Ryan and E. O'Malley.

The roots of Behan's beliefs and art lie deep in the Irish folklore, which in *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* takes the form not only of prison records but also of Irish songs, ballads, folk-tales, specific kind of humour and idiom. The tendency to exploit the Irish folklore links Behan with the Irish theatre of the late nineteenth and twentieth century and the literary autobiographical tradition of G. Moore, J. Joyce, O. St. J. Gogarty and S. O'Casey.

A denominator common to all these trends in Behan's *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* is that they all mean the writer's part in actual life of Irish lower classes and "rebels". The everlasting value of Behan's autobiographical methods mainly arises from the author's fidelity at describing "a slice of real life".

„CONFESSIONS OF AN IRISH REBEL” BRENDANA BEHANA JAKO PRZYKŁAD ANGLOIRLANDZKIEJ AUTOBIOGRAFII ZBELETRYZOWANEJ

STRESZCZENIE

We wstępie artykułu pokrótce omawia autobiografię jako rodzaj literacki i wskazuje, że w wielu zajmujących się nią opracowaniach teoretycznych brak jednoznacznego genologicznego określenia autobiografii. Na ogół krytycy zajmują dwa przeciwstawne stanowiska. Jedni bowiem uznają autobiografię za specyficzną formę biografii, inni zaś podkreślają swoistą odrębność tych dwóch gatunków literackich, przynajmniej pod względem metod pisarskich. Ponieważ jednak w założeniach gatunkowych biografii i autobiografii występują wyraźne analogie, wydaje się, iż można uznać te dwie dziedziny literatury za gatunki pograniczne.

W autobiografii istnieje szereg odmian, których różnicującym wyznacznikiem w rozważaniach teoretycznych był tradycyjnie stopień autentyzmu i fikcji lub też, rzadziej, funkcje artystyczne.

Za podstawę niniejszych rozważań przyjęto podział biografii dokonany przez M. Jasińską w *Zagadnieniach biografii literackiej*. Uwzględnia on jednocześnie warstwę informacyjną i stylistyczno-kompozycyjną biografii oraz umożliwia elastyczne klasyfikowanie licznych przecieży i różnorodnych odmian autobiografii.

Bujny rozwój form autobiografii europejskiej XX wieku przypadł na okres obu wojen światowych, które w wielu krajach, także w Irlandii, sprzyjały ruchom wyzwoleńczym oraz emancypowaniu się niższych klas społecznych. Autobiografia irlandzka w końcu XIX wieku i w naszym stuleciu miała wybitnych przedstawicieli, takich jak choćby G. Moore, L. O'Flaherty, W. B. Yeats, J. Joyce, P. Kavanagh, O. St. J. Gogarty, S. O'Casey, F. O'Connor. Do końca pierwszego ćwierćwiecza XX wieku opowieść autobiograficzna była w Irlandii gatunkiem dominującym, zaspokajała bowiem powszechną wewnętrzną potrzebę utrwalenia i przekazania jak największej ilości materiału faktograficznego. Począwszy od lat trzydziestych coraz częściej pojawiała się w literaturze irlandzkiej forma autobiografii zbeletryzowanej, o silnych wpływach literatury proletariackiej, folklorystycznej i neorealistycznej. Autobiografia irlandzka miała wówczas charakter pośredni między opowieścią i powieścią autobiograficzną, posiadała dużą wartość informacyjną, jak też pewną swobodę artystyczną.

Brendan Behan należy w angloirlandzkiej literaturze drugiej połowy XX wieku do najznajomniejszych przedstawicieli autobiografii zbeletryzowanej. Autobiografię tę stanowią 4 kolejne tomy: *Borstal Boy* (1958), *Brendan Behan's Island. An Irish Sketch-Book* (1962), *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (zarejestrowany na taśmie w 1964, opublikowany w 1965), *Brendan Behan's New York* (opublikowany w 1964). Tomy te łączy w jedną całość wspólna tematyka i podobny nastrój, wyrażający się w ekspresywnym i wręcz obsesyjnym przedstawianiu irlandzkich problemów oraz ukrytych napięć.

Confessions of an Irish Rebel to najbardziej typowy przykład nowoczesnej angloirlandzkiej, plebejskiej autobiografii zbeletryzowanej. Stanowią one kontynuację młodzieńczych, dokumentarnych wspomnień autora z borstalskiego zakładu poprawczego, zawartych w *Borstal Boy*. Prezentują zarówno życie irlandzkich klas niższych, jak i kolejne doświadczenia autora, zdobywane w irlandzkich i angielskich więzieniach oraz w toku działalności politycznej, którą prowadził m.in. jako nieformalny członek I.R.A.

Zagadnienia elementów autobiografii zbeletryzowanej zostały w artykule ujęte dwójako: 1. z punktu widzenia jej funkcji informacyjnej, Behan bowiem przedstawił wiele politycznych, społecznych, ekonomicznych i kulturalnych aspektów irlandzkiej rzeczywistości; 2. z punktu widzenia jej walorów estetycznych, gdyż w artykule podkreślono specyfikę kompozycji, narracji, sposobu charakteryzowania postaci, stylu i języka dzieła.

Determinanty gatunkowe, które mają wpływ na charakter *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, to przede wszystkim: autentyzm i wysoki stopień informacyjności; epicka, spontaniczna forma; typowość przedstawianych zdarzeń i odczuć; wielowarstwowa, lecz fragmentaryczna fabuła, na którą się składa historia życia bohatera, stanowiąca szkielet konstrukcyjny dzieła, relacja autora i postaci drugoplanowych oraz przedstawienie historii, tradycji i rzeczywistości narodu irlandzkiego, pikarejska struktura utworu; specyficzny dobór przedstawianych faktów; użycie subiektywnych, parodystycznych i groteskowych metod obrazowania reakcji psychicznych w celu ujawnienia farsowych antynomii i wyrażenia buntu przeciw reifikacji człowieka oraz

jego świata; wprowadzenie mowy potocznej, oddanie odrębności i nastrojowości języka potocznego, dialektu dublińskiego i aktualnych gwar przez umiejętne operowanie jego odcieniami; swoboda lingwistyczna, niekiedy ekshibicjonizm i wulgaryzm; oddanie atmosfery bezpośredniości poprzez wyzyskanie elementów konwersacji; powtarzanie wątków, zdań i wyrazów; wtrącanie dygresji odautorskich i refleksji, niezastosowanie stereotypowego rozbitcia tekstu na rozdziały z tytułami i numerami.

Behan zajął poczesne miejsce w dziejach światowej autobiografii dzięki wiernemu i spontanicznemu przedstawianiu prawdy o problemach i paradoksach irlandzkiego życia, a także dzięki ścisłemu związaniu się jego twórczości z panującymi światowymi prądami literackimi, jak naturalizm czy neorealizm, i łączności z wiekową spuścizną literacką.

Jeśli chodzi o tematykę i kompozycję *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, należy zwrócić uwagę na fakt, iż stanowią one kontynuację irlandzkich i europejskich tradycji literackich. Z jednej strony podkreślić też trzeba korelację z „buntowniczą” i kryminalną autobiografią europejską Villona, Celliniego, Dostojewskiego, Céline’a i Geneta, a szczególnie irlandzką Mitchela, O’Donovan Rossa, Ryana i O’Malleya, z drugiej zaś — uwydatnić oddziaływanie powieści pikarejskiej XVIII i XX wieku, zwłaszcza Haška, Manna, Waugh, i jej brechtowskich adaptacji, musicalu oraz dziewiętnastowiecznej powieści Newgate.

Powinno się także zwrócić uwagę na silny wpływ, jaki na Behana wywarły folklor irlandzki, tradycje irlandzkiego teatru przełomu XIX i XX wieku oraz elementy „perypatetyczne” autobiografii Moore’a, Gogarty’ego i Joyce’a. Wspólnym atrybutem stylistycznej i ideowej struktury *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* jest „irlandzkość” autora i jego udział w życiu irlandzkich klas niższych oraz elementów „buntowniczych”. Trwała wartość autobiograficznej spuścizny Brendana Behana zawartej w *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* to ukazanie „a slice of real life” — „wycinka prawdziwego życia”.

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