

Behan, Dominic

by Anne Dolan

Behan, Dominic (1928–89), writer, balladeer, and broadcaster, was born 22 October 1928 in Dublin, fourth child of five children of Stephen Behan, house painter, and Kathleen Behan (qv) (née Kearney). Educated at St Agatha's School, North William St., St Canice's CBS, Brunswick St., and for a brief spell at Kimmage school, he left school aged 14 to become a house painter. Living at Russell St. and from 1937 at Kildare Rd, Kimmage, he absorbed the spirit of nationalism and socialism that infused the Behan household, and that also strongly influenced his brother Brendan (qv). Surrounding him with literature, history, and balladry, his parents and his uncles, Peadar Kearney (qv) and P. J. Bourke (qv), fostered what were to be the dominant interests of his life. As a teenager he joined Fianna Éireann, reaching the rank of 'officer in command'. However, frequently unemployed, he dedicated himself to the cause of the workers rather than the nation, and became prominent in the Dublin Unemployed Movement. He left Ireland in the early 1950s and went to London, where for six years he worked as a house painter.

A chance meeting with a producer in 1956 resulted in the beginning of his broadcasting career. In the succeeding years he worked for the BBC and Radio Éireann, contributing regularly to the BBC's Third Programme. He gained a reputation as a balladeer, writing songs such as 'The patriot game' (a disillusioned variant of the traditional Irish rebel song) and 'Liverpool Lou', and recording the album 'Streets of song' with Ewan MacColl in 1959. He became a full-time writer in 1957: his first play, 'Posterity be damned', was staged at the Gaiety Theatre in 1959. In February 1960 it was produced by John Ryan (qv) and Alan Simpson (qv) at the Metropolitan Music Hall, Edgware, where at rehearsals Behan had one of his many public rows with his brother Brendan. The play, an expression of disillusionment with the IRA, provoked bomb threats from extreme republicans. His other plays included 'The patriot game', 'The folksinger' (screened by Thames Television, 1972), and a one-man show entitled 'Behan being Behan'. He published widely over three decades, writing an autobiography, *Teems of times and happy returns* (1961) (later dramatised by RTÉ); two biographies, *My brother Brendan* (1965) and *Milligan: the life and times of Spike Milligan* (1988); *A tribute to Malachy McGurran* (1980); and his first novel, *The public world of Parable Jones* (1989). He also wrote periodically for *Life*, *Hibernia*, the *Scotsman*, and the *London Evening Standard*. His work for the BBC, RTÉ, and ITV included several television documentaries and a cantata on the life of Christ. Behan also made several guest appearances on RTÉ television, his last on 'Kenny live' culminating in an argument with his brother Brian (qv).

He married (1 October 1955) Josephine Quinn, a Scottish laboratory worker, in a civil ceremony in Dublin. They returned to London, where they lived for many years,

and had two sons, Fintan and Stephen. They moved to Scotland in the 1970s. He died 3 August 1989 at their home in Glasgow of a cancer-related illness.

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Dominic Behan, *Teems of times and happy returns* (1961); Brian Behan, *With breast expanded* (1964); Dominic Behan, *My brother Brendan* (1965); Ulick O'Connor, *Brendan Behan* (1970); Beatrice Behan, *My life with Brendan Behan* (1974); Herbert A. Kenny, *Literary Dublin: a history* (1974); John Ryan, *Remembering how we stood* (1975), 38; Brian Behan, *Mother of all the Behans* (1984); Brady & Cleeve (1985); Dominic Behan, *The public world of Parable Jones* (1989); *Ir. Times, Ir. Independent, Ir. Press*, 4 Aug. 1989; McRedmond

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