

# **“THE MOST COOPERATIVE OF WRITERS”: BRENDAN BEHAN’S COLLABORATION WITH CAROLYN SWIFT ON *THE QUARE FELLOW***

James Little

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**Abstract:** Brendan Behan was a writer for whom collaboration was a central part of the creative process. His work for the inherently social art of theatre thus provides a fascinating case study through which to examine collaborative textual geneses, particularly when there is an archival trail that enables us to analyse these collaborations. Building on the recent turn in genetic criticism towards the study of collaborative creative processes, this article draws on the recently acquired papers, at the University of Galway, of Pike Theatre co-founder Carolyn Swift, who was central to the editing of Behan’s plays for performance. Focusing on drafts of *The Quare Fellow* (first staged 1954), the essay shows that Swift deleted multiple instances of violent language from Behan’s manuscript, suggesting that the play’s violence was censored by this key collaborator. Bringing the tools of genetic criticism to bear on Behan’s theatre work demonstrates the significance of Swift’s role in Behan’s collaborative creative practice and the centrality of collaboration to his aesthetic. In conclusion, the article calls for a revised reader’s edition of Behan’s plays which would take into account the collaborative nature of his theatre work.

**Keywords:** collaboration in the theatre, genetic criticism, censorship of violence, Pike Theatre, Brendan Behan, Carolyn Swift, *The Quare Fellow*

In a draft of her programme note for the Abbey Theatre production of *The Quare Fellow* in 1984, Carolyn Swift tried to set the record straight about her role in the genesis of Brendan Behan’s landmark play. She tells of his typescript, then entitled “The Twisting of Another Rope,” arriving at Dublin’s Pike Theatre in 1954. Considering it to be “over-long,” she pruned this script back for its premiere: “Every brilliant line, whether redolent of native Dublin wit or universally-appealing humanity, was buried in a dozen more, only slightly less brilliant, so

that the exceptional wood could not be seen for the less remarkable trees.”<sup>1</sup> After the Pike premiere, she made further changes to Behan’s script: “I did a considerable amount of transposing of incidents and dialogue in order to improve the construction, and got the author’s approval for it.” She then persuaded Behan to remove a blackout near the end of Act One, and showed him where he could redraft the resulting text accordingly.<sup>2</sup> According to Behan’s cousin Séamus de Búrca, the author had previously refused to discuss rewrites of the play with Abbey producer Ria Mooney.<sup>3</sup> However, Swift found Behan “most co-operative”:

Whatever he may have said about discussing re-writes with Ria Mooney, he raised no objections to the cuts and transpositions I considered necessary. Indeed, I found him among the most co-operative of all the authors I ever worked with, and I was later to work with many in my capacity as a script-editor in television.<sup>4</sup> My impression was that, unless he was under the influence of drink, no one was more professional or amenable than Brendan, provided he was confident that any criticisms came from a genuine desire to improve the work and not to patronise him.<sup>5</sup>

When Swift came to rework the script for Tomás Mac Anna’s Abbey production in 1984, she claimed to have no fewer than five different scripts in front of her on her desk, giving us some idea of the complexity of the play’s textual genesis.<sup>6</sup> This article draws on the recently acquired papers of Carolyn Swift at the University of Galway to illustrate the collaborative nature of Behan’s working practice, to make the case that such collaboration is central to his aesthetic, and to argue that we need to reflect these collaborative dynamics in scholarship on Behan’s work.

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Swift, “The Script of The Quare Fellow” (1984), James Hardiman Library, University of Galway, MS T40, box 1, 01r. There are two versions of Swift’s typescript preserved in the James Hardiman Library: one is two pages long; the other is three pages long. In this article, I refer to the three-page version.

<sup>2</sup> Swift, “The Script of The Quare Fellow,” 02r.

<sup>3</sup> Séamus de Búrca, *Brendan Behan: A Memoir* (Dublin: P.J. Bourke, 1985), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Swift was recruited at the drama department of RTÉ when it began broadcasting on Irish screens in the 1960s; she worked as a script editor there until 1970. Gerard Whelan, “Carolyn Swift,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.008414.v1>.

<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Swift, *Stage by Stage* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1985), 139.

<sup>6</sup> Swift, “The Script of The Quare Fellow,” 03r.

## Genetic Behan

Siobhán O’Gorman has argued for greater attention to be paid to the “often unacknowledged aspects of Swift’s role in the [Pike] theatre.”<sup>7</sup> The Pike was a tiny, 55-seat theatre in a converted Dublin coach house, founded and run by Swift and her husband, Alan Simpson, from 1953 to 1961.<sup>8</sup> *The Quare Fellow* was one of their major early successes. Focusing on the programme for the play’s 1954 premiere, O’Gorman notes that it credits Simpson’s role as director, while relegating Swift to the role of “assistant producer.”<sup>9</sup> Barry Houlihan has likewise attempted to recover Swift’s dramatic work, which has “suffered levels of obfuscation” familiar to many female theatre workers.<sup>10</sup> As will be detailed below, typescripts of *The Quare Fellow* preserved in Swift’s papers back up these scholars’ contentions that her work deserves more focus, and that she did most of the editing of Behan’s play.

In performing their recovery work on Swift’s career, both O’Gorman and Houlihan use archival holdings to help shed new light on her and Behan’s work. Indeed, the theatrical work itself may be seen as encompassing archival material as well as “conceptually that which is implied by [...] authoritative texts” and performances.<sup>11</sup> For around half a century now, genetic criticism has used pre- and post-publication versions of the published text to draw greater attention to the “temporal dimension” of the work of literature.<sup>12</sup> Using a perspective that is

<sup>7</sup> Siobhán O’Gorman, “‘Hers and His’: Carolyn Swift, Alan Simpson, and Collective Creation at Dublin’s Pike Theatre,” in *Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance: The Rise of Women Theatre Artists in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 130.

<sup>8</sup> The Pike’s auditorium was created by covering the yard adjoining the coach house. For details on the theatre’s layout, see Christopher Morash, *Dublin: A Writer’s City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 46.

<sup>9</sup> Programme quoted in O’Gorman, “‘Hers and His,’” 136. For a reproduction, see de Búrca, *Brendan Behan*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Barry Houlihan, *Theatre and Archival Memory: Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories, 1951-1977* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 53; see also Brenda Donohue, “Women and the Archive: What Vision of the Present Will Be Preserved for the Future?” in *Navigating Ireland’s Theatre Archive: Theory, Practice, Performance*, ed. Barry Houlihan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 163-79.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Shillingsburg, “Literary Documents, Texts, and Works Represented Digitally,” *Center for Textual Studies and Digital Humanities Publications* 3, [http://ecommons.luc.edu/ctsdh\\_pubs/3](http://ecommons.luc.edu/ctsdh_pubs/3).

<sup>12</sup> Pierre-Marc de Biasi, “Toward a Science of Literature: Manuscript Analysis and the Genesis of the Work,” trans. Jed Deppman, in *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-Textes*,

particularly suited to performing arts like theatre, the “work” has been seen by genetic critics as involving not only the texts and performances associated with it, but also the working process behind it.<sup>13</sup> More recently, the focus of genetic criticism has begun to turn towards authorial collaboration as part of an effort to challenge the still dominant Romantic concept of the author as solitary genius.<sup>14</sup> In his 2022 monograph *Genetic Criticism: Tracing Creativity in Literature*, Dirk Van Hulle devotes an entire section to “the sociology of writing,” noting that “[t]exts written for performance, such as dramatic works, often involve a complex sociology of writing” due to the wide range of different collaborators involved in staging the text.<sup>15</sup> As such, genetic criticism provides a helpful set of tools with which to recover an under-acknowledged collaborator in the creative process.

### The Genesis of *The Quare Fellow*

It was actor Sally Travers who drew Simpson’s and Swift’s attention to *The Quare Fellow*. Travers had read the play when it was still a one-acter; she encouraged Behan to expand it into a “full-length play” and tried unsuccessfully to interest her uncle Micheál Mac Liammóir in staging it at the Gate Theatre.<sup>16</sup> When the playscript arrived at the Pike, Swift recalls,

ed. Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrer and Michael Groden (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Houlihan’s genetic analysis of the work of Thomas Kilroy: Barry Houlihan, “‘Creatures of His Imagination’: The Becoming of Plays and the Archive of Thomas Kilroy,” in *Navigating Ireland’s Theatre Archive: Theory, Practice, Performance*, ed. Barry Houlihan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 103-21. For further examples, see Nathalie Léger and Almuth Grésillon, eds., “Théâtre,” special issue, *Genesis* 26, no. 5 (2005).

<sup>14</sup> For earlier models of such scholarship, see Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). The latter states: “The universe of literature is socially generated and does not exist in a steady state.” McGann, *Textual Condition*, 75. This is all the more the case when the author in question was known to get up onstage to add to the performance of his own texts through songs and interjections. See Michael O’Sullivan, *Brendan Behan: A Life* (Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart, 1999), 180, 269.

<sup>15</sup> Dirk Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism: Tracing Creativity in Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 105.

<sup>16</sup> Carolyn Swift, “The First Production of ‘The Quare Fellow,’” in programme for *The Quare Fellow*, dir. Tomás Mac Anna, Abbey Theatre, 1984, n.p. I would like to thank Abbey Theatre archivist Mairéad Delaney for providing access to this document.

we were slightly daunted for the pages of the script were all of different sizes and qualities and the typing the product of a number of different machines, all well past their prime. Moreover, the speeches were thick wedges of dialogue, nearly all with a minimum of four sentences, and full of subordinate clauses. As soon as we studied it, however, we realised there was pure gold waiting to be prised loose from the excessive verbiage.<sup>17</sup>

Simpson's account likewise draws attention to the material heterogeneity of the document, though with an important change in emphasis:

It was a rather unprepossessing document, typed with several different typewriters of various degrees of mechanical disintegration, on paper of varying shapes and sizes and dubious origins. I soon realized that this was for me.<sup>18</sup>

Note Simpson's focus on the first-person singular – "this was for *me*" (emphasis added) – rather than the first-person plural of Swift's: "As soon as *we* studied it, however, *we* realised there was pure gold waiting to be prised loose from the excessive verbiage" (emphasis added). This gives some indication of the collaborative dynamic between the married co-directors of the Pike, which had a direct influence on the genesis of Behan's work.<sup>19</sup> While Simpson would acknowledge Swift's role as textual editor, her input was not given the same status as his directorial work.

Swift's textual alterations to Behan's playtext would now be categorised as the work of a dramaturge, though this was not a widely used word in the Anglophone theatre of the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> Praising Behan as "the most cooperative of writers," she

<sup>17</sup> Swift, *Stage by Stage*, 138-39.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Simpson, *Beckett and Behan, and a Theatre in Dublin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 40.

<sup>19</sup> Twelve years later, Simpson provided another account of receiving Behan's manuscript: "While I loved the dialogue I found it somewhat repetitive and involuted and in need of some cutting. He had a lazy habit of starting off on a subject, dropping it, and then coming back to it later on, and so diminishing its dramatic impact." Alan Simpson, "Introduction," in Brendan Behan, *The Complete Plays* (1978; London: Methuen, 1995), 7. This introduction also contains a facsimile copy of a page from a typescript of *The Quare Fellow* which I have so far been unable to consult. See Simpson, "Introduction," 16.

<sup>20</sup> See Magda Romanska, "Introduction," in *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, ed. Magda Romanska (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 3. The Google Books Ngram Viewer for the word "dramaturge" – albeit drawn from their selective corpus – shows a sharp

states that his cooperation during the play's first run "emboldened me to attempt improvements to the script which I had not either the time or the courage to attempt before."<sup>21</sup> Simpson's account verifies this: "Brendan proved an extremely co-operative author [...] he permitted *my wife* to cut and rearrange various parts of the dialogue, and me to change the title."<sup>22</sup> Swift's role is further backed up by correspondence in the Pike Theatre archive between Simpson and Abbey managing director Ernest Blythe on the play *Posterity Be Damned*, written by Behan's brother Dominic.<sup>23</sup> Their exchange shows that Swift's editorial work was common knowledge in Dublin theatre circles: "Carol has done quite a lot of work on it in the way she did to 'The Quare Fellow,'" Simpson writes, to which Blythe replies: "I hope Mrs Simpson will make a job of it as she did with TQF but we do not feel that in this case she has the material to work on which she had when she tackled Brendan's play."<sup>24</sup> Simpson's awareness of Swift's editing skills was such that he even asked her to come to the Abbey and create "what one might call a definitive script" during his 1969 production of *The Quare Fellow* – a full eight years after the couple had separated.<sup>25</sup> Swift puts it down to gender inequality that Simpson is often presented by scholars as being the sole director of the Pike, and this maps onto research showing that women are often written out of their literary collaborations with male colleagues.<sup>26</sup> In sum, it is clear that Swift was Behan's major collaborator on the Pike Theatre production of *The Quare Fellow*. In spite of

increase in the use of the word from the 1960s onwards. See *Google Books Ngram Viewer*, <https://books.google.com/ngrams/>. In 1963, Swift claimed that the Abbey Theatre would benefit from employing a "play doctor," itself a synonym for "dramaturge." "'Play Doctor' Needed by Abbey, Says Lecturer," *Irish Times*, 5 March 1963, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Swift, *Stage by Stage*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Simpson, *Beckett and Behan*, 40-41; emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> I wish to thank Barry Houlihan for kindly sharing his transcriptions of letters from the Pike Theatre Papers with me.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Simpson to Ernest Blythe, 6 June 1959, Trinity College Dublin MS 10813/398/411, partially qtd in Houlihan, *Theatre and Archival Memory*, 43; Ernest Blythe to Alan Simpson, 12 June 1959, Trinity College Dublin MS 398/412. Further evidence of Swift's editorial role at the Pike comes in correspondence from Simpson to Louis Elliman, in which Simpson claims that *Posterity Be Damned* should be put on at Elliman's Theatre Royal: "by the time Carol has finished 'fixing it,' it will have considerable impact." Trinity College Dublin MS 10813/387/389, qtd in Houlihan, *Theatre and Archival Memory*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> Simpson to Swift, 23 May 1969, James Hardiman Library, University of Galway, MS T40, box 1.

<sup>26</sup> Swift, *Stage by Stage*, 110-11; Bette London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 3-4.

her important input, however, this crucial collaborative work has not been properly acknowledged.<sup>27</sup>

Since none of the typescripts preserved at the University of Galway match Swift’s and Simpson’s descriptions of a heterogeneous typescript cobbled together from different paper sources, it is likely that they are from a later period in the editing process. Firstly, there is a prompt copy which seems to have been used during the Pike Theatre’s 1954 run, with stage directions and instructions for blocking written on the blank versos. There is also a set of parts which corresponds to this prompt copy. In addition, there is a typescript which appears to be a later version of the text, possibly edited for a production at Dublin’s Olympia Theatre which never took place.<sup>28</sup> Finally, there is an Abbey Theatre playscript, prepared for Simpson’s 1969 production of the play at the theatre.<sup>29</sup> What follows is an analysis of edits to the prompt copy, where the most substantial changes to the text can be found. It is here that we find the violence of Behan’s play substantially altered.

### Editing Behan’s *The Quare Fellow*

Violence is a key part of Behan’s writing, just as it was in his life. For instance, marital violence is accepted as a norm by the prisoners of *The Quare Fellow*, while sexual violence towards women is normalised in the casual references to rape made by the prisoners in *Borstal Boy*.<sup>30</sup> Behan himself has been posthumously accused of attempting to rape Letty Cottin Pogrebin, then an employee of his publisher Barney Geis, in a New York hotel room in the 1960s.<sup>31</sup> His publisher and

<sup>27</sup> A letter from Denis Johnston which mentions “the raging success that you made with *Godot*” suggests that Swift may have also been responsible for the textual edits to Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* for performance at the Pike. Denis Johnston to Carolyn Swift, 9 February 1957, Trinity College Dublin MS 10813/395/478; qtd in Houlihan, *Theatre and Archival Memory*, 42. The most widely cited history of Irish theatre records these edits as being made by Simpson: Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 199-208. Further research is thus required to determine who was responsible for the edits to the Pike production of *Godot*.

<sup>28</sup> According to Swift and Simpson, this planned production was cancelled because Behan’s brother Seán Furlong, while employed at the Olympia, had sold copies of the left-wing *Daily Worker* to the audience. Simpson, *Beckett and Behan*, 56; Swift, *Stage by Stage*, 152.

<sup>29</sup> For a list of *Quare Fellow* manuscripts, see the Appendix below.

<sup>30</sup> Brendan Behan, *The Complete Plays* (1978; London: Methuen, 1995), 43; Brendan Behan, *Borstal Boy* (1958; London: Arrow, 1990), 160. For more details, see James Little, “Quare Memory in Brendan Behan’s *Borstal Boy*,” *Irish University Review* 50, no. 2 (2020): 297-98.

<sup>31</sup> Terry Prone, “Collective Silence Spared Sexual Aggressors Like Brendan Behan,” *Irish Examiner*, 17 April 2023, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/columnists/arid-41118052.html>.

close collaborator Rae Jeffs also recalls Behan's wife Beatrice telling her that Behan would beat with his fists anyone who woke him up from an alcohol-induced sleep: "It dates from his days on the run," she told Jeffs, "and he imagines it is a policeman come to take him away."<sup>32</sup> Based on Jeffs's account, it would appear that Beatrice herself was familiar with suffering such violent attacks from her husband.<sup>33</sup> In addition, his work features acts of violence carried out on prisoners by prison officials, as well as violence between prisoners themselves. Finally, as has been discussed in detail elsewhere, Behan himself was a Republican who – for a period at least – supported the use of physical force against the state; John Brannigan has aptly described his early writings as being "immersed in the narrative tradition of divinely-sanctioned violence against England."<sup>34</sup> With all of this in mind, it is clear that different forms of violence are central to Behan's life and work.

The main focus in *The Quare Fellow* is on state violence towards condemned prisoners. In the prompt copy, however, much of this violence is cut from the script. Take, for instance, Neighbour's description of the suffering of a prisoner who was hanged, which he recalls from his time working in the prison hospital:

I cut the hood away, and his head was all twisted. His face was black, ~~and the veins swelled in knots and the two eyes were the worst, staring, bursting, bloodshot, angry like a bull's, frightened like a rabbit's.~~<sup>35</sup>

The passages struck through, describing in detail the hanged prisoner's bulging eyes and swollen veins, are omitted from the later typescript:

I cut the hood away, and his head was all twisted. His face was black and the two eyes were the worst, frightened like a rabbit's.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Rae Jeffs, *Brendan Behan: Man and Showman* (1966; London: Corgi, 1968), 70.

<sup>33</sup> "Beatrice looked distraught, and the calm and control I had come to associate with her was missing as she explained that whoever woke Brendan in this condition would be treated to a series of thumps on whatever part of the body happened to be in the line of his fists." Jeffs, *Brendan Behan*, 69.

<sup>34</sup> John Brannigan, *Brendan Behan: Cultural Nationalism and the Revisionist Writer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 47. As Brannigan goes on to point out, "in his later writings he reveals a more subtle critical nationalism" (47).

<sup>35</sup> *The Quare Fellow*, Pike Theatre prompt copy (1954), James Hardiman Library, University of Galway, MS T40, box 1, 25. I follow the pagination on the prompt copy.

<sup>36</sup> *The Quare Fellow*, Pike Theatre typescript (c. 1954), James Hardiman Library, University of Galway, MS T40, box 1, 26. I follow the pagination on the typescript. In the version Simpson published as part of his *Complete Plays*, this passage has been edited further: "I cut the hood away; his head was all twisted and his face black, but the two eyes were the worst; like a rabbit's; it was fear that had done it." Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 60.



Later, when the warder Regan debates the lot of the condemned prisoner with the visiting Department of Justice official Mr Healey, detail on the gruesomeness of killing is again cut from the prompt copy:<sup>37</sup>

Mr Healy. But we give a condemned man every spiritual facility. I venture to say some of them die holier deaths than if they had finished their natural span.

Regan. But that's not our reason for hanging them, sir. ~~In countries where they haven't much religion, they still throttle them or chop their heads off or shoot them, but they don't run it as a kind of a mission.~~ We don't advertise "Commit a murder and die a happy death." You want to be very careful in what you're saying, sir, or you'd have them all at it. They take religion very seriously in this country, sir.<sup>38</sup>

Once more, the deleted lines are omitted from the later typescript.<sup>39</sup> The text in *The Complete Plays* contains further edits, with Regan's speech drastically pared back in comparison with the earlier version quoted above:

HEALEY. Well, we have one consolation, Regan, the condemned man gets the priest and the sacraments, more than his victim got maybe. I venture to suggest that some of them die holier deaths than if they had finished their natural span.

WARDER REGAN. We can't advertise "Commit a murder and die a happy death," sir. We'd have them all at it. They take religion very seriously in this country.<sup>40</sup>

Each of these cuts goes against the play's own call for more honest, open descriptions of violence carried out by the state. Regan himself makes the point to Healey that hanging should be called "[n]eck breaking and throttling" in order to make the brutality of capital punishment clear for all in the terms used to describe

<sup>37</sup> I follow the spelling of Healey's surname in the body text of *The Complete Plays*. This surname is still spelled without the second "e" in Simpson's 1969 script. *The Quare Fellow*, Abbey Theatre playscript (1969), James Hardiman Library, University of Galway, MS T40, box 1.

<sup>38</sup> Pike Theatre prompt copy, 36.

<sup>39</sup> Pike Theatre typescript, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 67.

it.<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere, the Hangman borrows a warder's cap in order to peek into the Quare Fellow's cell without being noticed as an executioner, thus masking the impending state violence by using a piece of prison uniform as a disguise.<sup>42</sup> That *The Quare Fellow* constantly calls out the hypocrisy surrounding state violence and its representation is the reason why it was so topical at the time, its 1956 London premiere coinciding with a debate on the abolition of capital punishment in the House of Commons.<sup>43</sup> In cutting depictions of violence from the play, Swift was thus going against the call in the play to have the description of violent acts more explicitly laid out before the public. Behan for good reason trusted his more theatrically experienced collaborator to make his script stageworthy, but the price for this was a toning down of the abolitionist thrust of the play.

A further example of violence being erased from Behan's play comes during Neighbour's vindictive description of the Quare Fellow's forthcoming hanging, which he shouts to Fatser (Mickser in the published text). Yet again, the most gruesome details are removed from the prompt copy:

Neighbour. (Stands out and calls loudly after him) Take care, now, I saw the quare fellow in here a couple of years ago. A young hardchaw. In the pride of his strength and impudence. I saw him over at the ball alley in "A" yard, and his ball come out and near took the ear off me, and I walking round the ring with poor old Mockerah, and neither of us minding no one. And they laughed and said I headed the ball well, though the ear was near cut off me, and deaf for three days after it. (Rising his voice) Who got the best of it, now, strong and all as he is, as young as he is? How will his own ear feel tomorrow morning, with the washer under it, and whose legs will be the weakest, when the trap goes from under him and he's dropped into the pit of pain? And what use is the young heart if its only the stronger to burst and spatter the blood of his body and the marrow of his bones, while he wriggles and writhes and turns and twists in saturated agony, every

<sup>41</sup> Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 67. Later edits to the text at Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop are incorporated into the first edition published in 1956, of which the Theatre Workshop and Behan hold joint copyright. See Brendan Behan, *The Quare Fellow* (New York: Grove Press, 1956), copyright page. This edition is the basis for Simpson's later *Complete Plays*. See Simpson, "Introduction," 15.

<sup>42</sup> Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 102-103.

<sup>43</sup> O'Sullivan, *Brendan Behan: A Life*, 207. *The Quare Fellow* premiered at the Pike Theatre in November 1954, just months after the last state execution in the Republic of Ireland had taken place. The last state execution on the island of Ireland was carried out in Belfast in 1961, while the last such execution in the United Kingdom took place in 1964.

~~minute a month with years for days, and the cosy darkness of the hood red lit with the lights of fear, and the fires of hell?~~<sup>44</sup>

Here, the "pain" caused by state violence is literally excised from the text. The somewhat abrupt end of this passage at "the young heart" in the published version is explained by this edit, which takes away the extra dialogue aimed at detailing the Quare Fellow's final suffering.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, let us turn to the most grisly section of dialogue erased from the prompt copy. It comes when Prisoner A outlines the details of the fratricide for which the Quare Fellow is due to be executed:

I heard about it myself from ~~the~~<sup>a</sup> man that part of the country, that the quare fellow had the brother hung-up in an out-house, ~~and was~~ bleeding him into a crock, ~~when a neighbour happened to be passing, and sees blood all over the place. The quare fellow comes out and tells him he's after killing a pig and that's how the blood comes to be splashed about. To cut a long story short, doesn't he tell the fellow to wait, and out he comes in a minute, with a lump of meat, and tells your man to take home that fresh bit of shoulder and eat it. Months later, your man finds out ~~whose~~ whose shoulder it is, he's after eating, and begod he's taken off to the mad house, and never left it since.~~<sup>46</sup>

All four examples outlined above concern not the act of violence itself, but the narration of violent events which occur offstage. This final act of erasure is distinctive, however, in that it maintains audience sympathy for the Quare Fellow *not* to hear the details of his brother's butchering.<sup>47</sup> While this may have been a reason for taking out this description of involuntary cannibalism, the other passages seem to have been cut according to a general principle of "pruning," as Simpson calls it, with the apparent intention to censor the more violent aspects of Behan's work. As Van Hulle points out, editorial "pruning" can amount to censorship, or even self-censorship, as when Behan himself toned down his depictions of sexual relationships with other men in the drafting of *Borstal Boy*.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Pike Theatre prompt copy, 48.

<sup>45</sup> Behan, *The Complete Plays*, 82.

<sup>46</sup> Pike Theatre typescript, 64. In this transcription, "x" denotes an illegible letter.

<sup>47</sup> It also echoes the legend of Atreus feeding his unwitting brother Thyestes with the flesh of his own sons, and the feeding of Tereus's son to him by his sister-in-law Philomena and wife Procne.

<sup>48</sup> Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism*, 101; see Little, "Quare Memory," 296-98.

Though the Pike Theatre were never afraid of controversy, as is shown by the legal battle over the attempted state censorship of their 1957 production of Tennessee Williams's *The Rose Tattoo*,<sup>49</sup> it seems that the level of violence in Behan's writing led to his script being censored by his collaborators. While Swift and Simpson contend that edits to *The Quare Fellow* were made in the interest of creating a less sprawling and repetitive text, they also had important thematic, aesthetic, and political consequences for the play.

## Conclusion

Swift and Simpson were not Behan's only collaborators. To mention but a few: Rae Jeffs notes Behan's "complete co-operation" in the editing of *Borstal Boy* to remove libellous passages; she would go on to play a major role in the creation of Behan's infamous talk-books, which she claims he never even read.<sup>50</sup> Séamus de Búrca claims to have typed up Behan's early play *The Landlady (An Bhean Ciosa)*, and made suggestions for changes which Behan implemented.<sup>51</sup> Most notably, Behan's theatrical collaborations with Joan Littlewood have been the cause of much heated debate, but little textual scholarship, and it would be useful to examine the Joan Littlewood papers in the British Library in order to find material evidence of her involvement in the editing of his plays. Investigating these collaborations could form the basis for a new reader's edition of Behan's plays, which is sorely needed given the lack of textual accuracy or clarity of editorial choices made in *The Complete Plays*. As John McCourt states, in his introduction to a recent volume of scholarly essays on Behan, "[n]othing close to a definitive or a complete edition of his dramatic works is available."<sup>52</sup> Analysing Behan's collaborations shows the potential benefits that such an edition could have.

## Appendix

The following is a list of *The Quare Fellow* manuscripts which I have located in my research for this article:

*The Quare Fellow / Casad an tsugain eile*, manuscript, Princeton University Library, box b-001194, folder 12.

<sup>49</sup> See Gerard Whelan with Carolyn Swift, *Spiked: Church-State Intrigue and The Rose Tattoo* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2002).

<sup>50</sup> Jeffs, *Brendan Behan*, 40, 14-15.

<sup>51</sup> de Búrca, *Brendan Behan*, 19, 48.

<sup>52</sup> John McCourt, "Introduction," in *Reading Brendan Behan*, ed. John McCourt (Cork: Cork University Press, 2019), 5.

- The Quare Fellow / Casad an tsugain eile*, typescript, Princeton University Library, box b-001194, folder 13.
- The Quare Fellow: Corrected Script*, Princeton University Library, 2006-1030Q.
- The Quare Fellow: Uncut Version*, Princeton University Library, 2006-1030Q.
- The Twisting of Another Rope: A Play for Radio*, typescript, National Library of Ireland, MS 49737.
- The Quare Fellow*, typescript, National Library of Ireland, MS 29083.
- The Quare Fellow*, Pike Theatre prompt copy (1954), James Hardiman Library, University of Galway, MS T40, box 1.
- The Quare Fellow*, Pike Theatre typescript (c. 1954), James Hardiman Library, University of Galway, MS T40, box 1.
- The Quare Fellow*, Pike Theatre parts (1954), James Hardiman Library, University of Galway, MS T40, box 1.
- The Quare Fellow*, Abbey Theatre playscript (1969), James Hardiman Library, University of Galway, MS T40, box 1.
- Proofs of *The Quare Fellow* (1957), Grove Press Archives, Syracuse University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, box 108.
- Proofs of *The Quare Fellow* (1964), Grove Press Archives, Syracuse University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, box 109.
- Working copy of *The Quare Fellow* (1964), Grove Press Archives, Syracuse University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, box 109.
- The Quare Fellow*, Lord Chamberlain's copy, British Library.
- The Twisting of Another Rope*, typescript, auctioned at Bonham's auction house in March 2024.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See "Books and Manuscripts: Behan (Brendan)," *Bonhams*, <https://www.bonhams.com/auction/29868/lot/304/beh-an-brendan-annotated-typescript-of-his-play-the-quare-fellow-1954/>.

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