Well, it was getting late, Mr Behan—and perhaps—
‘Late? Now hold it a minute and don’t give me that business about being late. I don’t say I’m an aisy man to interview but you don’t have to give me heroin to make me talk. We’ll have a little more tay, if you playse. Now, bless your soul, August, and may your son be a bishop.’

Behan sighed and produced another apple from his pocket. He bit into it briskly.

Here, gasping, a bellhop appeared as though he had run from Thermopylae, to announce that the poet was wanted on the telephone.
‘Ah,’ said Behan, ‘it’s a rough time I’m having to be sure. They’re interviewing me all the time and then I have to answer the telephone every five [deleted] minutes. But, I’ll tell you, it’s better than carrying a hod.’

On the way to the phone, Behan passed the Frank Morgan type who was still arguing with his agent.
‘Pipe down, old sport’, suggested the actor to Behan. ‘I can’t hear this bloody chap on the other end of the pipe.’
‘I beg your pardon’, said Behan graciously. ‘Are you speaking English?’

Brendan Behan’s Last Wake in Montreal*

TONY ASPLER

‘I love THE United States, but I’m a friend not a client. Understand me? The Big Apple, now that’s the place...’ The Big Apple: New York. Brendan Behan toyed with his eggs and gazed out wanly over the frozen streets of Montreal. 8 December 1960. Brendan had just arrived in la belle province, unheralded, tired after a nine-hour drive from the Big Apple.

After the adulation of Broadway, the spectacular success of The Hostage and the instant recognition in the streets, Brendan found himself in French Canada where neither the myth nor the man was known. To add to his discomfort it seemed his own personal furies had laid on a cold spell; temperatures dropped to fifteen below, and this raw cold which makes every Montrealer his own Scott of the Antarctic sapped Brendan’s energy.

If he could not saunter around a new city, talking to doormen, paper boys, buying magazines, he was unhappy. Now, caged in his hotel room,

the prospects for the week were dismal indeed. Oh God, oh Montreal.

'I want to see the real Montreal, le vrai Canadien', he said to me. So we toured the city—Brendan, his wife Beatrice, and an ex-IRA friend who drove him up—Eamonn Martin—and we only got out of the car at the look-out on the top of Mount Royal to see the snowscape of Montreal sliding gently down into the grey St Lawrence like a ski slope. Brendan made the sign of the cross over the sullen city and then urinated in the snow.

He had six days before his appearance at the Comédie Canadienne and four before his scheduled performance at McGill University ('An Evening with Brendan Behan'). Four days to soak up the atmosphere, to capture the city as he had done in the Big Apple.

Whenever Brendan said the word 'Canadian' he gave it a French intonation. As far as he was concerned Canada was French, or at least the most sympathetic part was. He insisted that first night on visiting the French quarter, so we all went down to a steakhouse on St Lawrence Boulevard.

As we drove along the Main, Brendan said, 'Alouette, gentil Alouette. There's nothing goddammed gentil about it. This is a city of hatreds, I can smell it.' During the meal Brendan was in fine form; he regaled us with stories of Ireland—how he tried to seduce an American girl in a graveyard, how he fed a carthorse a bottle of Irish whiskey in Sligo (the animal died and Brendan performed the burial rites over its carcass and had it interred on the beach). Halfway through the meal he disappeared and Beatrice looked glum.

'He's gone to have a sup', she said sadly. Brendan had been on the wagon for about six months, apart from a champagne lapse in New York—though this had been written off cynically as a publicity stunt. He had drunk nothing stronger than soda water and had thrived on it.

But a combination of Montreal's savage cold and his own sense of let-down forced him back on his old friend in the bottle. He came back to the table some twenty minutes later, ordered champagne and Guinness, and began to sing, 'I'm Lady Chatterley's lover, a game gamekeeper am I . . .' He came to the line, 'Evelyn Waugh's a push-over', and suddenly leaped up throwing a fistful of dollar bills on the table and said: 'I want to see the French'. Seeing the French meant zig-zagging our way down the Main from beer parlour to bar to sleazy night-club. The French atmosphere struck an mnemonic chord in Brendan and his Paris experiences flooded back to him.

Wherever we went he introduced himself, 'Je suis ancien maquereau de Paris', and as if to prove it he produced fistfuls of crumpled bills which he called his 'ammunition'. In each bar he sang the Marseillaise, the first French song to come to mind. The habitués of those seamy bars did not see the sensitive Irish poet; they saw only a happy, drunken man with his shirt