

Empirically Yours

London based, Killarney born filmmaker Denis Buckley suggests that it will be the bravery of fellow Kerryman John Moriarty, who died last weekend that will inspire future generations of Irish artists.

On a hot morning in June I walk into the cool of the Brompton Oratory in South Kensington. On the way in, English men with panama hats, blazers and white trousers are step standing while their wives with more sense hover over children under the cover of the columned canopy. Inside, some older women wear lace placed about the head with the south facing point of the material resting just above the eyes. I sit on the right admiring the Italian influence above as a soutaned choir walks across from the left. All genuflect, men and women together below the great dome and exit. Eleven bells ring and six frocked men, four in black hats, walk out from the same side and process along the aisle. One of the priests uses a flicking motion to decant water from the end of a brush, the choir are singing, the congregation rise without request. Another priest, voice low in the vast premises, begins,

Introibo ad altare Deum
I will go in to the altar of God.

When asked, which rarely happens in England, of my religion I claim not to be influenced by any interventionary deity. In the church during this Latin Mass I do not kneel, respond or sing the words on the pages provided for those not familiar with the liturgy. It would be idiotic to presume because I had experienced, through no decision of my own, a thousand masses I could therefore participate in this service. I could not. I am here in this church only because believer poet John Moriarty died yesterday morning and he said I should go.

I first read Moriarty after I decided that I was a Kerryman before I was Irish. *After spending half my life in England I wondered what nationality really meant to me. Following a call by the Taoiseach in 2006, 90 years after the Easter Rising for "active citizenship", I looked at where my responsibilities lay.*

In *The State Lies* a film work I made last year I suggested that the Ireland I grew up was imagined by the patriots before it materialized. I went on to propose that the supervisory state, (government), was failing us in not supporting the very community that makes collective identity possible, preferring instead to favour the choice of individualism over social responsibility. Moriarty was important to me during the preparation of the work because I came to see after years of direct action that it is ideas, the imagining of what does not yet exist that really changes the way we evolve.

Moriarty was born close to the recent reality of the Free State. On the one hand he suffered from the lack of vision in social planning but on the other he benefited from the resilience of community involvement in survival. His lifework is infused with belief in collectivism and in the land's ability to heal and restore. In parishes like Moyvane, where John grew up, farm work was a shared experience. The elemental harmony evident in later writings were not the flights of idealized imaginings but were grounded in necessity of the thing to be done. Hay and turf gathering was hard essential work for all and a young Moriarty would have been out there as soon as he was physically able.

Listowel in North Kerry has a tradition. A tradition of academic excellence which was due to instruction. Teaching was not of the driver instruction quality, learning enough that one may pass an exam, it was a placing in present time ideas that last and the forming in young minds possibilities that earth bound realities could not contain. That John Moriarty's bequest may be a hedge school is not surprising given what he himself received.

One of the most fascinating aspects of John Moriarty's time at UCD was that a contemporary of his was the soon to be industrialist Tony O' Reilly. It could not be a more demonstrative personification of the duality of Irish society in the last 40 years than the future lives of these students. One became the hero of the suited and at the time reasonably frustrated go getters that assumed Ireland during the period from the 60's until the fall of Haughey. The other went to a place that no one ever heard of and travelled there by boat.

In the restlessness of pursuit for self meaning there is what anthropologist Joseph Campbell, a fan of Joyce, called epiphanies. Moments of clarity that pass beyond dialogue consciousness. The intellect almost has to transcend its night watch to come to intuitive understanding. In Canada, John Moriarty was employed to teach. He was finding like many in his profession that the traditions of European culture, (the dead white males), were not the be all and end all of human self assessing. The teacher must never stop being a student and in the indigenous communities of Northern American Moriarty I think, found an inkling of what he was looking for.

That realisation brought him back to the West of Ireland, first to Connemara and on to Kerry. This return to the land brought about the transformation that will, I believe, in time be his lasting influence for future imaginers of Ireland. It was Joyce's confidence that marked him as a hero for artists born after he lived. For John Moriarty it will be his bravery that will inspire those who will in future define Ireland.

When Moriarty lay in the Atlantic wet grass and begged to be removed from his European present he must have known the rigours that success would demand. Like Hopkins his "face down wet grass" ordination meant that nothing, no thing could be same. As Beckett found you can't ask and then turn down the very gift you coveted for so long because it means more suffering not less. It was time to step up and Moriarty like Beckett did just that.

Moriarty's mind was loosened and it freed up his language. Because of that, every evocation he makes is a demonstration of the page as alchemical. The weight of history in Moriarty is not a giant lump to labour under but is used instead as a lever to expose the light of his new thinking. Like the Latin Mass he suggested, I don't believe in all he believes but by God I never disagreed with such delight in the reading. I share his fascination with the passion of Christ, its religio and in its literal meaning to link back. I revel in his pantheism and his right sized adoration of nature. I see the cause of his collectivism being the interdependence of all things. I understand that the empirical, "I be", should at least encounter the shamanistic, "I dream", in a sort of backward to go forward evolution. I sway during his incantations, the delight in the word made flesh. The corporality of the Christ story he makes as real as the fat ass of a porn actress. Like Van Morrison wills Whitman, I will Moriarty to rave on, rave on, rave on words on printed page.

Through and because of all this is his bravery. He imagined Ireland and he lived it imagining. Moriarty rightly would see the sin of usury in Christian banks today. He would see the cranes fly higher than the blackbird over Mangerton and know all is temporary, including the thought he was having. He looked cosmologically deeper. He saw the vacant job of the healer and got on with. Watch his lecture Prometheus and the Dolphin and see speech philosophy at work as it was in the time of Aristotle. He lived it; that made the difference, he walked the walk.

Near the end of Latin Mass in London's SW7 as the congregation were trying to remove the paper host from the roof of their mouth, the priest spoke,

In principio erat Verbum
et Verbum erat apud Deum, et
Deus erat Verbum.
In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God, and
The Word was God.

For the first time I lowered my head and thought of the hearse going from the Cathedral, up New Street, along High Street. I imagined the pace and make up of those following. There would be family, friends and those who never knew the man only through the word. Shoppers would bless themselves and wait out of respect until the chief mourners passed. At the lights the hearse would speed up and leave the town before climbing Aghadoe. Down the dip of the graveyard I can see the Upper Lake like a screen behind the black clad latecomers. I can smell the newly turned earth that saved him saying "Welcome old friend, how good to see you again". I hear now the first drum of earth upon the brassplate and the priest's words, the last John Moriarty will hear this time and I close my fists and pray to myself that there in Ireland it is Irish not Latin that he speaks.

Denis Buckley 04/06/07