

John Moriarty

By John O'Donoghue  
Sunday Independent June 10 2007

JOHN MORIARTY, from north Kerry, was a charming, easy-going and unselfconscious poet and philosopher. Throughout his life, he thought and wrote as a mystic and man of vision who searched endlessly for truth.

Born in Moyvane, close to Listowel, in 1938, he was educated at University College, Dublin. On achieving brilliant academic success, he went on to lecture in English literature in Canada for six years. He subsequently returned to Ireland, leaving behind his academic career, and set up home in Connemara, where he worked as a gardener.

He later moved back to Kerry, where he lived on the foot of Mangerton Mountain. John always had a deep appreciation of nature and I have no doubt that the beautiful scenery of the Mangerton Mountain, which became his retreat from modern Ireland, gave him great pleasure. Indeed, he had often described his journey down to Killarney as crossing into Ireland.

John had an incredible strength of character and always had a positive effect on everybody who knew him. It was frequently commented that he made everybody in his company feel like they were important to him as he listened intently to anything they had to say.

He became well-known to listeners of the Joe Duffy Liveline programme in the last number of years, where he would regularly take part in literary discussion and in support of other listeners on various topics.

When he contributed to the programme last year to discuss the fact that he had been diagnosed with triple cancer, his strength of character and his attitude to life sparked discussions which lasted for the entire week and indeed have continued on and off on the programme since.

It was fitting, therefore, that the programme paid tribute to John last Tuesday, replaying some of his interviews, which gave us another insight into his outlook on life. I recall one poignant moment where a listener detailed a story where John, who was undergoing chemotherapy and his hair was falling out, would throw his hair into the garden where he observed a chaffinch would use it to build his nest. John commented that "even the birds are preparing my way back to divine ground".

He was a man of great humanity and compassion, displaying a unique combination of profound intellect and deep spirituality. Indeed this spirituality and his strong belief in the hereafter brought him great comfort and strength during his battle with cancer. John described his illness as not being terminal. He felt that he was in a departure lounge, that death is a door to somewhere else.

John was, of course, always highly ambitious and committed to the improvement of life. He believed that life was a journey and he was always determined to live it to the full, giving as much as he could of himself. For the last number of years, John was

working tirelessly to establish a Christian Monastic Hedge School in Kilgarvan, Co Kerry. The project was to be called Sli na Firinne, an Irish expression meaning "the path of truth": the path of our final adventure, the adventure of our immortality.

John has left a lasting legacy to Irish literature with the publication of eight books since 1994. His first book, the wonderfully descriptive *Dreamtime*, which was inspired by the Australian Aboriginal myth that their ancestors literally dreamed the earth, drew on cultural landscapes in India, China, Egypt, Australia, Native America, and Europe.

Further works from John drew liberally upon the legends of Ireland, classical Greece, Native Americans, Ancient Egypt, Islam, Asia and the Christian gospels to try to articulate the innermost mysteries of human consciousness. These included the three volumes of *Turtle Was Gone a Long Time*; *Nostos*; *Invoking Ireland: Ailiu Iath n-hErend*; *Night Journey to Buddh Gaia*, and *Serious Sounds*, which was a great insight into John's childhood in north Kerry.

Once in a lifetime, if we are lucky, we have the honour of touching greatness. A man may die, nations may rise and fall but the work of a brilliant mind transcends the generations and traverses nations. Change and transition are the laws of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future. John was never afraid to bypass the formative boundaries that make mind prisoners of mere mortals.

He relished the exploration of the unknown and for him the unknowable was simply another frontier in which to bound and gambol with that unquestionable free-thinking spirit of his. For him intellectual conformity was the enemy of thought and the jailer of freedom.

Ar dheis laimhe De go raibh a anam dilis. Ni fheicimis a leitheid aris. John will be greatly missed, and I wish to convey my condolences to his long-term partner Eileen Moore, and his family and friends, of which there were many.

He's the sense I have

that life means more

than just surviving.

I know him as

a smell, a smile,

a feeling.

(from the poem 'Mother and Child Reunion')

- John O'Donoghue