

Tributes paid to writer John Moriarty

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Tributes have been paid to the writer and philosopher John Moriarty, who died in Co Kerry on Friday at the age of 69. He had been diagnosed with cancer in 2006.

The Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O'Donoghue, said it was with great sadness that he had learned of John Moriarty's death.

Mr O'Donoghue said: "John was known as a charming, easygoing and unselfconscious poet and philosopher. He was a man of great humanity and compassion, displaying a unique combination of profound intellect and deep spirituality."

His eight published books, which drew upon the world's ancient legends, Islam and the Christian Gospels, had left a lasting legacy to Irish literature, Mr O'Donoghue said.

"John had an incredible strength of character, which was displayed in abundance last year when his appearance on Joe Duffy's Liveline programme to discuss the fact that he had recently had a diagnosis of triple cancer sparked a discussion on his attitude to life which lasted for the entire week," the Minister added.

A native of Moyvane, north Kerry, John Moriarty studied philosophy and logic at UCD in the late 1950s. A double first-class honours degree was conferred on him and he was considered to have had one of the finest minds of his generation.

He taught English literature at the University of Manitoba in Canada for six years, but left his teaching post to go "walkabout", as he described it, setting out on a "journey of discovery" which eventually brought him to Connemara and to taking on work as a gardener.

His book *Dreamtime*, published by Lilliput Press in 1994, was described as "one of the most extraordinary books ever published in Ireland".

Since that time seven further books have been published, including the so-called Turtle series as well as the autobiographical *Nostos* and *Serious Sounds*.

Known for his "distinctive rich voice", John Moriarty was also a lecturer and broadcaster. He was presenter of *The Blackbird* and *The Bell*, a series of late-night discussion programmes broadcast on RTÉ television in the mid-1990s.

In a review of his book *Invoking Ireland*, published in 2006, the poet Paul Durcan described Moriarty as "the original, radical, non-conformist questioner".

Yesterday, his long-time publisher, Anthony Farrell, of Lilliput Press, said that Moriarty's use of myth and philosophy in his writing had made him a "Tolstoyan figure".

"He was an interpreter of today, using the vision stories of ancient culture to interpret modern society. He had a childlike vision and radiance and his use of language was extraordinary," he said.

A sequel to his autobiography, *What the Curlew Said*, was completed shortly before his death.

John Moriarty died surrounded by family and friends at his home near the Horses' Glen at the foot of Mangerton Mountain, Killarney.

He is survived by siblings, nieces and nephews as well as by his partner, Eileen Moore.

The removal from his home in Mangerton to St Mary's Cathedral took place last night and he will be buried in Aghadoe today after Requiem Mass in the cathedral.

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