

# John McCormick: 1918-2010

John Owen McCormick, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Rutgers University, died 1 April 2010 in York, England. He was born in Thief River Fall, Minnesota, 20 September 1918. Because the Great Depression had brought economic ruin to his family, he left home to seek work at the age of 14. He rode the rails finding jobs where he could and after arriving in New Orleans took work aboard a ship. This latter position involved him in the delivery of weapons to Loyalist forces in the Spanish Civil War. By 1941 he had returned to his home state and earned a Bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota.

With the United States' entry into World War II, McCormick volunteered to serve in the Navy. His college degree and previous seagoing experience resulted in an officer's commission and then command of an anti-submarine boat.

After the war, the GI Bill allowed McCormick to attend Harvard University where he studied with Perry Miller and earned a PhD in comparative literature in 1951. He then taught American studies in Salzburg, where he met his second wife, the English poet Mairi MacInnes. He soon moved to Berlin where he became the director from 1954 to 1959 of the American Institute of the Free University. He returned to the United States to become Professor of Comparative Literature at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

In 1961, McCormick was a Smith-Mundt Fellow at the National University of Mexico, and he took the opportunity to learn bullfighting. In 1967 he published *The Complete Aficionado*, a book about bullfighting based on his experiences (republished as *Bullfighting: Art, Technique, and Spanish Society*, Transaction Publishers, 1998). Other published works include *Catastrophe and Imagination* (1957), *The Middle Distance: A Comparative Study of American Imaginative Literature, 1919-32* (1971), *Fiction as Knowledge: The Modern Post-Romantic Novel* (1975).

In 1987, McCormick published his well-known work *George Santayana: A Biography* (Knopf; reissued by Transaction Publishers, 2003). This book has introduced many people to Santayana's life and thought and thereby has made an important contribution to the growing appreciation of Santayana's philosophy. But the author's stated motives in writing the book were not missionary ones, rather they "were delight in [Santayana's] character and in his eloquence, agreement with his naturalist philosophy, and joy at the prospect of a man of his stature who refused to puff himself" (xiv).

The same year his Santayana biography appeared, McCormick retired from teaching at Rutgers after twenty-eight years. The next year he moved to England with his wife and worked on, among other projects, compiling Santayana's marginalia (the first of two books, which comprise Volume VI of *The Works of George Santayana*, is due to be published by MIT Press in 2011). In 2001 he published *Seagoing: A Memoir*, and in 2008 *Another Music: Polemics and Pleasures*.

McCormick is survived by his wife, Mairi, and their children, Peter, Antoinette, and Fergus, and by Jonathan, his son from his first marriage.

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