

Milltown to mark centenary of famous playwright MJ Molloy's birth

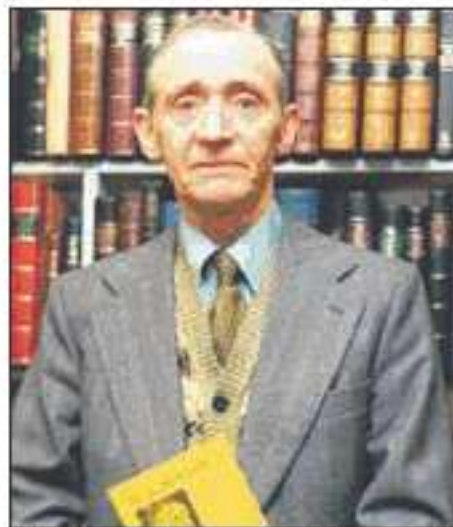
By Jim Carney

ONE of Co. Galway's most renowned literary figures, playwright M. J. Molloy, will have the centenary of his birth celebrated in his native place early next month.

Author of 14 plays, nine of which were premièred at The Abbey Theatre, Dublin in the 1940s, 50s and early 60s, Michael Joseph Molloy was born in March 1914 at Cartron, Milltown where he lived all his life. He died, aged 80, in 1994.

Considered the equal of John Millington Synge for authentic, lyrical use of rural West of Ireland language and subject matter, Joe Molloy's plays are no longer widely performed outside of the amateur drama movement; they are regarded as "of their time," a time that passed with the emergence of the 1960s' permissive society and, with

it, rising secularism as social norms became increasingly liberal. But Molloy's reputation is secure and so is his place of honour in theatre history and heritage. Among the leading professionals who hold him in the highest esteem is the founder and driving force of the Druid company, Garry Hynes, who produced a widely acclaimed and commercially successful revival of one of the Milltown writer's greatest plays, *The Wood of the Whispering*, in 1983. The lead role of Sanbatch Daly was played by the late, great Mick Lally, also a founder member of Druid, along with Garry Hynes and Marie Mullen. After secondary school at St Jarlath's, Tuam the young Molloy went to study for the priesthood at St Columban's College, Dalgan Park, Navan, Co. Meath but at the age of 20, while studying philosophy, the classics and



theology, he was stricken with bone tuberculosis; he was in considerable pain for nearly five years, through many operations, and he was forced to abandon his studies.

From a visit to the Abbey Theatre, to see two plays by George Bernard Shaw, he was inspired to follow the life-path that would take him back to the Irish national theatre as one of its leading names for two decades.

His other major plays were *Old Road* (1943), *The Visit-*

ing House (1946), *The King of Friday's Men* (1948), *The Paddy Pedlar* (1953), *The Will and the Way* (1955), *Daughter from Over the Water* (1958), *A Right Rose Tree* (1958), *The Wooing of Duvesa* (1964), *Petticoat Loose* (1979) and *The Bachelor's Daughter* (1985).

A member of Aosdána, his lecture "The Making of Folkplays" was published in *Literature and Folklore: Ireland and Newfoundland* (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977). The late Professor Robert O'Driscoll of the University of Toronto, Canada once wrote: "M. J. Molloy was the greatest master of Irish Folk Theatre since Synge," and "his work was as significant as Synge's."

• **The tribute night in honour of M. J. Molloy is on Friday, April 11 in Milltown, with guest speakers, music and a performance by the revived Milltown Drama Society.**