

Michael Moriarty for the persecution

Review by
PETER O'BRIEN

I HAVE always enjoyed the acting of Michael Moriarty, especially his character, Ben Stone, the assistant district attorney in the television show *Law and Order*. Even now I watch him in reruns, several years after he was sacked and replaced by Sam Waterston, and admire the low-keyed righteousness of his character.

But his book — a personal journal of his private and public demon-wrestling over the last few years — is so remarkably bad that it will be difficult to think respectfully of the actor or his characters ever again. The only words that seem to have been deleted from the original journal are "Dear Diary"; what have been added are numerous footnotes to bring the meandering commentary up to date.

Now resident in Canada, Moriarty defines himself as a "Christ-bitten Libertarian." He is the sort of person who can't stand to have a licence plate on his car for fear that the government will then be able to watch him and therefore restrict his freedom at all times. Why he chose Canada, and what travesties and demons he will find here, is anyone's guess.

In case you may not be able to guess who his enemies are, he will tell you. Again and again. Janet Reno, attorney-general of the United States, is number one on his list. She is mentioned by name 89 times in this book and alluded to many more. Granted, her decisions regarding Waco or Washington's desire to establish a new TV rating system may not have been wisdom-saturated. But 89 snipes? Look at the book's jacket. That's Moriarty atop a horse, à la St. George, about to slay the dragon, whose face just happens to be to be that of Reno.

Among his other enemies are the



Moriarty: 'I am not paranoid.'

THE GIFT OF STERN ANGELS

By Michael Moriarty

Exile Editions, 295 pages, \$19.95

executive producer of *Law and Order*, Dick Wolf, and Peter Jennings. His few friends include radio wacko Howard Stern, "my best friend," and Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize-winner Elie Wiesel, who "loves me."

Although there is the odd lucid thought here, the mass of the book reads like the stream-of-consciousness or stream-of-paranoia of someone with limited imagination and a ham-fisted understanding of language. The verbiage is punctuated by swearing, the use of multiple exclamation points (sometimes up to four!!!!), snippets of Moriarty poetry and the very helpful philosophical assessment, "Hmmm" or sometimes "hmmmmmm."

What is lost, unfortunately, is the thematic genesis of all this ranting. Moriarty's concern for freedom and

his shuddering at the very thought of state-sponsored censorship are important and worthy. But there is not a shred of reason or logic to this diatribe. What we get instead are multitudinous digressions: his desire to run for president, his musical compositions, his failing marriage, his dream of killing his mother ("I unhesitatingly knew it was my job to kill her. I cried: Yesssss! as I attacked and I woke up. It was frightening but refreshing"), his brief time on Broadway in *My Fair Lady*, his electro-convulsive shock treatments when he was younger, what food he's hungry for, etc.

One moment he will say "All words are sacred," and the next he will say: "There's the pretty waitress. And me. The ham and eggs taste great!" or "I have *carped* my *diem*," or "Hot diggity. Out on my porch for the sunset with a beer! Damn, there's nothing prettier!" Yikes! It's a mystery why Exile Editions, which has published fine books in the past, would have put this book in print.

This review may very well lead Moriarty to consider me part of the politically correct, government-infiltrated conspiracy that is blithely removing the scaffolding of freedom from society. I can only respond that I am frightened of anyone who says: "I have the truth. They have lies."

Perhaps Dustin Hoffman said it best, when he met Moriarty years ago and commented on his acting: "You're talented, Michael, but you're crazy." Or, because Moriarty would prefer to speak for himself, the last words should go to him: "I don't think I'm the least bit paranoid."

Writer and editor Peter O'Brien is a citizen of both the United States and Canada. He lives in Toronto.