

The great Irish poet Derek Mahon died on Thursday night at the age of 78. This poem of his was widely read in the early days of the Coronavirus pandemic, and is still of comfort now.

Everything Is Going to Be All Right

How should I not be glad to contemplate
the clouds clearing beyond the dormer window
and a high tide reflected on the ceiling?

There will be dying, there will be dying,
but there is no need to go into that.

The poems flow from the hand unbidden
and the hidden source is the watchful heart.

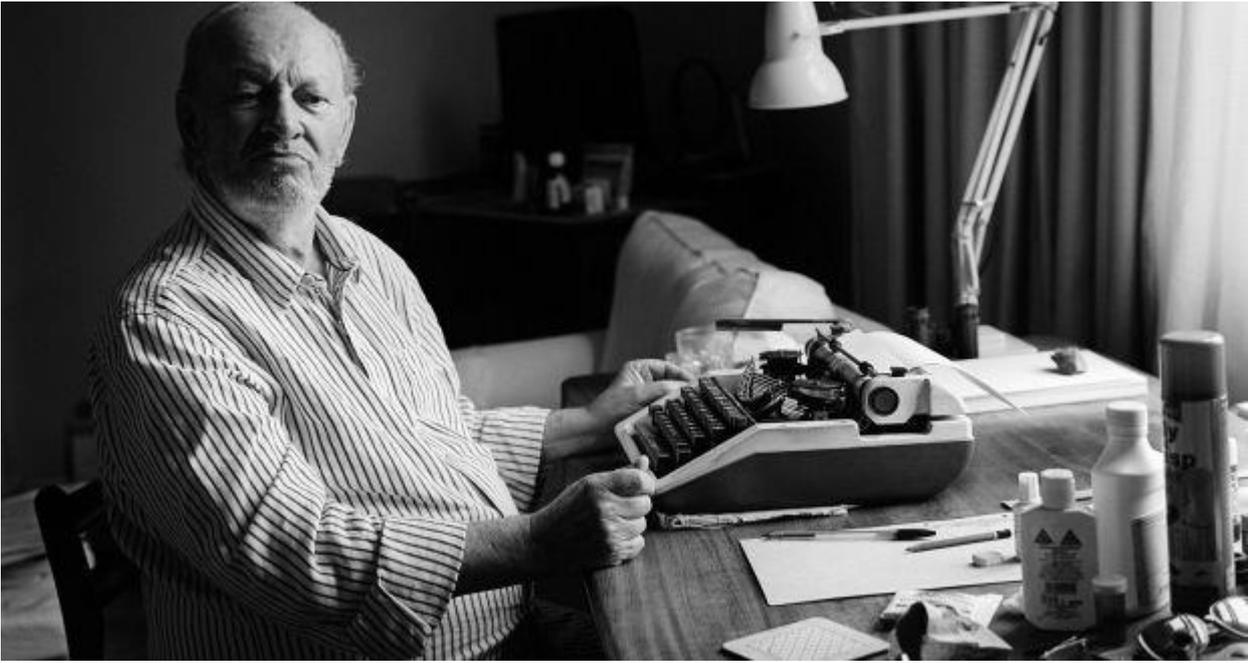
The Sun rises in spite of everything
and the far cities are beautiful and bright.

I lie here in a riot of sunlight
watching the day break and the clouds flying.

Everything is going to be all right.

Derek Mahon

(1941-2020)



Derek Mahon at home in Kinsale, Co. Cork in 2010. Photograph: John Minihan

Derek Mahon (1941-2020) was born in Belfast. His father and grandfather worked at Harland and Wolff while his mother worked at a local flax mill. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and then at the Sorbonne in Paris.

In the 1960s he was part of the group known as the Northern Poets, who included Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley. His poetry is influenced by the work of Louis MacNeice, W. H. Auden and Samuel Beckett. The humour that abounds in Beckett is well-matched by the wit that Mahon sprinkles throughout his work, often in those poems that demonstrate his talent for sharp social observation.

On hearing of his death, the President of Ireland, Michael D, Higgins, wrote, “What I recall as his greatest strength was his poetic instinct to continually dredge for what was human about us; what was contradictory as well as what was full of possibility. Such poetic work would sometimes conclude with a near manifesto statement, such as in the lines from his poem ‘Calypso’:

*Homer was right though about the important thing,
The redemptive power of women.*