

“It might be anywhere,  
That ivory tower  
Approached by a dirt road.” – Derek Mahon

This is the senior undergraduate poetry workshop at U.F. Most of you will be looking either to pursue an MFA somewhere, or else for some elite entertainment to round off your first degree. Well, this is the place.

(Providing a sufficient number of copies can be drummed up), we will be reading Paul Muldoon’s update-able but still pretty wonderful (1986) anthology of *Contemporary Irish Poetry*, containing substantial selections from just ten poets, built around the great generation of Ulster poets, Heaney, Longley, Mahon, Paulin and Muldoon. As a necessary compliment to the editor (who didn’t include himself in his own book), we will read one, or possibly two books by the man himself, *Moy Sand and Gravel* and perhaps one of *Quoof* or *Meeting the British* or *Why Brownlee Left*. I am hoping this will be the start for you of a lasting interest in Ireland and its outstanding writers; please take my word for it, the five names listed are a sort of *pleiade* of our times, while before them, Patrick Kavanagh and Louis MacNeice (the poets’ poets’ poet in the UK for at least the past thirty years) are the great enablers.

The course will follow the familiar workshop format, each 3-hour block divided between reading and talking about the books; and workshopping poems written for the class, to my specifications (or, occasionally, not). Please bring enough copies of your work to go round, and remember to make two for me each time. It is my hope that the varied reading – constellated round the single complex reality of historical and political and cultural Ireland (Heaney in his essay, “Belfast” quotes Shakespeare’s *Henry V*: “What is my nation?”) – will bring you closer to a sense of poetic possibilities, and hence into your own. Thus, among other forms/ tropes, I’d like to have you try out a poetic epistle (Longley, 218, 220), a sonnet (*passim!* but especially Kavanagh, and also Muldoon, in due course), a literary poem (MacNeice, 118, Mahon, 278, 291), a poem about work (Kavanagh, 26, MacNeice, 121, Heaney, 236, Paulin, 331), a poem about country (*passim!*), a love poem (MacNeice, 86, 142, Montague, 186, Heaney, 257, Durcan, 316, McGuckian, 385 (?!)), a poem of compression (Mahon, 295, Durcan, 319), a poem with variations (MacNeice, 129, 140), a poem of a kind of tapestried richness (MacNeice, 81, Mahon, 296, 305), a poem of poverty (Kavanagh, 75, 76, Heaney, 264, Paulin, 336), a poem as rant or riff (MacNeice, 93, 99, Mahon, 303), poem as autobiography (Kavanagh, 75, 76, MacNeice, 111, 127, Heaney, 233), and so on and so on.

I expect us mostly to be reading an anthology poet a week, sometimes one over two weeks; towards the end of the term, two or three weeks for the Muldoon(s). Please come thoroughly prepared. I'd like you to get a sense – and so to give me a sense! – of the whole oeuvre of the poet: what distinguishes them, what angle do they like to come at you, what are they good at, what are they bad at, what (if anything) fascinates you about them.

Be alert please for the occasional email from me; I have no other way of communicating with you in a hurry.

No phones or so-called “devices”, please. It's offensive to me and to your fellow-students. No cheating or cribbing (hard to know where that might occur!). One allowed absence. As little lateness as you can manage. Grades based on attendance, participation, quality (if any) and improvement (if any) in the writing submitted. I think this is not a Gordon Rule class – unfortunately, because if it had been, I would also have liked to get a page from you each week on each new author, response paper kind of thing. Maybe we'll still do that anyway?

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Office hours, Mondays, 1-4 (before class)