

Richard Hayward's love of Munster

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Two generations ago Richard Hayward (1892-1964) played a significant role in the cultural landscape of Ireland. For forty years he was a pivotal figure as a travel writer, singer and actor, and was well-known all over the country. As well as writing a discursive travel book on Munster, he also wrote a detailed book on Kerry. The author of a recent biography of Hayward reflects on his achievements and explores his connection to Munster.

Although born in Southport, Lancashire in 1892 Hayward grew up in Larne, Co. Antrim and tried to disguise his English background. His father, Walter Scott Hayward, was a boat designer and renowned yachting celebrity in the northwest of England. In the mid-1890s the family moved to Ireland, living firstly in Omeath in Co. Louth and then settling on the Antrim coast. Walter Hayward ran an engineering works in Belfast and in the early years of the twentieth century he worked for the Congested Districts Board in the west of Ireland helping fishermen modernize their boats.¹

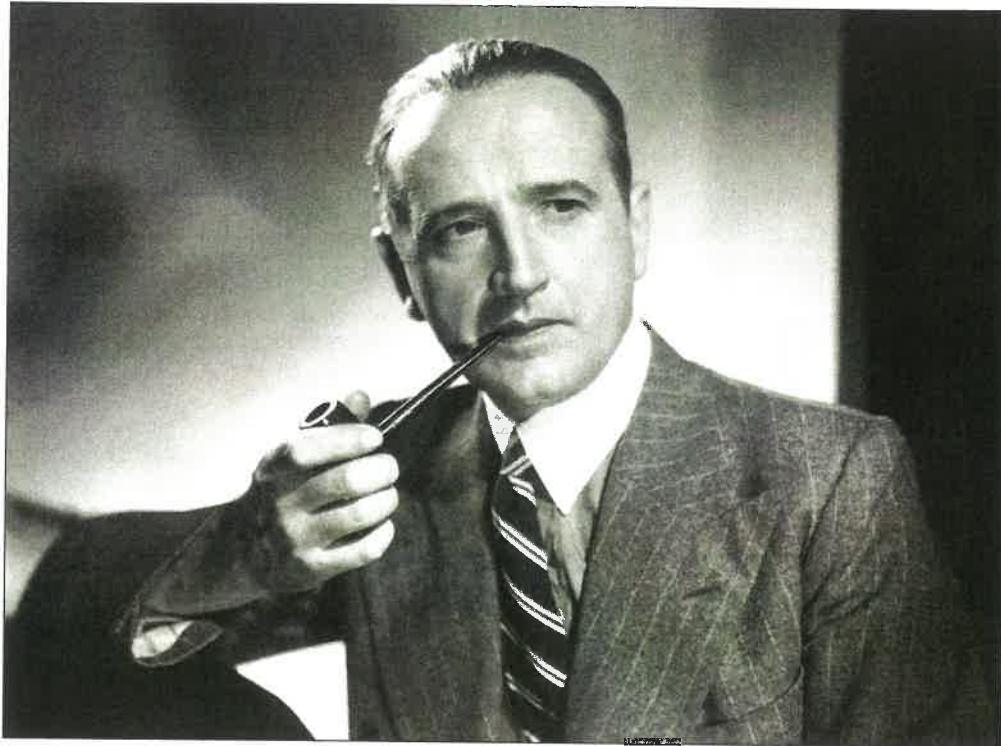
At the age of seven Richard Hayward developed an interest in music. The family employed a maid from Ballybay in Co. Monaghan who taught him his first songs. From her he learnt Irish ballads that struck a special chord leading to a lifetime's interest in traditional songs and an abiding passion for playing the harp. The maid's repertoire included 'The Ould Leather Breeches', 'The Fair of Athy', 'Sweet Mary Acklin', and 'Wicked Murty Hynes'.² He spent his life promoting Ireland through his filmmaking, songs and above all, his eleven travel books about the country. In later life, as a singer he broadcast on both the BBC and Radio Éireann and as a folklorist travelled all over Ireland. He moved easily between the parallel worlds of filmmaking, the theatre, singing and writing, and his life touched many people.

In a busy singing career he recorded 156 records for major labels such as Decca and HMV. He sang to packed houses at concerts and festivals and performed many radio recitals, singing Orange ballads as well as traditional Irish songs. It was at a meeting of the Irish PEN writers' organisation in Jurys Hotel in Dublin in 1937 that he was first introduced to Delia Murphy who became known as 'The Queen of Connemara' after an old Irish boat song. She sang along with him providing the evening's entertainment. With her strong accent and distinctive singing voice, Murphy performed 'Three Lovely Lassies.' Hayward recognised her star quality and realised he had found a musical soulmate. That night marked the start of what was to be a fruitful four-year partnership, performing on stage together and recording duets for HMV. Murphy went on to become Ireland's first celebrity woman singer.

In the 1930s Hayward laid the foundations of the Irish film industry and was acknowledged as a talented character actor, appearing in early black-and-white Irish 'talkies'. His first major film, *The Luck of the Irish* was filmed in Co. Antrim in September 1935. Crowds gathered to watch the actors and it led to much curiosity amongst

¹ Walter Scott Hayward obituary, *Southport Guardian*, 24 August 1910.

² Richard Hayward, *In Praise of Ulster* (5th edition, Belfast 1945) p. 317.



Richard Hayward, Irish travel writer, actor and singer

local people. Eyewitness accounts of the filming describe extra police being called in from Larne to control the crowds. Two other major feature films, *The Early Bird* (1936) a country comedy, was filmed in Glenarm and Carnlough, while *Devil's Rock*, a romantic drama, was shot in Cushendun in 1937. Its cast included the Limerick actor Michael Gleeson. *The Early Bird* broke box-office records in Galway, Dingle and Carlow. In *Irish and Proud of It* (1936) – filmed at Clogher Head in Co. Louth – a young actress, Dinah Sheridan, appeared alongside Hayward in the lead role. Years later she went on to play the part of Mrs Waterbury in *The Railway Children*.

At the same time as his acting and singing career was flourishing, Hayward was developing his writing. In 1936 he had published a novel, *Sugarhouse Entry*, and two years later his first travel book *In Praise of Ulster* brought him to literary prominence. The book covered all nine counties of Ulster and was illustrated with forty-eight wash drawings by the landscape artist James Humbert Craig. The sketches included coastal scenes, mountains, green roads and wheel-less carts, and covered a diverse range of cultural experiences and traditional pastimes.

The book was an immediate success and was reprinted four times during the Second World War. This led to his decision to explore and write about other parts of Ireland, spreading his wings to the midlands, the west and the southwest. Hayward was a lover of the Shannon region and his book *Where the River Shannon flows* (1940) tells the story of a journey by caravan following the course of the river from the Shannon Pot in Cavan through Leitrim, Athlone, Lough Derg, Ballina, Limerick city, Foynes and on to Ballybunion in Kerry. This book included black-and-white photographs of people he met en

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³ Richard Ha
⁴ Ibid., p. 23

route as well as pictures of Limerick city, the Falls of Doonass and the Shannon Scheme at Ardnacrusha. To accompany the book he also made a film, *Where the Shannon flows down to the sea*, which was screened in Ireland in 1940 and proved popular. Hayward followed his Shannon book by writing about the Corrib region. *The Corrib Country* came out in 1943 and covered the area stretching from Lough Mask through Corrib to Galway Bay.

Towards the end of the war he took off to Kerry for five weeks with the artist Theo Gracey and the result, *In the Kingdom of Kerry*, was published in 1946. With its rich heritage, Kerry offered Hayward scope to write about everything from history, legend and folktales to archaeology and architecture. Apart from the cultural history of the county, its natural beauty with quiet lakes, valleys and Ireland's highest mountains, was ideal territory for him. He climbed many of the mountains, including Carrantuohill, Mangerton and Brandon. When it came to Carrantuohill, he set off with two guides, Tomás O'Sullivan, a local man, and James Stewart from Limerick. The hardest part of the trek to Ireland's highest point at 3314ft was negotiating the Devil's Ladder:

The Devil's Ladder is the devil itself. Six hundred feet high, and as vertical as makes no difference, it looks like the old course of a waterfall, and composed of scree and loose boulders, it is treacherous to hand, foot and ankle, as well as to the heads of those who follow the more forward climber. For my part I hugged the sides for safety, and many a sizeable boulder came clattering down beside me that I would rather have seen there than felt somewhere else. The whole upward length of the Ladder is just one solid piece of hard work, sore on the hands and on the leg and thigh muscles, but it holds nothing to daunt any actively-inclined person.³

During his 1944 visit he also made a film about Kerry. On his return the following summer, he visited Killorglin for Puck Fair and included a sketch of the goat being raised on to the platform in the busy square. Hayward describes what he saw as the connection between Puck Fair and the solar festival of Lugh, the sun god of the Tuatha Dé Danann. From their base, Hayward organized a room on the first floor of O'Shea's cinema, giving him a grandstand view of the proceedings. With his jackdaw eye, he scanned the panorama of the square and street down to the bridge, gathering precise, jewelled detail as well as making notes. He paints a graphic description of the scene:

The tall wooden scaffold-like construction rising in front of my window, flagged and be-ribboned for the reception of His Majesty King Puck when the great moment arrived; the concourse of showmen and their stalls crowding the small square to bursting point; the movement of frightened herds with their loud cries and bellows; the streets and pavements in many places ankle-deep in cow dung; the rather savage feeling of sound and colour and raw humanity. It was all very primitive and lively and pagan-seeming and it was all intensively exciting.⁴

The book was well received by the critics. Writing in *The Bell*, Bryan MacMahon, the Kerry author, summed up Hayward's work:

The scholar in him shows us the Chi-Rho Crosses in the crumbled abbeys, the jester in him laughs at such phenomena as an unsinkable man; the zealot in him denounces the intrusion of sham villa on good landscape or the glazed tile on grey

³ Richard Hayward, *In the Kingdom of Kerry* (Dundalk, 1946) p. 246.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

graveyard; the anchorite in him leads us up grass-grown roads and the imp and the acrobat in him takes us out on dizzy pinnacle of Skellig Michael and leaves us there with our vertigo for good company.⁵

In the late 1940s Hayward teamed up with the Belfast artist Raymond Piper and together, over a period of seventeen years, they explored every county and produced five regional topographical books in a series called *This is Ireland*. The first, *Leinster and the City of Dublin*, (1949) covers twelve counties with the lion's share going to Dublin. It was followed by four other regional books: Ulster, Munster, and two on Connacht.

For his final book in the series, Hayward tackled Munster, a province with which he was no stranger and where he had built up many contacts, especially in Limerick. He had been a frequent visitor to many parts of the province, leading groups from the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club to the Burren, Limerick, Kerry, Cork, and Waterford. In 1949 Hayward spent several weeks in Limerick adjudicating at the *Féile Luimnigh*. As well as sections on music and dancing, this festival also included elocution, debates and talks on Irish history. Hayward was most impressed with the standard of acting that he found in Limerick. In the Irish plays section, the Knockainey Dramatic Society took first place for what he called a 'faultless presentation' of Bryan MacMahon's play 'The Bugle in the Blood.'⁶

In the spring of 1960 Hayward set off, accompanied again by Raymond Piper, on a tour of all six counties of Munster. This was their fifth and final collaboration and they were determined to round off the enterprise with a grand literary and artistic finale. They were about to undertake a marathon motoring tour in the southwest of Ireland, a formidable task taking in some of the country's biggest counties, highest mountains and most noted antiquities. They spent three months touring Munster, but it was to be nearly four years before the book was published to a fanfare of publicity.

Their journey starts with a short section on Cork city before quickly moving on to the rest of the county to which Hayward devotes sixty pages. They stop at the Blarney Stone, which he says he has already kissed three times. 'As I write, *the Cult of the Blarney Stone* seems to have entered a new phase with the publication of a neatly designed *Certificate of Eloquence* that may be purchased for a small sum by every person who submits to the amusing and time-honoured ceremony.'⁷ They are accompanied through west Cork by John T. Collins, an 'old shanachie', full of history, lore and humour. There are personal moments in the book such as Hayward's singing of 'The Iniskilling Dragoon' over the novelist Donn Byrne's grave in Rathclarin near Kilbrittain – despite the admonition of the epitaph, 'I'm in my sleeping and let you not waken me.' He reflects on the work of Byrne – known to him as Brian – who was killed in a car accident in 1928 at Courtmacsherry Bay in Cork.⁸ Lists of wild flowers, complete with botanical nomenclature and his bracketed notes, include references to botanists such as Robert Lloyd Praeger who died in 1953, and Henry Chichester Hart.⁹

In Clare the two men travelled the 'marvellous new road that hugs the coast' enjoying the panorama of the Cliffs of Moher, and walking the Burren's limestone pavement. Piper, who was developing a passion for wild orchids, produced an exquisite two-page suite of sketches of the highlights of the Burren flora. Frequently Hayward wrote to

⁵ *The Bell*, vol. xiii, no. 1 (October 1946) p. 82.

⁶ 'Amateurs act like Professionals', by Richard Hayward, *Sunday Independent*, 2 February 1950.

⁷ *Munster and the City of Cork* (London, 1964) p. 44.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 51-2.

⁹ Richard Hayward travel notebooks, archive held at Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, Co. Down.



Old Bishop's Palace, Church St, Limerick, sketched by Raymond Piper for Hayward's Munster book

people requesting information about buildings, local customs and folklore or stories from the past. For example, specific information on the history of Glenstal Abbey in Co. Limerick was sent to him by the Belgian monk Dom Hubert Janssens de Varebeke after their visit.¹⁰ While at Glenstal, they enjoyed 'the open-handed hospitality of the house' hearing the monks intone a grace in plainchant.¹¹

The Limerick chapter starts in the city with an eight-page historical context with Hayward quickly turning on his descriptive prose to set the scene:

Limerick, City of Sieges, City of Sarsfield, City of the Broken Treaty, looks at its best when it is seen from the Clare side of the river, with its spires, its churches and its huddle of houses rising pleasantly above a noble sweep of the Shannon, where perchance a company of swans floats on water made dark by the reflection of King John's Castle that towers immediately above it.¹²

In his travels Hayward had built up a substantial body of architectural knowledge and the city's built heritage, especially its ecclesiastical buildings, intrigued him. With Piper by his side, he wandered the streets and the artist's evocative sketches include delicate line drawings of St Mary's Cathedral, the Franciscan Church and the Old Bishop's Palace. Hayward also admired the Georgian streets of Newtown Pery and wrote of the area:

¹⁰ Hayward private papers and letters, Ulster Folk & Transport Museum.

¹¹ *Munster and the City of Cork*, p. 109.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Despite the tasteless hand of the despoiling modern builder the town which the Perys created in that waste is still a beautiful example of eighteenth-century town planning and it is especially interesting because it was one of the first towns in the British Isles to be built to a preconceived and intelligent design.¹³

Other towns that feature in the Limerick section, and merit sketches are Kilmallock, Adare and Askeaton. Piper also produced a sketch of Alma Fitt, the antiquarian and banker from a Quaker family of grocers and auctioneers, who lived at Corbally. Hayward had become friendly with him through visits to Limerick as part of his early exploration of the Shannon region in the late 1930s. Fitt was on hand to help with information on the city and county and showed both the author and artist around. Hayward said of him 'he probably knows more about his native city than any man alive today.'¹⁴ In 1951-2, Hayward was President of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club and at Easter 1956 and again in 1962 Fitt had helped organise a visit to Limerick and Clare by a large group from the club.

In many different parts of Ireland, Hayward was able to call on writer-friends who provided valuable local knowledge in helping organise the field club trip itineraries. These included the Donegal topographical writer and historian Harry Percival Swan, the Inspector of Monuments and architectural historian Harold Leask, the scholar and poet Liam S. Gogán, Harry Tempest of Dundalk, who had published Hayward's books in the 1940s under the Dundalgan Press imprint, and the essayist and linguist Hubert Butler, a member of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society.

During his tour of Munster, Hayward joined the Kilfeacle Beagles in Tipperary for their annual off-season meet to the summit of Galtymore Mountain on Whit Sunday, 5 June 1960. Participants who reached Dawson's Table by 4.00 pm received a buttonhole badge known as the *Barr Buadha Na Binne*, 'The top victory of the peak.'¹⁵ Hayward was selected that day for a special award as the most senior person on Galtymore. He returned several times and in June 1964 helped choose the Maid of the Mountain. After his death, a plaque was erected on the summit of Galtymore in memory of Hayward and of James Blake, a local man who drowned in a boating accident in Tangier. He had known Blake through the Beagles. The memorial bears the words 'The top victory of the peak', the motto on the badge which the Beagles issue to those who climb to the top.

Munster and the City of Cork, was published in 1964, just a few weeks before Hayward's death. It was the culmination of a five-volume venture that started in 1948 at the age of fifty-six and crowned his writing career just two months short of his seventy-second birthday. It was published at the end of August 1964 by Phoenix House of London. Although it was part of the series *This is Ireland* it was a larger format than the other four books published by Arthur Barker in a uniform edition but was a pleasure for readers to hold. The mustard-yellow and green dust wrapper showed an elegant illustration of the Clock Gate at Youghal, Co. Cork. Piper had doubled the amount of sketches he had drawn for the other books and produced 120 high-quality halftone plates from pencil drawings, twenty-four of which were full page. A de-luxe limited edition of a hundred numbered copies, signed by both Hayward and Piper, was produced in a slipcase at ten guineas and was heavily subscribed in advance. At the end of the following year the book's worth was recognized when it was chosen for the National Book League Design Exhibition in London.

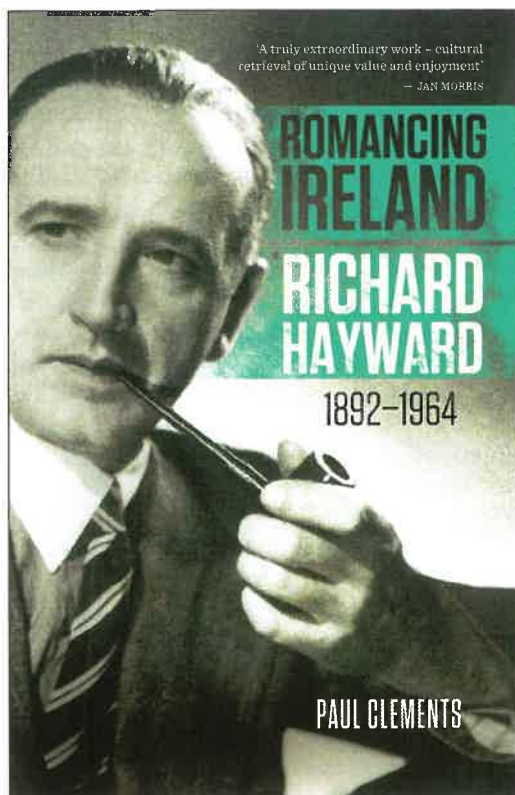
¹³ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp 91-2.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 234.

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Romancing Ireland, Richard Hayward paperback reprint cover Lilliput Press May 2015



The Limerick businessman Alma Fitt was a friend of Richard Hayward. He was sketched by Raymond Piper for Hayward's Munster book

The Munster book hit the shops in early September and was released in tandem with a whirlwind round of speeches, lunches and dinners in Ireland's major cities. Signing sessions, involving both writer and artist, started on 2 September in Belfast and the week-long tour took them to Dublin, Cork and Limerick where a medieval banquet at Bunratty Castle was held in Hayward's honour.¹⁶ A blaze of publicity in the daily and Sunday papers followed while the afterglow of the lunches lingered. For the most part, the critics lavished praise with largely positive noises but in some cases it was tempered with carping criticism.

Writing in the *Guardian*, Seán O'Faolain described the book as 'a blend of old time lunch-pictorial Baedeker-Murray tradition of factual-informative'. His main complaint was that the book was impractically big and heavy:

It is not really meant to be read; it is meant to be consulted. Richard Hayward's head is full of curious information. I feel he has been toppled by the sheer poundage of information, historical, botanical, topographical etc. that he has had to supply and the foot-slogging style he has had to adopt.¹⁷

¹⁶ Private papers, Hayward archive, Ulster Folk & Transport Museum.

¹⁷ *Guardian*, 4 Sept. 1964.

The *Cork Examiner* critic began his review by saying that in all parts of Ireland there are legions of enthusiastic admirers of Hayward's work. 'Perhaps no other writer has done so much to foster a love of the countryside, a knowledge of Ireland's place names and an appreciation of Irish scenic beauty.' The only disappointment, the reviewer felt, was the brevity of the chapter on Cork city: 'Nine pages out of 200 is surely scant treatment ... Perhaps it was that Messrs. Hayward and Piper were over-eager for the open road and the green fields, or maybe John T [Collins] was so anxious to get them to his beloved West Cork that he forebore to regale them with more urban anecdotes.'¹⁸

In *The Irish Times*, Maurice Gorham felt that Hayward 'does not bother about being bang up to date, is not ashamed to wax sentimental on occasion and makes no effort to conform to contemporary tastes. He does not hide his dislike of the Church of Christ the King at Turner's Cross with which no doubt many Corkmen will secretly agree.' Gorham's criticism was about the absence of people. 'We get no hint of the people on whom the character of places depend. A few such glimpses might have added living humanity to a book that is rich in everything else.'¹⁹ A similar complaint about lack of people was made in *The Irish Press* by Seán J. White who said there was 'an absence of a felt sense of life being lived. The Munsterman should marvel at the act of imaginative sympathy that makes an Ulsterman and a confessed Orangeman so knowledgeable about Munster.' He also criticized the inadequate section on Cork city which he felt Hayward had 'scanted.' White felt his prose had a rather embarrassing way at times: Adare Friary is 'a venerable pile', in Brandon 'the far-flung delights of Brandon Bay came into our ken,' and in Glencar he travels 'a splendid bog road that is beset by a veritable sea of mountains.'²⁰

In the *Sunday Independent* Frank O'Connor wrote a humorous piece in his 'Books on Sunday' column under the heading: 'Mr. Hayward is an even bigger crank than I am ...' He affects to know far more than I – or indeed, any living man – pretends to know ... I call the books remarkable because I buy them, which is the biggest compliment a professional writer can pay to another.' O'Connor then took Hayward to task [for] 'pretending to know. He parades Irish place-names in a Gaelic dress and in that miserable Gothic lettering which is miscalled "Irish" and gets them brilliantly wrong ... But, of course, arguing with Richard Hay Ward (to give his name its proper spelling) is half the fun because you cotton on to the man in a couple of pages.'²¹

In the final years of his life Hayward received awards including an honorary degree which was conferred on him by Lafayette College in Pennsylvania in June 1959. The citation stated that his doctorate was awarded for 'distinguished services to Irish literature' and in recognition of his contribution to the development and spread of Irish literature. It recognised his 'love of Ireland and Irish lore' and that he 'had conveyed the joy in beauty and the love of the country to many.'

In 1963, Hayward was elected Honorary Life Associate of the British Institute of Recorded Sound and the following year, in June 1964, was appointed OBE. His tragic death in a car accident near Ballymena in Co. Antrim on 13 October 1964, in which two other people were also killed, was widely reported in the press. He had been on his way to give a talk on folklore to Ballymena Rotary Club.

¹⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 3 Sept. 1964.

¹⁹ *Irish Times*, 5 Sept. 1964.

²⁰ *Irish Press*, 19 Sept. 1964.

²¹ *Sunday Independent*, 20 Sept. 1964.

Richard Hayward was a man of boundless energy, fierce ambition, and infectious enthusiasm. Through his books and writing, his tour guiding and films, he opened up the country to thousands of people. His travel books capture an Ireland long gone. They are a remarkable record of a country going through dramatic social and political change before the modern era.

In 2013, a blue plaque was unveiled at his house on the Antrim Road in Belfast, and in 2015 his 1950 travel book, *Ulster and the City of Belfast* was reprinted for the first time in sixty-five years. A low-relief, bronze-cast, portrait of him by the sculptor Charlie Ludlow, mounted on speckled marble, sand cast and patinated, was presented to the Linen Hall Library in Belfast, early in 2015. All of this will ensure that the name of Richard Hayward lives on and that a new generation will enjoy his books, songs and films which played such a part in the mid-twentieth century fabric of Irish life.²²

²² A biography of Hayward by Paul Clements, *Romancing Ireland, Richard Hayward 1892-1964* (Dublin, 2014) is available from bookshops or direct from the publishers, Lilliput Press, at €20, post free anywhere in Ireland: www.lilliputpress.ie.