**Preface**

This book, which comprises ten, mostly short, essays, is a sequel to my 2017 self-published memoir *Keep on the Move.* Several essays - ‘On Memory’, ‘On John McGahern’, ‘On Chopin’ and ‘On *Private Passions*’ - discuss in more detail themes highlighted in that book. Others, like ‘On Dying’, ‘On Pain’ and ‘On Brexit’, address completely new topics; while ‘On Chess’, ‘On Sport’ and ‘On Creativity’ reflect on important aspects of my thinking and life that previously were only incidentally mentioned.

*Keep on the Move* was a very book-based memoir. So is this collection, to the extent that quotations and other people’s ideas similarly feature prominently throughout, all of which, as before, are acknowledged in footnotes.

In his final collection of essays, *The Plain Speaker*, my literary hero, the Nineteenth Century essayist, William Hazlitt, likened his preferred writing style to extempore speaking and the painting of frescoes, which “imply a life of study and great previous preparation, but of which the execution is momentary and irrevocable”.[[1]](#footnote-1) I hanker to self-present as much here, and often, following Hazlitt, in a manner which is intentionally contrarian and so inevitably provocative. Indeed, although I am not an intellectual, despite regularly aspiring to be one in my imagination, my purpose in writing this book, akin to Edward Said who was, is to be “a disturber of the status quo”.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In his book *Essayism*, the Irish writer Brian Dillon claims a great essay should “be at once a wound and a piercing act of precision”.[[3]](#footnote-3) While the ones in this collection are occasionally vulnerable, the aim is that they all should be penetrating. I have also tried hard to be readable.

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1. William Hazlitt, ‘On Application to Study’, in Duncan Wu, (ed.) *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, Volume 8 (The Plain Speaker), London, Pickering & Chatto, 1985, p.57. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, London, Vintage Books, 1994, p.x. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Brian Dillon, *Essayism*, London, Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017, p.13. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)