I am grateful to Maynooth University for facilitating sabbatical leave in spring 2019, which allowed me to work on this book.

More generally, I am glad to work in a university where the neoliberal reconstruction of higher education has, comparatively, been kept at bay, and where there is still freedom to teach and think. I am also glad to work with many good colleagues across the university, and especially those I work with most closely in the English Department led in recent years by Emer Nolan, Colin Graham, Stephen O’Neill and Lauren Arrington. I am particularly grateful for their practical support to Amanda Bent, Clodagh McDonnell and Tracy O’Flaherty. And many thanks also to my colleagues in the university library and the university bookshop. It is right to acknowledge the (grossly undervalued) work of our doctoral students and occasional teaching staff, on whose labour my freedom to research, and that of my permanent colleagues, depends; I am especially indebted to Thomas Connolly, Brenda O’Connell and Emma Roche. Many of the ideas in this book developed in classroom dialogue, and I am especially grateful for the thoughtful engagement of final year BA students and students on the English Department’s MA programmes. And much thanks for their energy and enthusiasm to my colleagues in the MU SexGen Research Network, and especially to Patricia Kennon and Fergus Ryan.

For support, encouragement and solidarity, heartfelt thanks to: David Alderson, Julie Bates, Conrad Brunstrom, Denis Condon, Colin Coulter, Sharae Deckard, Treasa De Loughry, Dermot Dix, Bridget English, Ann Fogarty, Oona Frawley, Matthew Frost, Kevin Honan, Heather Laird, Chandana Mathur, Ed Madden, Mary McAuliffe,

For their time and assiduous care when reading chapter drafts, I am grateful to: Joe Cleary, Paul Delaney, Declan Kavanagh, Sinéad Kennedy, Emer Nolan. I am especially grateful to the readers for MUP for their thoughtful, sympathetic and encouraging response to the work.

A version of Chapter 1 was previously published in Reading Brendan Behan (Cork University Press, 2019); parts of Chapters 4 and 5 appeared in The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Fiction (Oxford University Press, 2020). For their supportive guidance many thanks to the respective editors: John McCourt and Liam Harte.

For permission to use photographs of his murals on the cover and in the book, many thanks to Joe Caslin.

I presented early versions of these chapters in various symposiums and guest lectures. Many thanks to warmly generous interlocutors on those occasions: John Brannigan, Maria DiBattista, Gavin Clarke, Tadgh Hoey, Naomi Michalowicz, Mary McGlynn, Barry McCrea, Ann Mulhall, Jamie O’Neill, Philip Roseman, Cherry Smyth and Eibhear Walshe. For generous hospitality thanks to the Irish Literary Society in London, the Columbia Irish Studies Seminar and to Notre Dame University in Rome.

I am especially grateful for the support and kindness of Joe Cleary, Sinéad Kennedy, Emer Nolan and Deirdre Quinn; sometime colleagues at MU, but, more importantly, very good friends.

Likewise, I am grateful for the support and love of family, friends and neighbours in Kerry, Carlow, Wicklow, Dublin, London, Berlin and Darmstadt. A special word of thanks to Sandra Godkin for encouragement and friendship.

This book is concerned with literature and politics, but also with imagining possibilities for freedom and love; Tony Broderick continues to teach me much about the latter.