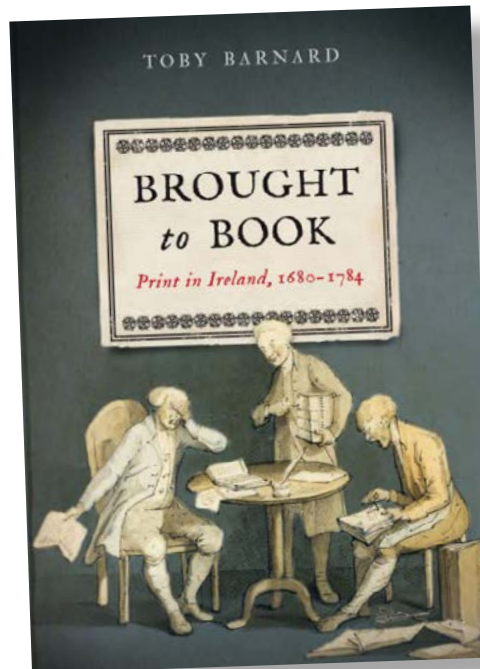


## Brought to Book. Print in Ireland, 1680-1784

Barnard, Toby. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-84682-629-0. 400pp, €45, hbk.

Toby Barnard's latest *tour de force* is an investigation of the print culture of Ireland from 1680 to 1784, the latter the year a new law was enacted (2017), which curtailed the presses. Barnard provides us with a cornucopia of information, making *Brought to Book* a vital purchase for anyone interested in the history of Ireland during the early modern period. From the outset he seeks to provide a social history of print through the prism of the past, searching what truly interested the reading public of early modern Ireland.

The book is arranged in an idiosyncratic manner: Chapters 1 and 2 look at print from a chronological perspective and in turn these lead into six main chapters which focus on the trade from a thematic point of view. As Barnard states in his preface, this approach owes much to the seminal *Reading Ireland. Print, Reading and Social Change in Early Modern Ireland* by Raymond Gillespie (Manchester, 2005), which focused on seventeenth-century Ireland (and perhaps for this reason Barnard tends to concentrate on eighteenth-century examples). Chapter 3 examines 'Schooling and Learning' and includes a valuable discussion of the type of schooling available and the role of the classics in instruction. The next three chapters focus on 'Past', 'Present' and 'Future Irelands'. Chapter 4 concentrates on



antiquarian scholarship, Chapter 5 on the growth of printed contemporary comment (particularly from the 1720s onwards), while 'Future Irelands' examines the output from societies such as the Dublin Society. Here the focus is on broader civil society rather than any attempt by the Irish government to either control or more generally utilise print. 'Salvation' forms the focus of Chapter 7 which presents an avalanche of material about how different denominational groups used and appealed to the press. Of particular note in this chapter, but also throughout the book, is the exemplary use of manuscript and printed correspondence by Barnard, who gathers together his extensive knowledge of sources from a myriad of archives, to draw our attention to new material. Moving from the sublime to the sometimes surreal, Barnard continues to investigate another theme in his eighth chapter: Entertainments. Noting the importance of the novel, Barnard also includes discussions of verse, plays, music and prints, all of which were becoming more and more readily available in eighteenth-century Ireland.

Following 'Entertainments', Barnard eschews the thematic and instead swerves into a geographical examination of the *loci* of print: in 'The South, 1680-1784' he examines the rise of printing centres at Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Kilkenny and Limerick (the emphasis understandably being on Cork). 'The North, 1694-1784' does the same for Belfast and, to a lesser extent, Derry, Newry and, bizarrely, Drogheda. This geographical arrangement, though it somewhat jars with the previous thematic focus, allows Barnard to

plot how different themes fared in different localities. His final chapter, prior to his conclusion, looks at 'Writers and Readers' and in this he explores the difficulties in bringing a book (or pamphlet) into print. Naturally, with such a theme, the career of Philip Skelton (1707-1787) provides a useful focus.

In his introduction Barnard states that 'this text does not eschew the quantification now possible thanks to advances such as ESTC but nor does it shun anecdote.' This is a bit of an understatement as much of the book is a tapestry of cleverly woven parables of print which skilfully demonstrate Barnard's main points. His opening story of the Haymans of Co. Cork is a case in point: he uses the reading of this relatively obscure family to extrapolate to what might have been available and the vectors by which it might have arrived in early modern Ireland. Instance on instance, story on story, set out the parameters of the work.

This novel approach challenges the reader and Barnard assumes a good deal of basic knowledge on the reader's part. Not only the chapter arrangement but also, at times, the arrangement of material within chapters, can make it an arduous, if compelling, read: the at times abrupt movement between different time periods – the instances come thick and fast but often from different ends of the eighteenth century in a way which is sometimes difficult

to follow. On a more substantive note, Barnard rightly reminds us of the importance of the European literature of the past, arguing that we ignore this 'colossal ballast' at our peril when discussing the habit of readers and collectors in early modern Ireland, yet he does not really attempt to come to grips with this essential feature of the Irish book trade: book auctions are mentioned but never examined in any great detail. One might argue that in a book whose title is *Brought to Book. Print in Ireland, 1680-1784* the emphasis is rightly on the output of the Irish presses, but Barnard's book goes well beyond this to provide us with a social history of print in Ireland. And, as he says himself, print in Ireland was heavily dependent on imports from abroad.

These are, however, minor caveats with what is a phenomenal piece of scholarship. For those who persevere, there are untold riches: indeed the footnotes alone make this book essential reading for anyone interested in the history of the book in Ireland. A quotation about Richard Parr's *Life of Archbishop Ussher*, cited by Barnard, admirably describes Barnard's own work: 'it will be seasonable as long as the examples of good and excellent persons are necessary.'

*Elizabethanne Boran, PhD is Librarian of the Edward Worth Library, Dublin*