

# Reading Ireland

PRINT, READING AND SOCIAL CHANGE  
IN EARLY MODERN IRELAND



RAYMOND GILLESPIE

# Reading Ireland



Manchester University Press

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in early modern Ireland

RAYMOND GILLESPIE

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## Preface



To some extent the task of writing a book about the past is rather like trying to formulate a response to Archimedes' problem of how to find a place to stand in order to move the earth. Finding such a place to observe, even without moving, the world of early modern Ireland is not an easy task. Traditionally our understanding of that world has been filtered through the lenses of war, plantation and colonisation. More recent work has placed the historian at other vantage points, offering new perspectives from the localities, the world of death and burial and that of popular religious ideas. This book uses yet another vantage point, developed elsewhere, to observe early modern Ireland from a different perspective. In other contexts the history of books has proved to be an important focal point around which ideas about social, cultural and political change can cluster and be tested. The work of Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton, David Hall, D.R. Woolf and D.F. McKenzie, among others, has served to release the history of the book from being simply a bibliographical exercise, describing the material form of printed books, to one which sets the book in its cultural, economic and social context. In particular, by understanding how communities involved with the world of print, as producers, distributors and readers, put printed artefacts to use in daily life, it is possible to reconstruct something of the social and cultural topographies of those worlds. That is the task and the approach to the past that this book attempts for early modern Ireland.

Much of the evidence on which this book draws, and particularly the evidence of the books themselves, is well known. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century bibliographers, such as E. McClintock Dix, Richard Best, R.J. Hayes, W.K. Sessions and most recently Tony Sweeney, have done much fundamental work in identifying surviving imprints and in cataloguing the output of the Irish presses. More recently Mary Pollard's monumental *Dictionary of members of the Dublin book trade, 1550–1800* (London, 2000) has allowed us to put some flesh on the stark imprints by charting the careers of printers and booksellers. The way I have used that evidence is, I think, rather different from that in which bibliographers have proceeded although there are clearly overlaps and the first part of this book, in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, is heavily dependent on the pioneering work of others. My perspective differs also from the way in which intellectual historians have approached print, searching for evidence of formal sets of propositions about God, the physical world or the life of the mind. In the main I am not concerned with the history of ideas at a high social level or the world of the university or of learned society. Rather this is a book about the social and cultural history of books throughout society. To do this I have examined books not simply for their physical make up or the ideas they contain, although both of these are important attributes of the printed word, but rather in an attempt to understand how books, and the

world of print generally, were used in early modern Ireland. This process of using books I have termed reading, and it lies at the centre of Part III in Chapters 5 to 7. As such, reading is not a simple decoding of symbols on a page which separated the formally literate from the illiterate, a cleavage which some have seen as underpinning much of the social differentiation in early-modern societies. Recent research, however, has highlighted the fact that those two worlds are not mutually exclusive. Those who were technically 'illiterate' could use books, and other documents, in that they understood how, if necessary, to manipulate them in particular social contexts. In that sense the world of reading and writing serves to shape, and to be shaped by, the experiences of the everyday world. As Carlo Ginzburg's portrait of Menocchio, the miller from Friuli, in *The cheese and the worms* (1980) demonstrates, reading is a complex issue in which readers deploy different strategies in understanding the printed word, and in doing so restore agency to the reader.

This book has been written over a long period of time. It is, in some sense, a successor to an earlier book, *Devoted people: belief and religion in early modern Ireland* (Manchester, 1997). That book was concerned about what it meant to be religious in early modern Ireland and argued for the importance of experience, rather than formally expressed doctrine or institutions, in shaping the religious worlds. Some of those questions are revisited in Chapter 6 below. However, this book is an attempt to broaden the argument of *Devoted people* and ask what it was like to live with a wider range of experiences in early modern Ireland. As such it is a book about meanings, or how contemporaries constructed the world around them and were, in turn, shaped by those constructions. I use the world of print as the focus, and reading as a way of understanding how people constructed print, in which many were involved, to begin to formulate answers to the problem of reconstructing the experience of the early modern Irish world. Inevitably, as I have discussed other aspects of early modern Irish society in articles and conference papers I have considered various aspects of the role print may have had in those diverse worlds. Thus some of what I have to say here is already published, and textual critics will have no difficulty in tracing it. In particular I have drawn on two earlier articles on 'The circulation of print in seventeenth-century Ireland' in *Studia Hibernica* no. 29 (1995–97), pp. 31–58, and 'Reading the Bible in seventeenth-century Ireland' in Bernadette Cunningham and Máire Kennedy (eds), *The experience of reading: Irish historical perspectives* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 10–38. Nevertheless, I am confident that enough that is new has crept in to justify the purchase price of this volume.

This is a survey of the world of reading and writing over a period of two hundred years. It is not a subject which has attracted much attention from historians hitherto and hence the secondary literature is limited. I have been forced back into the jungle of primary sources in an endeavour to find patterns in the making and using of print. The scattered nature of that evidence means that I have had to draw on the knowledge and good will of two groups of people. The first is the librarians and archivists who have charge of the material cited in the notes and bibliography. Without exception, in a time of overstretched resources, they have been unfailingly helpful and without the patience and kindness this book



## *Preface*

could not have been written. The second group is those who have provided me with references or have sent me on new and profitable trails by their suggestions. In particular I would like to thank Toby Barnard, Jimmy Kelly, Brian Mac Cuarta, Giles Mandelbrote, Maighr  ad N   Mhurchadha and Tony Sweeney. In addition Toby Barnard read the entire text and, in the manner of an eighteenth-century landlord, improved it a great deal. The remaining blemishes are the result of my wilfulness rather than his generous chiding. In other practical ways I am indebted to John McLoughlin and Virginia Davis whose kindness made a good deal of the research possible. Like *Devoted people* this book is published by Manchester University Press which is made manifest in history editor Alison Welsby. In this case she, and the press, have had their patience severely tried by a wayward author who has insisted on being diverted down the byways of history instead of getting on with the business in hand. I trust that their faith has finally been translated into good works. More than any others two people are responsible for what follows. The first is Penny Woods, librarian of the Russell Library in NUI Maynooth, who in 1994 offered me the chance to talk at a conference organised by the Rare Books Group of the Library Association of Ireland on the book trade outside the pale. My resolute refusal of the invitation was met by an equally, though probably misguided, resolute insistence that I was the only person who could do this. The result was that a vague interest in the history of books, which most historians possess, was crystallised into a concrete research project with which I have lived, intermittently, for the last ten years. Over that period I have been encouraged, criticised, given much practical help and distracted by Bernadette Cunningham, who has made this book possible in ways which are too numerous to mention. While both Penny and Bernie deserve many thanks neither is to blame for what follows.

As with most explorations into early modern Ireland the nature of the evidence and the historiography dictates that there will be lacunae in this analysis, and unanswered questions remain. The nature of the evidence means that not enough has been said about the detail of the geography of book availability, which is clearly an important question in assessing the social and cultural impact of print. Given the space available I have not been able to say much about language change, which is also clearly an important area, but recent work in this area by Pat Palmer and Vincent Carey has made this a less pressing, though far from resolved, problem to which I hope to return. If this book serves to provoke others to try to resolve some of these problems, or indeed others, then it will have achieved at least one of its aims.

## Note on the text



In order to make the text as accessible as possible the spelling of quotations has been modernised and punctuation added to make the meaning more comprehensible. Titles of early modern printed books have been modernised and limited publication details have been given. Full details will be found in the CD Rom version of the *English short title catalogue, 1473–1800* (3rd edn, London, 2003). All dates have been given in Old Style except that the year has been taken to begin on 1 January. In the notes, references have been given in their most accessible form and where adequate editions of texts or reprints of early-modern printed works exist these have been used. Calendars of documents are cited when the calendar entry provides enough information to illustrate the argument. In the footnotes references are given in full when a work is cited for the first time in a chapter and it is subsequently abbreviated in that chapter. Document collections are not described in the notes but descriptions are included in the bibliography although genuinely miscellaneous collections have not been so described.

# Abbreviations



The following abbreviations have been used in the notes:

B.L.	British Library, London
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
<i>Cal. S. P. dom</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic</i>
<i>Cal. S. P. Ire.</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers relating to Ireland</i>
H.M.C.	Historical Manuscripts Commission
N.A.	National Archives, Dublin
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland, Dublin
N.L.W.	National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
P.R.O.	The National Archives, Public Record Office, London
P.R.O.N.I.	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast
R.C.B.	Representative Church Body Library, Dublin
T.C.D.	Trinity College, Dublin

## Part I



# The conditions of print



## Chapter 1

# The social meaning of print

Historians have not been slow to appreciate the importance of print in early modern European history. The success of seismic shifts in religious and intellectual life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been, at least in part, attributed to the invention and diffusion of printing across Europe in this period. In the view of one of the first modern accounts of the history of the book, 'the printed book was one of the most effective means of mastery over the whole world'.<sup>1</sup> For some early modern people also print was an important force in shaping their lives and the world around them. The English Protestant martyrologist John Foxe regarded print as a providential gift from God which allowed the shackles of Rome to be shaken off and the true light of the Gospel to dawn.<sup>2</sup> How print actually worked in the early modern world is now less clear than it may have appeared to Foxe and his contemporaries. For some modern historians, such as Elizabeth Eisenstein, the 'print revolution' was about the process of printing, especially the increasing of output of works, the standardisation of texts and the preservation of documents. However the technology of print which such explanations emphasise was not, of itself, an agent of change in Ireland. In economic terms, the technology of print was of limited significance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ireland, employing no more than a handful of individuals on a full-time basis. For those who imported printed material it remained a small part of the cargoes in the holds of their ships. Rather it is only when the products of the printing press are embedded in a social, religious and political context that their significance becomes clear. From this perspective the revolution which print engendered is a more complex affair, operating over a longer time-scale and as much concerned with the reception of the printed word as about its production.<sup>3</sup> Reading as much as printing is central to this approach, yet reading, like writing or printing, was not a neutral process. Texts, whether manuscript or print, were read in particular contexts. Churches,

for instance, instructed their followers how to read the Bible, and lawyers and politicians thought they knew how statutes could best be read. These social, political, economic, institutional and cultural frames which surrounded both reading and printing provide a point of departure in understanding the world of print in early modern Ireland.

## I

In 1689 the Cork Williamite and future lord chancellor of Ireland Richard Cox, passing his exile from Jacobite-controlled Ireland in London, wrote a history of his native country. He concluded his address to the reader in the second part of the history, which dealt with the events nearest his own time, by observing 'when these windings and revolutions will end God almighty knows'.<sup>4</sup> Later historians have followed Cox's lead in describing early modern Ireland as an age of dramatic, indeed revolutionary, change. It was, according to T.W. Moody's introduction to the third volume of the *New history of Ireland*, 'above all an age of disruption ... more catastrophic and far-reaching than anything Ireland had experienced since the Anglo-Norman invasion of the twelfth century or was to experience again till the great famine, the land war and the struggle for national independence'.<sup>5</sup> Some would go further and, like Cox, characterise the events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a revolution. Roy Foster, for instance, has characterised the eighteenth-century Irish experience as owing 'everything to the fundamental and protracted revolution of the seventeenth century'.<sup>6</sup>

Evidence for this sense of early modern Ireland as a revolutionary age is not wanting. In some respects it shared in processes that can be traced in outline across early modern Europe. The centralisation of authority in Dublin after the end of the Nine Years' War in 1603 and the undermining of powerful local magnates such as Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone, for example, reflect trends at work elsewhere in Europe also. The state increasingly monopolised violence and the machinery of war at the expense of local nobilities. Similarly the economic transformation of Ireland, with the rise of a market economy and the greater commercialisation of economic life, echoed a broader European process. In religious terms too, the progress of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in Ireland needs to be seen in a European context, if only to emphasise some of the aberrant features of the Irish experience.

In other areas the development of Irish society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was unique. The composition of the Irish social and political elite underwent a dramatic shift in the years between 1580 and 1700. The Irish peerage summoned to the parliament of 1585 was drawn from five Gaelic or Gaelicised families and twenty Old English landed families, the descendants of the medieval Anglo-Norman settlers. By the end of the

seventeenth century, of the fifty-nine elite families who were summoned to the House of Lords thirty-nine (or about two-thirds) were drawn from New English settler families who had arrived in the country in the half century before 1641. A further five were from settler families of post-1641 origin. Old English families had thirteen representatives while just two were of native Irish extraction. The changing composition of this parliament reflects a major transfer of power from one social group to another.<sup>7</sup> Underpinning this transfer of political influence was a dramatic shift in the pattern of Irish landownership as land passed from Catholic to Protestant landowners through both formal plantation and informal colonisation. However, the traditional estimates of the fall in the proportion of Irish land held by Catholics from 61 per cent in 1641 to 22 per cent in 1688 and by 1703, after the Williamite land settlement, to 15 per cent may be too sweeping.<sup>8</sup> The simple equations of Protestant with settler, and Catholic with native are far from being perfect. At least some new settlers, such as the Hamilton family, earls of Abercorn in Ulster or the Browne family, Lords Altamont in Mayo, were Catholic. Again some of the former Catholic families, such as the Butlers, earls of Ormond, converted to Protestantism. Yet the shift in landholding patterns is striking enough to delineate, at least in outline, the decline of one elite and its replacement by another.

Such patterns of change are the stuff of history but they are rarely as simple as they appear at first glance. Only occasionally is it possible to see anything which might even resemble a single, coherent revolution. Irish Catholics may have lost land but in many cases they retained considerable social prestige. As Archbishop Oliver Plunkett noted in Ulster during the 1670s, many of the 'ancient vassals' who were now reduced to the rank of tenants to new settlers 'are more or less so well disposed to their former overlords that they always give them some contribution'.<sup>9</sup> It may have been easy to effect a change in land ownership but social attitudes proved more difficult to alter. In the sphere of religion, too, it is possible to map out the institutional revolution that took place in early modern Ireland. However, the effects of these developments on religious belief are much more problematical because the laity shaped their own ideas about God for day to day use in the world.<sup>10</sup> Changes in the various spheres of human existence happened at differential rates. Some areas of experience, such as belief or social attitudes, shifted only slowly while other aspects, such as economic status or institutional change, responded more quickly to external stimuli.<sup>11</sup> To this already complex situation it is necessary to add a consideration of regional variation in the distribution of power and wealth. Such variations in power and wealth help to explain why Ulster, where the social and political vacuum which followed the 1607 flight to Europe of the northern earls allowed a major social engineering project to be carried out, was so different to Longford where local native families devised



survival strategies to minimise the impact of plantation.<sup>12</sup> All of this suggests that early modern Ireland did not undergo a single revolution but rather a series of interlinked revolutions moving at varying speeds. Their differential progress in different parts of the country may go some way to explaining not only the highly localised nature of early modern Irish society but also why large-scale movements, such as the Reformation, comprising a series of linked revolutions in institutions and beliefs, had the character that they did.

For the historian, this understanding of early modern Ireland gives rise to the problem of observing these various, overlapping revolutions in action. This book uses the perspective of the world of print as a vantage point from which to observe the shifts in early modern Irish society. To do this it exploits two important attributes of print. First, the printed word had a material form and hence by examining how it was created, traded and owned as a commodity it is possible to chart some of the economic changes that took place in early modern Ireland as a traditional exchange economy gave way to a more commercial one. However print as a commodity had a greater significance than simply revealing the workings of the marketplace since print, especially in the form of books, was an important marker of status for its owners in this new commercial world. The accumulation of a library by a gentleman, even if none of the books was read, was an important sign of a person's social and economic position. Thus the rise of the world of print provides an insight into social change as Ireland moved from a Gaelic polity, which relied on oral traditions to preserve and spread ideas, to a more Anglicised one, in which books conveyed thoughts but also allowed their owner to display in physical form his real or imagined erudition. The second important attribute of print was that it had the potential to transmit ideas. Those ideas did not exist in a vacuum but rather were appropriated by those who came into contact with them through the process of reading. In practice, reading was a technique which deployed a much wider range of skills than simply the technical mastery required to decode letter forms. How people understood the printed texts with which they came into contact was a complex process as they absorbed the ideas they found on the page and applied them to their own worlds. Chapters 3 and 4 of this book exploit the first attribute of print, its existence as commodity, to chart some of the revolutions that took place in the supply of books in the early modern period. Chapters 5 to 7 deal with the second attribute of print by attempting to construct how contemporaries used the books they had bought, borrowed, stolen or heard others read aloud. In so doing these chapters chart something of the ways in which the inhabitants of early modern Ireland perceived their world and how that world was shaped by its representation in print. The expansion of print was contingent on one other important variable that needs to be examined. Print depended on a world in which the social rules for writing were well

established. Chapter 2 deals with the significant shift in the social context that took place in early modern Ireland which enabled writing to become an accepted part of that world. It was that revolution which allowed the other linked revolutions that accompanied print to flourish. The remainder of this first chapter will deal with another aspect of the social context of print, its social meaning, and with what contemporaries thought of the material and intellectual commodity that printing with movable type brought to Ireland.

## II

There was a wide range of attitudes towards the printed word in early modern Ireland. Some of those who came into contact with print were enthusiastic about it. Thomas Gent, the York printer who was born in Dublin and served his unhappy apprenticeship to Patrick Campbell in the city, declared in his early eighteenth-century verse autobiography

Printing is sure a fine and curious art  
Esteemed by princes, great and mighty men  
Because the things obscure it doth impart  
More quick than numbers e'er could do by pen;  
So cheap withal – what manuscripts contain  
As saves the world of time with little pain.<sup>13</sup>

The late seventeenth-century Presbyterian minister of Benburb, County Tyrone, John Kennedy, would have agreed, declaring in his notebook that the invention of printing led to 'knowledge [being] greatly increased in men's minds'. In particular, he noted that printing had put the Bible into widespread circulation 'and every one applied to find out the meaning of the original' and communicate it to others rather than have that knowledge confined to clergy.<sup>14</sup> From a different confessional position Thomas Bourke, the printer to the Catholic Confederation of the 1640s, also extolled the power of print in a preface to one of his printed works. Of books, he claimed,

without the print many either lie hidden in obscure angles or are moth eaten in old desks or hutches or finally buried in perpetual oblivion. I might therefore say much of the incomparable good and benefit that doth redound to the Commonwealth by the print of which the Catholics of this kingdom were deprived since the revolt from the true religion, which was not the less of their sufferings, or the meanest prejudice done to their learned men ... But now it hath pleased God after so long pressures and afflictions to dispose so of the affairs of the Catholics of this kingdom necessitated to take arms ... that among other blessings they also have a print, I am confident that the studies and brave works of learned men shall shortly come to light for the public good ... wherefore gentle reader, with this my labour in the press confident that to thine use I will shortly publish other learned works which hitherto, through the iniquity of former times lay lurking in darkness.<sup>15</sup>

From yet a third perspective, that of Gaelic Ireland, print also appeared attractive. By the early seventeenth century the preserving power of print was viewed by some as a way of capturing the history and culture of a traditional world that appeared under threat. In 1642 Rory O'More, one of those who had planned the rising of the previous year, in a fit of enthusiasm for the study of Irish history wished that 'those learned and religious fathers in Louvain did come over in haste with their monuments and with an Irish and Latin print'.<sup>16</sup> Certainly by the beginning of the eighteenth century one native Irish scribe was so entranced by the world of print that he scribbled two long notes on its history in the margins of a manuscript he was writing.<sup>17</sup>

Others were less certain of the benefits of print. For some, print, with its ability to circulate ideas widely, could be a source of disruption. As Dean George Rust declared in a preface to a funeral sermon in 1663, 'I am well aware how indiscreet it is to expose that to the eye which was intended but for the ear'.<sup>18</sup> In the field of politics many contemporaries were well aware of the problems which print could cause. When the secretary of the Kilkenny Confederation, Richard Bellings, came to write his memoirs in the 1670s he refused to allow them to be printed, despite many rumours that they would be, because he feared the divisions which the unrestricted circulation of the work would create. Instead they seem to have circulated widely in the more traditional and restrictive form of manuscript.<sup>19</sup> Again the desire to minimise widespread conflict may lie behind the duke of Ormond's unwillingness to enter into a printed debate with the earl of Anglesea in the 1680s.<sup>20</sup> In religion too, fear of fracturing local, delicately balanced relations may well be one factor in explaining the near absence of locally printed works of religious controversy in early modern Ireland. While in England the presses produced several hundred controversial works in the reign of James I alone, the Irish press produced almost none. One explanation for such difference may lie in the fact that those who wished to attack Catholicism had to do so without creating tensions with the Catholic majority in Ireland. Thus, controlled discussion and circulation of manuscript tracts rather than the shotgun effect of print were the preferred options. It may also help to explain the care which Bishop King took to manage the controversy which he generated with the Presbyterians in the 1690s by attempting to restrict circulation of his printed tracts.<sup>21</sup>

The power to disrupt, some felt, was the result of the anonymous property of print, appearing cold on a page, which it was argued was more durable and reliable and so some gave more credit to it than rumour. One pamphleteer of the 1640s, for instance, complained of the fabulous pamphlets printed about the rising in Ireland which were 'making credulous people to believe such things as are contrived from their [the pamphleteers'] hellish brains'.<sup>22</sup> Again during the political crises of the popish plot in the early 1680s the Irish chief

governor, the duke of Ormond, complained of allegations being made that his sympathies lay with Catholics, 'yet if it get into a narrative thousands will swallow it as truth and against this there is no [de]fence. The credulous that trust in print will never leave or consider whether it be material or no.'<sup>23</sup> Whatever about the individual words of print, the printed book, used as a prop in argument, could also carry authority which could be used to reinforce spoken messages. The physical power of the printed book to persuade people, particularly those who could not read it, in a way that oral recitation would not is suggested by the events surrounding a gathering in a house in Dublin in November 1641. One man, George Hackett, 'drew a little book which the examinant [Bartholomew Lennon] knewest was an almanac and there read the names of divers persons which the said Hackett said were the principal rebels'. Hackett, according to his own deposition, was able to sign his name while most of the others were not. He was clearly using the book as a prop in his performance to convince others to whom the contents of the book would be seen as mysterious. The book probably did not contain any such list of names since none of the surviving almanacs does but it was sufficient that his audience believed it might.<sup>24</sup> A rather similar performance occurred in early 1642 in Tipperary during the siege of a castle when one of the besiegers took an unspecified book from his pocket and swore that if those holding the castle came out they would be released.<sup>25</sup> Again the book as prop helped convince.

The enthusiasm, albeit guarded at times, which contemporaries expressed for the printed word did not sweep all before it. Print was seen as being appropriate to particular circumstances. As the duke of Ormond commented of one work in 1678, 'it is too long to pass to many hands in any other way than by printing and that I do not think it or the subject worth'.<sup>26</sup> Print settled down as another means of communication alongside speech and the written word of the manuscript. What began as speech often made its way into manuscript and subsequently into print.<sup>27</sup> Sermons, for example, might move through all three media. According to Henry Jones, the bishop of Meath, one of his sermons which was printed in 1676 'at first was intended but for that honourable auditory [at Christ Church cathedral, Dublin]' but

being awakened by an imperfect copy taken while it was in speaking which I understood to have been dispersed I know not how far and might be (I feared) to the prejudice of the truth and to the advantage of adversaries I therefore conceded to the revising and publishing thereof for avoiding those inconveniences declaring this and none other to be what I own.

To fit into the new medium of print 'something also is added for further enlargement which might better pass (I conceive) in writing than speaking'.<sup>28</sup> Again what began in print might well end up in speech. The Protestant polemicist Barnaby Rich claimed that after the publication of his *New description*

*of Ireland* in 1610 he happened to be at the house of a Dublin alderman 'where a woman began to pick quarrels both at me and my work, belying and slandering both it and me and with such false and untrue reports that a number of those that had never seen the book itself believed all to be true that she reported'. Rich was ostracised on the basis of reports of his book rather than the printed work itself although as he observed 'the book is extant to be seen and to answer for itself'.<sup>29</sup>

In many respects oral communication continued to dominate the world of early modern Ireland. The tradition of story telling, for example, remained strong although by the end of the seventeenth century many traditional tales had been committed to manuscript form for recitation.<sup>30</sup> In some contexts oral forms were preferred to written ones. As one Irish scribe wrote in the margin of a manuscript he was working on in 1679, 'A blessing on the souls of good reciters that used to be who could speak this to me and not weary me [by having to write it down]'.<sup>31</sup> Face to face communication could achieve things that writing could not. As Oliver Plunkett, the archbishop of Armagh, observed of one of his Franciscan adversaries during a dispute, 'I shall write to Coppinger ... but a man to man conversation would accomplish a great deal more than an impersonal letter and I would say many things to him face to face which I do not think it suitable to put on paper ... he would be able to show my letter and boast about it'.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore written documents could be forged, a point which religious controversialists made great play of with Catholic writers claiming that Protestants had inserted material into the Bible or the Church Fathers.<sup>33</sup> Documents could also be lost and because of this could be deemed less reliable than oral testimony provided by an individual whose trustworthiness was recognised. The reliability of such memory could be tested against the wider communal memory and with reference to the standing of the witness in the community. This may help to explain why in property boundary disputes the oral evidence of 'old men' was often preferred to written descriptions of boundaries, since boundary markers could be moved or destroyed and documents could be altered. Even in the 1660s when Drogheda corporation had maps of their property they still fretted that the 'ancient men' who knew the property boundaries would die because then the real boundaries of the corporation's property would be uncertain.<sup>34</sup> To this end rituals enacted to remember property and jurisdictional boundaries were an important aid to memory. In the case of Drogheda the corporation reinstituted the riding of the franchises so that the boundary of the town's authority would be remembered. In a 1639 case involving the Christ Church cathedral property of Astagob in County Dublin, for which deeds certainly existed, a number of witnesses described an elaborate ritual in which five or six men perambulated the meres of the property. In one case Nicholas Crenan, a man in his late fifties in 1639, described how 'he was whipped at the Hoar stone

[a boundary marker] upon mereing of the said land with the other boys of his parish when he was ten years of age'. Others described being whipped at another part of the mereing 'to the end that he might take notice of the mereing aforesaid'.<sup>35</sup> Memory and oral testimony were clearly more important than the written document in such contexts. They also had the advantage of simplicity since the record of the past was only as old as the memory of the oldest living person and hence could easily be reshaped to remove potential conflicts between past and present.

Many in early modern Ireland were inclined to rely on oral evidence to understand the world and its past. Others, particularly of a scholarly tradition, which placed its faith in writing, increasingly turned to manuscript records for their evidence about the Irish past and tended to trust such texts over the oral tradition.<sup>36</sup> In doing so they tended to remake the Irish past in the image of the present, as having been a literate world in which documents were important. The antiquarian Conall Mac Geoghegan, for instance, preparing his translation of the Annals of Clonmacnoise in 1627, recreated the past in an acceptable, literate form. He stressed the importance of the written word for those in Ireland's past and equated civility with literacy and books arguing that the Viking wars meant that the Irish 'were grown rude and altogether illiterate' and more recent loss of books had led to ignorance.<sup>37</sup> Those of the Gaelic learned class in early seventeenth-century Ireland repeatedly deferred to manuscripts as sources of authority. In the poetic dispute known as the 'Contention of the bards', at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the contenders referred each other to manuscripts as proofs of their arguments. As one participant in the debate argued, 'let him who would challenge me rub it out from the books'.<sup>38</sup> In some cases the list of manuscripts was very specific and many of the same works, which clearly held considerable authority, were used by both historians and poets writing about the Irish past in the seventeenth century.<sup>39</sup> It would be wrong to assume that such manuscript volumes existed in isolation. They were subject to interpretation from within the oral tradition because the literate standards of documentation could not be uniformly or readily applied in every case since literate ways of transacting business developed only slowly. Contradictions between the oral and written interpretations of the past sometimes needed to be resolved. In the poetic 'Contention' the manuscript tradition was juxtaposed with the oral tradition of poetry, and the Old English historian of the 1630s, Geoffrey Keating, also referred his readers to the oral tradition of poetry on which he based some of his interpretations. Such a method of presenting evidence was modelled on much older historical texts.<sup>40</sup>

Much of what was written in Irish in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries remained in manuscript. The limited market for works requiring Irish type meant that it was uneconomic to print such texts unless a large

subvention was forthcoming from church or state which, with a few exceptions, it was not. Significant capital investment in paper, the largest cost in book production, and storage for books which did not sell quickly was simply not possible in an undercapitalised business. As a result works in Irish tended to be published scribally. Geoffrey Keating's *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*, for instance, circulated widely in seventeenth-century Ireland in manuscript form.<sup>41</sup> Such scribal publication was not confined to Irish-language works. For English-language texts also scribal publication was an approved way of circulating information in certain social contexts. Manuscripts of the works of literary coteries, such as that which existed around Katherine Philips in Dublin in the 1660s, certainly circulated widely among intended audiences.<sup>42</sup>

Rigid demarcations between the worlds of manuscript and print are not possible. Contemporaries distinguished only slowly between the two forms of communication. The earl of Kildare in the 1520s did not differentiate between manuscripts and printed works when he listed his books.<sup>43</sup> Differentiation appeared first in institutional collections and the early library catalogues of Trinity College, Dublin, did not include manuscripts because they were listed separately. By the 1620s, when the library of Limerick cathedral was listed, there too manuscripts and printed books were carefully distinguished.<sup>44</sup> However, printed books and manuscripts circulated in the same worlds. While the distribution of printed books improved greatly in the seventeenth century there were some who could not obtain their own personal copy of works which they wanted, particularly in the case of illegally imported Catholic works. One Franciscan, Connor MacParlane, for instance copied a printed devotional tract, available in Dublin in the 1680s, into his own commonplace book and also compiled a theological miscellany for his own use.<sup>45</sup> Again by the end of the seventeenth century a professional scribe had put Bonaventure Ó Eodhasa's *An teagasc Críosaíde*, printed in Louvain in 1611, into manuscript again, and in Dublin, Cavan and Fermanagh printed catechisms were also being copied by scribes.<sup>46</sup>

Print, like handwritten texts, was not intended to exist in isolation. It was intended to perform social functions, as manuscript publication and oral communication were also intended to do. Contemporaries recognised that print had a particular purpose within the range of possible ways of publication. The early seventeenth-century godly preacher Richard Olmstead prefaced one collection of his Irish sermons with the words 'as a picture expreseth not the life, so neither can writing demonstrate the lively energy of the voice which consists of an utterance and action, the two ornaments of speech'.<sup>47</sup> As the late seventeenth-century Dublin Presbyterian minister Robert Chambers expressed it, 'there is as much difference between hearing and reading, between a lively voice and breathless lines as much as is between cold meat and hot'.<sup>48</sup> Sermons, for example, were intended to be heard rather than printed and

read. When a sermon moved from the medium of oral delivery to the printed word, significant changes were necessary to accommodate it to the new medium. Print allowed the sort of extended meditation on words that the performance medium of the sermon did not. As John Murcot claimed, when a sermon preached by him in Christ Church, Dublin, went into print in 1656, it would be useful to 'those whose frail memories may have lost the greater part of the sense of it and by a humble reading and meditation of it may do more good to those that have altogether been unacquainted with it'.<sup>49</sup> Such printed works did not rely on the presence of the minister to convey the authority of what was said; rather the meaning of the text was to be divined by a reader, possibly in consultation with others in a textual community.<sup>50</sup> One contemporary certainly adopted this strategy by annotating his copy of a Dublin printed sermon by the godly minister Faithful Teate with additional scriptural references. His annotations supported the argument and amended some of the printed references supplied in the text.<sup>51</sup>

While books and printed ephemera certainly carried ideas within the context of a wider communications network, they did not stop at that. Books were also creators of sociability. Books as gifts helped to bond particular groups together. In the 1560s the English jurist William Staunford sent a copy of his recently published book to his friend the Catholic palesman Nicholas Nugent, later chief justice of the common pleas.<sup>52</sup> In this case Protestant and Catholic found common space in the printed word of the law. In the late seventeenth century an English member of the Royal Society, Robert Plot, happily sent copies of his books to the Irish scientist and political philosopher William Molyneux.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore the borrowing and lending of books helped to cement social bonds. Both Luke Challoner, one of the first fellows of Trinity College, Dublin, and the early seventeenth-century archbishop of Armagh James Ussher opened their libraries to their friends. Some of these were clerical borrowers either in Dublin or in Trinity College itself but there were a number of lay friends who borrowed works on politics, history, geography and medicine, and a few borrowed devotional works. In some cases such contacts could produce what appear strange links. Ussher and David Rothe, the Catholic polemicist and future Catholic bishop of Ossory, for instance were on book and manuscript exchanging terms in the early 1620s. In turn Ussher borrowed from others.<sup>54</sup> In late seventeenth-century Dublin the Quaker Joseph Carleton, apparently with a much smaller collection, recorded in a notebook the books which he lent to others, crossing them out as they were returned.<sup>55</sup> Such communal sharing of books could create particular bonds between groups of people. In 1705, for instance, a group of Presbyterian ministers and students came together to form the Belfast Society at which they could read and discuss the books they read. A circular of 1720 described that