

## Foreword

### Print Culture in Early Modern France

The articles which we have gathered in this special issue of *The Irish Journal of French Studies* share a common approach to the history of print culture in early modern France. This approach considers that the role the printed works of the period played as cultural instruments which reflect, shape or support the ideas, prejudices or tastes of the milieus which created and received them cannot be properly evaluated if the material and commercial conditions in which they were produced are not taken into account. As illustrated by the different contributions to this volume, the bridging of the gap between 'production' history and 'reception' history, two modes of research that until recently were sometimes judged separate and self-sufficient, gives rise to a variety of methodological approaches and analyses that enrich our understanding of the complex factors inflecting early modern print culture.

One such approach, for example, points to how commercial rivalries between early modern printers/publishers, together with piracy, contributed to the success of a particular genre (Riffaud); another points to the ways in which the anonymous compilation of sources may have enabled a publisher to direct an edition at a readership with a particular ideological viewpoint without appearing to commit himself to it (Emerson); another examines how an astute publisher could seize upon the opportunity offered by translation to find a market for a text originally aimed at a different readership and culture (Baxter).

Recent scholarship on the history of the book has seen an increased awareness of the necessity to valorize the co-existence of manuscript and print cultures, and indeed oral and print cultures.

After the difficulties that faced the trade during the politico-religious troubles of the sixteenth century, French book publishing took off again in the following century and expanded both in terms of the number of volumes printed and the size of the print runs. But this development, together with a significant rise in literacy rates, should not blind us to the fact that early modern French culture remained nonetheless largely oral and visual. This is the case not only for popular culture, which goes without saying, but also for the culture of the elites. Two contributions to this volume consider the complex interaction between printed text and oral text (Whelan), and between verbal and visual media (Meyer). In the first case, the analysis focuses on the ways in which the printing of sermons could turn a Protestant preacher into an author, although simultaneously lessening the impact of the *ex-tempore* effect of performance on the reader/spectator. In the second case, we are reminded how visual images, when well conceived and set in a symbiotic relation to the text, could elevate a witty parody in verse of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to the ranks of the splendid editions produced in Italy and Lyon during the previous century.

Historians — even book historians — often take the survival of early printed material on which they work for granted. Indeed much material has been lost forever, particularly 'livres d'usage' such as books of piety or school-books, but it is astonishing that so many copies of so many editions have survived dispersion and neglect through time. They owe their survival not only to their selection and preservation in emerging institutional libraries but to past and present bibliophiles and to those who have catered for them, the antiquarian booksellers of yesterday and today. It is fitting therefore that a collection of essays which focus frequently, albeit not exclusively, on rare editions should also include studies (Brooks and Pittion) of two remarkable examples of book-collecting separated by more than three centuries (that of Bouhéreau and of Aspin), whose vision and erudition resulted in the preservation of rare and fragile material that would have otherwise been lost.

It will not escape the notice of readers that most of the editions and collections discussed here are found in the older collections of two major Dublin libraries, the Old Library of Trinity College Dublin and Marsh's Library. Such is the extraordinary wealth of early modern French material in Dublin research libraries, including the Edward Worth Library and the Chester Beatty Library, that a collection of nine essays cannot do it justice. However, it is our hope that the contributions to this special issue of (fittingly) *The Irish Journal of French Studies*, in addition to contributing to scholarship concerning the early modern book, will also draw attention to the wealth and diversity of these holdings of early printed material, highlight Dublin's literary heritage from a perspective that is rarely seen, and encourage further research.

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