

'Literary Food' for the American Market: Patrick Byrne's Exports to Mathew Carey

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ON SEPTEMBER 18, 1788, Patrick Byrne, bookseller in Dublin, wrote to Mathew Carey in Philadelphia, informing him that he had sent him an unsolicited parcel of books, to sell as best he could in his own shop or by auction.¹ This was the start of an extensive business between these two men which was to last over twenty-five years. The course of their dealings is remarkably well documented in Carey's account books at the American Antiquarian Society and in his correspondence at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Carey, who had emigrated from his native Dublin in 1784, was to do extensive business with many of his acquaintances in the Dublin book trade—John Chambers, Bernard Dornin, Thomas McDonnell, the Rices among them—but Byrne was his largest Irish supplier.² It is therefore appropriate to use their relationship as a case study for exploring the little understood area of Irish book trade exports at the end of the eighteenth century—the details of transport, customs, payment, distribution, and the type of books involved.

1. Lea and Febiger papers: Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter HSP). I am grateful to James N. Green for identifying and copying the letters of both Carey and Byrne from this source.

2. Richard Cargill Cole, *Irish Booksellers and English Writers 1740–1800* (London: Mansell, 1986), 49.

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In the eighteenth century the export of books from Ireland to the colonies was prohibited by the Navigation Acts until 1778. However, as direct imports of the goods that would have paid for the books were forbidden, even then the legitimate trade was effectively stifled. It was not until 1780 that free trade both ways was allowed. The effect was immediate. The declared value of unbound exports shot up from about £100 in 1780 to £2,600 in 1783, the bulk going to North America. In the twenty years prior to 1780 books worth £1,857 are recorded as having been exported in the Irish customs ledgers, while in a similar period after 1780 the total was nearly £10,000.³ It was on the crest of this wave of exports that Byrne sent his unsolicited parcel: '... if this trade should be to your advantage and mine,' he wrote in his letter, 'I can give a large supply of all books printed here.'

Carey was to become the foremost bookseller and publisher in the United States, so his career is well documented.⁴ He was born in Dublin on January 28, 1760, the son of a baker. At the age of fifteen, against his father's wishes, he was apprenticed to the printer and bookseller Thomas McDonnell, 'a hard, austere master... of the most repellent manners,' in Carey's words. The youth quickly showed his penchant for political controversy, if not his skill as a printer. He wrote a pamphlet on the oppression of Irish Catholics, an advertisement for which caused such a stir that his father thought it advisable to pack him off to Paris for a while. There he worked for Benjamin Franklin and Didot *le jeune* before returning to Ireland in the following year. His apprenticeship now finished, he put his literary abilities to good use and for a period conducted the *Freeman's Journal*. In October 1783 his father gave him the money to start his own newspaper, the *Volunteers' Journal*. He took a politically radical editorial line, and, as the title indicates,

3. Mary Pollard, *Dublin's Trade in Books 1550-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 136-37, 141-42, 149.

4. See for example his *Autobiography* (New York: E. L. Schwaab, 1942); originally appeared in the *New England Magazine*, 1833-34; for a succinct account of his career see James N. Green, *Mathew Carey: Publisher and Patriot* (Philadelphia: Library Company, 1985).

supported the reforms advocated by the Volunteer Movement. It was not long before Carey had yet again offended the government. This time it was considered he had libelled the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Foster, and after a date had been set for the trial, Carey considered it prudent to flee the country again, this time heading west. On September 7, 1784, he was smuggled aboard the ship *America* dressed as a woman. He landed in Philadelphia on November 1.

Carey's reply to Byrne's overtures in 1788 was to dampen the Dublin bookseller's enthusiasm.⁵ He gave a litany of reasons why the joint venture should fail. For a start he had concentrated on publication since his arrival in America and had put much effort and money into establishing his magazine *The American Museum*, which then teetered on the brink between success and failure. As a consequence he claimed he was 'somewhat unacquainted with the book business, having done nothing in it since my arrival in this country.' The next reason he offered was that the book business was 'much altered of late.' Whereas at the end of the War of Independence books were scarce and money abundant, in consequence of which 'any thrash [*sic*] went off well,' in 1788 the reverse was the case. He wrote of a deluge of books from England and Ireland. What was in demand were books for which Byrne would have found a ready market in Ireland: Bibles, law books, classics, dictionaries. As there was a high import duty on books, Carey calculated that there would be a considerable loss on many of the works. (He mentioned that the duty could be avoided by smuggling, but hurried on to say that 'that is a disreputable traffic in which I would not choose to be concerned.')

Carey continued by outlining what he considered the market wanted:

The people here are by many degrees more enlightened than on your side of the Atlantic. [There are] Few, even of the farmers, who have not a taste for Milton, Thompson, Young, &c. &c. The vile tales & burton books, whereof thousands are annually disseminated through-

5. Carey to Byrne, Oct. 22, 1788, Carey letterbooks, HSP.

out Ireland, & which corrupt the taste, (and may I not add, the morals) of the youth of both sexes, find here no circulation. . . . When, therefore, you mean to supply the American market with literary food, let it be of the most solid and substantial kind; history, voyages, philosophy, science, and well chosen school books.

An analysis of the list of seventy-five titles, valued at £35-4-6½, that Byrne had sent, shows that it was liberally sprinkled with novels: titles such as *Fatal Follies*, *Lucinda Ashburn*, *Peruvian Tales*, *Platonic Guardian*, *Love Letters*. But there was solid literature in there as well: Johnson's *Letters* and *Poetical Works*, *The Lounger*, Sterne's *Letters*. In fact over half the list is made up of literature, popular and serious. The rest is a scattering of politics, religion, law, useful arts, and other subjects. If we turn to Carey's account books we find all these titles entered up, and most interestingly the numbers sold or returned.⁶ As Carey predicted, the novels sold badly; but so did everything else. Of four copies of Johnson's *Poetical Works* sent, only one was sold. All three copies of the *Crown Circuit Companion* were returned. In fact nearly three-quarters of the parcel went unsold, Carey managing to dispose of only £9-5-2½ worth.

This first venture of Byrne's into the American market in 1788 must have been a chastening experience. The next evidence we have of continued business with Carey is four years later. Carey wrote to Byrne on November 15, 1792: 'Having lately entered extensively into the bookselling business, I wish to open a correspondence with you, to which end I now send you a small order.'⁷ With the order he sent some copies of his *American Museum* in the hope that Byrne could sell them. Carey had devoted much of his energies in the intervening period to boosting the circulation of this magazine and had built up a distribution network throughout the eastern states. He reluctantly ceased publication of it in 1792 when Congress raised the postage rates to an uneconomic level. However, when he then concentrated on printing and bookselling,

6. Carey account books, I 25-27, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester (hereafter AAS).

7. Carey to Byrne, Nov. 15, 1792, Carey letterbooks, HSP.

he made good use of the sales network that he had so carefully constructed.⁸

Byrne's reply of February 18, 1793, informs us that he had suffered a calamity. His neighbor's house in Grafton Street had been destroyed in a recent fire, which must have undermined Byrne's building because it collapsed on January 23. Fortunately nobody was injured, but all his stock was ruined, including books set aside for Carey's order. (Byrne wrote that he lost £3,000 by the disaster, but when he had to sue the Hibernian Insurance Company for compensation he valued it at only £1,000. He won his case.)⁹ Byrne, therefore, could send only some of what was ordered, but he also risked including many titles that had not been asked for, 'which from being good books will I hope have a ready sale.' Byrne's description of them as 'a parcel of the neatest bound books that ever left Ireland' confirms what is already well documented: that at this date American booksellers preferred to import their books ready bound.¹⁰ However, Byrne had not taken account of the puritan simplicity of American tastes, as Carey's reply of May 25 made clear: 'Send me no more elegantly bound books. Several of those in your first invoice I shall be obliged to sell for nearly first cost. Purchasers here set very little value upon mere splendor of appearance. Few will be found to give 1/ or 1/6 sterling more for a gilt volume than for a plain one.'¹¹

This was to be the first of fourteen shipments to Carey in the next two-and-a-half years, the total value of which was an astounding £2,092-11-5.¹² Byrne informed Carey that the available books were on board the *Washington*, which sailed immediately, but that the remainder would be shipped on the *Draper*, which was then unloading her cargo and would be ready to sail 'in about three weeks or a month.' The turn-around time for a vessel was therefore about four weeks, and we know from Carey's notation of the date

8. Green, *Carey*, 7.

9. *Hibernian Journal*, July 28, 1794.

10. Pollard, *Dublin's Trade*, 144.

11. Carey to Byrne, May 25, 1793, Carey letterbooks 94, HSP.

12. Carey account books, VII 2344, AAS.

of receipt on several of Byrne's letters that the time of travel was about two months. Byrne occasionally had problems in finding space on ships out of Dublin and would split an order between two boats. On one occasion a box of books addressed to Carey had to be left behind because 'the Vessel was so full that it would not be taken altho. not more than one foot square.'¹³ On other occasions he sent parcels for shipment from Belfast or Newry if vessels were more readily available there.¹⁴ And once, because he could find no suitable ship bound for Philadelphia, he even had to consign boxes to New York; they were to be forwarded from there by coastal shipping.¹⁵ The danger of transport because of war was another headache. Byrne concluded his letter of December 28, 1797, with 'a wish for peace to Europe & America as a help to your trade & mine.'

The costs of packing and transport were borne by the importer. The expense of course varied with the size of box used, but there was some uniformity among them. For example, the Carey account books show that packing material for a case sent on March 14, 1795, cost 11s.-4½d., while shipping cost 5s.-5d. Two cases sent on April 6 following cost exactly twice that.¹⁶ Sometimes, however, Byrne would ship the books in special cases, as on March 30, 1793, when he informed Carey that he had sent his order 'in six trunks covered with hair skin which I understand are a very saleable article in your market.' Insurance is mentioned explicitly by Byrne in a letter of August 10, 1793, although no costs are given for it prior to 1800 in Carey's account books. Thereafter it is shown as 8½ percent of the wholesale cost. (Duty at 13½ percent is also shown and freight at 2 percent, making the total import charge 24 percent, which almost cancels out the 25 percent trade discount).¹⁷

We have seen how Byrne exported over £2,000's worth of books

13. Byrne to Carey, Sept. 2, 1794, HSP.

14. Byrne to Carey, Aug. 10, 1793, HSP.

15. Byrne to Carey, Feb. 20, 1796, HSP.

16. Carey account books, I 30, AAS.

17. For example, see Carey account books, XVI 6781, Dec. 26, 1800, AAS.

to Carey in the years 1793 to 1795. The Irish Custom House ledgers record the following figures for book exports to Pennsylvania in these years:¹⁸

	<i>Bound</i>	<i>Unbound</i>
Year to March 25, 1793	£130-10-00	£ 45-00-00
Year to March 25, 1794	130-00-00	32-00-00
Year to March 25, 1795	129-10-08	43-02-11
Year to March 25, 1796	<u>18-15-00</u>	<u>14-00-00</u>
Total	£408-15-08	£134-02-11
	£542-18-07	

It is evident, then, that the Custom House figures are serious underestimates of the true value of book exports, probably by a factor of ten or more. This is not, as it might first appear, smuggling on a grand scale. There was, in fact, no duty on the export of books at this date. Export duties on most goods of Irish manufacture had been removed in 1783-84 by 'An act for the advancement of trade' (23, 24 Geo. III c. 5). The value of all goods, however, had to be entered in the Custom House ledgers, whether dutiable or not. Bound books were recorded by their monetary value, but the value of unbound books was calculated by weight. A notional value per hundredweight, which fluctuated throughout the century, was given for the latter. From about 1750 until the end of the century this was set at £2-10-0. From Mary Pollard's calculations this results in a value of about 2¼d. per duodecimo book, a figure that is obviously several times less than the book's production costs.¹⁹ In earlier times these figures may have had some basis in reality, but at the end of the century they were just notional figures calculated for administrative purposes. This compounded the underestimation of the value of the exports.

The answer to how such large quantities escaped being recorded would appear to be that the customs officers concentrated on the major items of export—linen, beef, butter, etc.—and these would have been accurately entered in the Custom House accounts, but

18. Irish Custom House ledgers, MSS 361/1-362/2, National Library of Ireland.

19. Pollard, *Dublin's Trade*, 139-40.

that the miscellaneous items such as books would not have been tightly controlled.²⁰ If Byrne's exports were declared on entering the United States, they would have been subject to duty at 5 percent. This was the level set by the Tariff Act of 1789 and not increased, despite pressure from local printers, until the act of 1816 when it was raised to 15 percent.²¹ It is not known if Carey adhered to his stated abhorrence of smuggling, but he was later to indicate that he at least upheld the general tenor of the law. In his autobiography he stated that he 'never experienced the least inconvenience' in importing books and was 'wont to import as many books as probably any other bookseller' in the country. The bulk, however, of his sales were of American manufacture, 'the duty on those imported . . . was ample protection.'²² Byrne did suggest to him that he bend the law a little. In a letter of September 17, 1800, the Dublin bookseller reported that he had shipped five cases of books to him, each on average with a retail value of £150, and continued: 'I must leave to your judgement the value you will enter them at, say £80-0-0 or what your discretion points out.' Byrne was here referring to the wholesale value, which is what must have governed the duty. He continued: '. . . as they are my own manufacture [they] are cheaper to me than to a purchaser—I mention this to govern your entry & payment of duty.' Byrne was indicating the latitude an importer had in valuing his purchases.

Carey's surviving accounts show that the invoices were in Irish pounds and that the cost quoted for each book was the retail price. Carey was afforded a trade discount of 25 percent on this if the purchase was to his order. However if it had been sent unsolicited by Byrne, and therefore presumably subject to return, he was afforded a lesser discount by way of commission.²³ Carey's letter of May 25, 1793, betrays irritation at the amount of 'unsaleable'

20. Louis M. Cullen, *Anglo-Irish Trade 1660-1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), 218. I am grateful to Dr. David Dickson for information on this and other economic matters in this article.

21. John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York and London: Bowker, 1972), 134, 223.

22. Carey, *Autobiography*, 101-2.

23. Byrne to Carey, Feb. 18, 1793, HSP.

books that Byrne had shipped unordered: 'I shd not do myself justice, were I to take them on any other terms than on commission. . . . I should prefer, in a general way, receiving only those books I may order, a few new articles excepted . . . Of every new work, just published, you may send me two or three copies, even without orders.'²⁴

Returns continued to be substantial. For example, in 1794 Carey paid Byrne £400 but the returns were £240.²⁵ Because of the distance and difficulties of payment generous credit terms were afforded. Byrne had problems getting regular payment but was happy to accept Carey's suggestion in his letter of November 15, 1792, that books purchased in the spring should be paid for in the autumn, and those purchased in the autumn could be settled for in the spring. In fact, Carey elsewhere had argued for a year's credit. He felt that the Irish booksellers were becoming too grasping and would lose their advantage over the London trade, which afforded twelve months' credit.²⁶

In the days before an international banking system emerged, the methods of payment were various. In his opening letter of September 1788 Byrne asked for 'a return in dollars or your country[s] produce.' Payment in specie was unusual for security reasons and because of the drain on the country's gold reserves. Indeed, in 1797 banks in England and Ireland were forbidden by law to pay out gold against their notes in order to protect gold reserves during time of war.²⁷ A request for the produce of the country was not without precedent from a Dublin bookseller. In 1753 Isaac Jackson asked of his Philadelphia customer that he make payment 'in rum, flax seed, flour or any other commodity.'²⁸ Byrne also accepted Carey's own printings, a common method of payment among booksellers. In 1793 some bound copies of the *American Museum*

24. Carey to Byrne, May 25, 1793, Carey letterbooks 94, HSP.

25. Carey account books, I 28-29, AAS.

26. Carey to William Jones, Nov. 14, 1792; quoted in Cole, *Irish Booksellers*, 50.

27. G. L. Barrow, *The Emergence of the Irish Banking System 1820-1845* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), 8.

28. Quoted in Pollard, *Dublin's Trade*, 150.

destined for him were seized at the Dublin Custom House because they were described on the bill of lading as being unbound.²⁹ Despite these occasional problems Byrne was quite enthusiastic about Carey's printings, as his letter of February 28, 1795, testified: 'I received your parcel of books printed by yourself. I feel a great pleasure in finding your progress to be equal to what I remember Ireland to be about twelve years ago [i.e., at the start of the export boom]. It is flattering to you & must be profitable, which I congratulate you on.' His enthusiasm was curbed late in the year when the duty on books imported into Ireland was raised to 2d. per pound. He wrote to Carey on August 29 asking him not to send too many of Guthrie's *Geography*, mentioning fifty 'as an experiment.'

The third method of payment was by bills of exchange.³⁰ By today's standards this was a rather cumbersome system which relied very much on trust and a regular flow of trade between cities. There were several variations but the usual transaction involved four parties: the payer, the payee, the drawer, and the drawee.³¹ The system can be illustrated by the following example. Suppose Hall in Boston (the payer) owed Smith in London (the payee) £100 British. Hall would approach some merchant in Boston, call him Wood, whom he knew to have regular trade with London and offer to buy a bill of exchange from him drawn on Wood's credit in London. If terms of exchange were agreed Wood then became the drawer, drafting a bill instructing his agent, Jones, in London, the drawee, to pay £100 British to Smith. Hall then posted this bill to Smith, who presented it to Jones for acceptance. If the drawee undertook to honor the bill after whatever period was stated in it, usually sixty or ninety days, he endorsed it. Smith could hold on to the bill until the lapse of that time or he could treat it as cash by endorsing it himself and passing it on to another holder. Or he

29. Byrne to Carey, Feb. 18, 1793, HSP.

30. Stewart Kyd, *A Treatise of the Law of Bills of Exchange and Promissory Notes* (Dublin: G. Burnet et al., 1791), 2-3.

31. John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 20ff.

could present it at a bank, which for a discount, would provide him with coin or one of its own notes, which, if confidence in the bank was good, would be readily accepted as payment in the business community. Where there were no banks some merchants or even lottery offices with surplus cash offered discounting services. The maximum discount level was set in Ireland at 6 percent per annum in 1731. The discounter was entitled to make an extra charge for commission on top of that, but it has been calculated that the discount and commission charges together never exceeded 9 percent.³²

Bills of exchange were the method most used by Carey for payment to Byrne, although early on the Dublin bookseller expressed his reservations about receiving them. On March 30, 1793, he wrote that he 'would prefer the produce of the country to bills of exchange, but if half produce & half bills were sent it would be better.' Byrne's reluctance to accept bills of exchange may have been because there was the risk that the bills would not be honored, which indeed happened in 1797 and which led to a frosty period in the relationship. On July 3 he wrote to say that three of Carey's bills to the value of £450, drawn on his brother Thomas Carey, a starch manufacturer in Dublin, were not accepted. His brother had argued that trade was stagnant and that he could not be punctual in honoring them and therefore declined to endorse them. Byrne then had to go through the inconvenient and time-consuming process of having the bills 'protested.'

The process of protesting a bill involved giving it to a public notary, who in turn presented it again to the person to whom it was addressed, demanding acceptance. If he again refused to accept it the public notary drew up a solemn declaration of the facts which would be accepted as evidence in the courts. The protest was then sent to the drawer and he was charged the costs of the process.³³ Byrne enclosed the three protests against Thomas Carey with his letter of July 3. Each was drawn up by John Garstin

32. Barrow, *Emergence of the Irish Banking System*, 36-39.

33. Kyd, *Treatise of the Law of Bills of Exchange*, 87-89.

and cost 6s.—6d. This added complication was frustrating for Byrne because he himself was under an obligation, he said, to pay nearly £1,000 by the end of September. Later that year or early the following Byrne experienced the same difficulties in getting Thomas Carey to accept his brother's bills.³⁴ Nine bills were involved but only two to the value of £100 were accepted. Byrne therefore had to have the other seven protested. With some justice he commented: 'I regret that my intention to serve you should turn to my disadvantage.'

Byrne was a great believer in the power of advertising. Right from the resumption of contact between the pair early in 1793 he was at pains to insist that Carey advertise the books he was sending for sale on his own account. In his letter of March 30 he provided copy for an advertisement which he asked Carey to insert in the *American Museum* (he must not have known it had ceased by then), and in newspapers in Philadelphia, New York, and 'in any other paper that you may approve of—three times in each paper.' In the prudence of this Carey needed no prompting. In his reply of May 25, already referred to, he further suggested that 'It would be advisable to print lists of new books, such as the Robinsons of London do, as well as W. Jones of Dublin.' Later, on August 10, Byrne asked him to advertise his editions of Vesey's *Reports* and Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Extracts* for him. Byrne noted that he had printed the copies of Vesey especially for the American market and insisted that he would not supply any other American bookseller with either book.

Byrne took advantage of Carey's extensive distribution network to gather subscriptions for his projected reprint in twelve quarto volumes of *A Complete Collection of State Trials*. On March 22, 1794, he wrote that the first volume was just finished and that he was forwarding a sample copy. On March 14, 1795, when the second volume was just completed, he sent him a batch of circular letters, subscription proposals presumably, with instructions to distribute them to the booksellers. Byrne again urged Carey to push his

34. Byrne to Carey, undated but following closely on one dated Dec. 28, 1797, HSP.

interest, informing him that the printing of the series would cost 'upwards of ten thousand pounds.' (Byrne must have overreached himself with this work as there is no evidence that more than three volumes were ever issued.) About a year later Carey was to strengthen his network by engaging as his agent 'Parson' Weems, the legendary itinerant bookseller who used to roam the countryside of Virginia and Maryland selling books in remote areas that had no bookstores.³⁵

The balance in the subject matter of the books imported changed radically subsequent to the first shipment. For example, in the seven cases sent in February, March, and April of 1795, law books were by far the biggest category, an area in which Byrne specialized.³⁶ There was only a sprinkling of novels among the remainder, which was made up largely of religion, belles lettres, travels, biography, husbandry, and even some cookery books. It is not clear if these were to Carey's order or were chosen by Byrne. But the return of books to Dublin did continue. In his fraught letter of July 3, 1797, Byrne, besides reporting Thomas Carey's refusal to accept his brother's bills, pleaded with Mathew not to return any books but to consign them to Henry and Patrick Rice, other emigré booksellers from Dublin who settled in Philadelphia. There is a note of resigned irritation in his plea: 'the books you complain of my sending I think are very saleable books and such as must go from a book-store, but your experience is better than my speculation.'

In more amicable times it seems that Carey was willing to do favors for Byrne. In 1794 he sent Byrne a copy of his *Short Account of the Malignant Fever*, about the yellow fever then raging in Philadelphia, and which, somewhat to Carey's surprise, became a best-seller and was translated into several languages. Carey intended that Byrne should print it in Dublin for his own profit. On March 22 Byrne acknowledged his generosity but reported that he had not printed it as it was already brought out by John Rice. On a few

35. Green, *Mathew Carey*, 10-11.

36. Carey account books, I 30, AAS.

occasions Byrne asked Carey to forward parcels of books consigned to Philadelphia, because a ship sailing there was the most convenient, but which were destined for booksellers in other cities. Such was the case in 1795 with books for Clarke and Kiddie in Baltimore, and in 1796 with a consignment for William Spotswood in Boston.³⁷ On October 11, 1795, Byrne wrote to Carey in some agitation with the news that he had heard the partnership of Clarke and Kiddie was at an end. Because they had been recommended to him by a friend as 'perfectly safe' he had sent them books worth over £300, of which over £200 was still outstanding. He therefore asked Carey to check the Philadelphia Custom House to see if any of the cases consigned to them were still there, and if so, to retrieve them on his behalf. He ended his letter by asking Carey to be discreet: 'This can be done without much noise or speaking of.'

It was not just in business matters that Byrne requested favors of Carey. In his letter of February 28, 1795, he informed him that he had packed his son William off to work with William Spotswood in Boston:

He was a very gay lad & would rather spend money and idle than attend to my shop. . . . I wished to correct his gaiety by his seeing the steady & rigid conduct of the Bostonians. . . . The reason I mention this to you is that if he should ramble from Boston to your city & that he should apply to you—I would not wish you to let him want but I would not wish you to be extravagant in supplying wants. . . .

Besides the personal details Byrne also gave Carey lengthy descriptions about the political situation in Ireland. In 1788 it was about the tithe agitations—'long may you continue to be free from the oppressions and tyranny of the clergy & their agents'—while in February 1795 it was the Catholic Question—'we the Catholics of Ireland are at this moment as inflamed as any body so numerous can be.' Byrne did not omit to give the bad news in March 1793 that William Paulet Carey, the painter and engraver, and brother of Mathew, had been arrested and committed to Newgate.

³⁷ Byrne to Carey Mar. 14, Apr. 7, 1795, and one undated but in folder preceding letter of Feb. 20, 1796, HSP.

From these comments it can be gathered that Byrne was a political radical, a position that was eventually to lead to his banishment from the country.³⁸ He was born in Dublin about 1741 and made his first appearance in the book trade there in 1778. Throughout the 1780s he built up a substantial business, establishing contacts with other booksellers elsewhere in Ireland, England, and, as we have seen, America and with whom he financed joint publications. For example, his printing in 1785 of Henry Boyd's translation of Dante's *Inferno* was also issued with the press variant imprint of C. Dilly in London; while in 1788 Henry Joy's Belfast printing of William Campbell's *Examination of the Bishop of Cloyne's Defence* also appeared with Byrne's press variant Dublin imprint.

Byrne, a Catholic, agitated for parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation, but when accused of partisanship in his printing of an account of Archibald Hamilton Rowan's trial in 1794, he replied: 'I have but one principle in trade, which is to make money of it, and that if there were two publications giving different features of the trial I would publish both.' Charles O'Connor accounted him 'a friend,' and he was the first Catholic to be an admitted member of the stationers' guild, the Guild of St Luke, after the relaxation of the Penal Laws in 1793.

He was a member of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, and his bookshop in Grafton Street was considered to be its literary rendezvous. It was there early in 1798 that he introduced Captain John Armstrong, who had pretended sympathies with the Society, to the Sheares brothers. In fact Armstrong was a spy for the government and passed on information about the preparations for the Rebellion. When the call to arms came the Sheares were arrested and subsequently executed. On May 21 Byrne was also arrested and charged with high treason. As his punishment he was to be banished from the British Islands by an act (38 Geo. III c. 78) which became law in October. While his destination was being

38. This account of Byrne is based on John T. Gilbert, 'The streets of Dublin no. V,' *Irish Quarterly Review* 3 (1853): 17-50 at 46ff.; R. B. McDowell, 'Personnel of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen 1791-4,' *Irish Historical Studies* 2 (1940-41): 2-53 at 24; I am also grateful to Mary Pollard for access to her notes.

determined by the authorities he languished in prison, his health and business undermined as a consequence.

Several petitions for clemency, both in his own name and on his behalf, survive from his period of imprisonment.³⁹ One of February 22, 1799, submitted by Byrne to the Lord Lieutenant, set out his 'unblemished character as a trader' of nearly twenty years standing. He denied that he had had any 'criminal or improper view' in the introduction of Captain Armstrong to the Sheares brothers, and insisted that he was not privy to their conversations. He also denied any prior knowledge of the Rebellion and insisted that he was never 'a member of any political club or society.' This latter denial flew in the face of evidence the administration already possessed through its network of spies: that Byrne had been a member of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen since at least 1792. He was one among many from the Dublin book trade who joined in the early 1790s: Henry Frazer, William Porter, Randall McAllister, James Moore, John Chambers, Thomas McDonnell, Peter Hoey, Richard Cross, and John Stockdale are all given in lists compiled for intelligence purposes.⁴⁰ The petition goes on to state that his wife had died since his arrest, leaving his five children without a parent to care for them. And without her supervision his business was in decline. He concluded his pleadings by stating that he was in extreme ill health and begged for release on bail. When that petition elicited no response he submitted another on April 17, 1799, which speaks of his business suffering very heavy losses and his property 'scatter'd in the hands of strangers and abroad.' Due to his recurrent ill health he sought permission to go to the milder climate of Oporto or Lisbon. That too fell on deaf ears and he was to languish in prison for over another year.

These happenings account for the lack of dealings with Carey during 1798. On October 16 a dejected Byrne wrote to him: 'After spending the better part of my life in trade in the capital of this kingdom, I am now determined to spend the remainder of it as an

39. State Prisoners' Petitions, 453-455, National Archives of Ireland.

40. Rebellion Papers, 620/20/36, 620/54/12, 13, 18, National Archives of Ireland.

American farmer—I write to you for advice and assistance in fixing myself in that situation.' He indicated that although he had a large stock of books he would not continue as a retail bookseller but would only supply them wholesale. Carey's portrait of himself in his reply of February (?) 1799 was one of equal dejection: 'I have ceased importing books for a long time. From Dublin I have not rec'd a book since I began business except from you. Would to heaven I had never rec'd half so many. I am trying hard to quit the business. If I can sell my stock, I shall retire to the country, sick of the confusion & disorder of a city life.' He went on to say that there would be no difficulty in finding a farm once Byrne arrived in America: 'There are at all times opportunities of purchasing such places as you desire.'⁴¹

Byrne was still in Dublin on June 21, 1800, when he again wrote to Carey: 'As I have been liberated [presumably from prison] in this city I do not think I shall go for your continent for some time.' He managed to delay his departure until September, when on the 17th a letter to Carey indicated that he was soon to travel to Oporto, and that he would winter there before sailing for Philadelphia or New York in the spring. In the event he must have travelled directly to Philadelphia almost immediately. A letter dated November 24, 1800, addressed to Carey from 95 Eighth St. South, is the first evidence we have of Byrne's arrival in the United States.

Despite his stated intention of becoming a farmer, Byrne remained in the book trade and rapidly regained his wealth. His advertisements in the Philadelphia *Aurora General Advertiser* throughout 1802 (for example April 28) state that he still possessed his warehouse in Dublin, 'which is more extensively stocked than any other in Ireland, with all old and new law books.' He must also have shipped over a considerable book stock, because in the same year he issued a sixty-six-page *Catalogue of the Quire Stock of Books of P. Byrne*. However, he did not rely wholly on Dublin printings for his stock, but from this time he also began commissioning

⁴¹. Carey to Byrne, Feb. ? 1800, letter press copy of reply to Byrne's of Oct. 16, 1798, HSP.

reprints from American printers. His renown as a law bookseller attracted a large order for them from President Thomas Jefferson in February 1805.⁴² So dominant did this aspect of his trade become that in May 1813 he could insert an advertisement for nearly 200 law books in the first issue of the *Booksellers' Advertiser and Spirit of the Literary World*.

Byrne continued to try and make the break from bookselling. He advertised the sale of his book stock for cash or in exchange for property in 1805 and 1806, but apparently got no offers and he remained in the book trade until his death.⁴³ He continued to do considerable business with Carey, as the latter's account books testify, but increasingly the trade was two way. He died in Philadelphia on February 20, 1814, at the age of seventy-three.⁴⁴ Carey, who was twenty years younger, continued in trade until his official retirement in 1822 when the firm became H. C. Carey and I. Lea. He died in 1839.

42. Cole, *Irish Booksellers*, 187.

43. *Ibid.*, 188.

44. *United States Gazette for the Country*, Mar. 2, 1814.

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