
The New York Times: Extracted from an article by James F Clarity, New York Times.

Kenny's, across the country in High Street, a short, easy-to-find shopping lane in the middle of Galway - a clean prosperous, old- looking city of 40,000 where people angle for healthy fish in the Corrib River right in the middle of town - was opened in 1940 by the parents of Desmond Kenny his two sisters and four brothers. They still run the business, too busy keeping track of its 150,000 titles and growing art gallery to complain about much.

"Mother came to University College to study commerce. Father was studying humanities," said Mr. Kenny. "There was no work in Galway, and they didn't want to emigrate, so they started a book shop in a rented room." The present shop has three floors, low ceilings and a narrow staircase that stagger up into rooms crammed with tens of thousands of out-of-print books. Mr. Kenny pointed to a top-shelf collection of the dusty-looking numerous novels and critical essays of George A. Birmingham, a politically controversial author of the first third of the century who became a friend of Graham Greene when Greene spent summers in western Ireland, then became a Kenny's customer, ordering by mail.

Kenny's has its own version of a book club in which clients trust them to send a load of books, say US\$50 worth, every few months, with no advance notice of what's coming, a kind of Irish literary pinata.

In addition to the shop, Kenny's also has a bindery producing and rebinding books in buckram, chieftain goat and aniline calf lined with hand-made marble paper, at costs ranging from about US\$175 to US\$500. The art gallery, almost exclusively given to the works of contemporary Irish painters, has frequent exhibitions.

Irish literature is the main stuff of Kenny's. The country's writers visit regularly, for signing sessions, to browse and to chat, to attend what Mr. Kenny calls "directors meetings " down the street at the Bunch of Grapes pub. At one such meeting, he recalled without a trace of snobbery in his voice, that maybe it was at Murphy's pub that a street- cleaner recognised Seamus Heaney and they had a handshake and a talk about poetry. William Trevor, Brian Moore and Edna O'Brien, a customer since she was a student some 35 years ago, are among other recent visitors.

While Dublin was Joyce's city, there is some poignant Joyce history in Galway, where his wife, Nora Barnacle, grew up. A visitor to Kenny's Sheila O'Donnellan, a transplanted Dubliner who has made professional recordings of Yeats, is a guide at the Nora Barnacle House on Bowling Green. Not far from the site where Mayor Lynch in medieval Galway ordered his son hanged for murder perhaps giving the world a new word, is part of Galway still called Nun's Island. This, Mrs. O'Donnellan said, is the scene of events of Nora Barnacle's life used by Joyce in "The Dead", by general agreement one of the finest short stories ever written. Nora's early suitor, Michael Bodkin, who died of tuberculosis, became Michael Furey in Greta Conroy's recollection in the story. And when her Catholic family learned that Nora had become friendly with a Protestant lad called Willie Mulvagh, they packed her off to Dublin to be a maid, and Joyce met her on June 16.

Mulvagh appears as Mollie Bloom's lover, Mulvey, in "Ulysses."

Books are sold in Nora Barnacle's childhood home but not "Nora," by Brenda Maddox, because Stephen Joyce, James's grandson, who has helped the museum-house, disapproves of it. Kenny's has "Nora" and Joyce, including a US\$1,400 1939 first edition of "Finnegans Wake".

Desmond Kenny said some customers had imaginative demands. One had to know what the bells of Christ Church Cathedral were playing in Dublin on June 16, 1904. Kenny's came close with a booklet on the church's bell offerings in 1902. Another client is close to fulfilling a need to own one book of each decade since Gutenberg Started printing in the middle of 15th century. There are also collections of rare and ancient books and correspondence. Two years ago, Kenny's sold to the New York Public Library a Dublin tobacconist's letters and account books from 1780 to 1910. In addition, there are history books and traveller's correspondence dating back 500 years. One of the prized acquisitions was a collection of letters written in Latin by a Jesuit missionary from the Far East in 1560.

The resident institutional memory is that of Maureen Kenny, the 71-year-old founder, who still works at the front desk. She recalled that in the 1950's an intense young woman came into the shop: Edna O'Brien, still a customer, raised in nearby County Clare. "She had just left school, had a job at a pharmacy in Dublin. She came in on a Friday afternoon with pencil and paper, wandering around and jotting down quotations." Mrs. Kenny said. "She said she wanted to be a writer".