

Censorship Said Strangling Irish Intellect, Imagination

By CAROL KENNEDY
DUBLIN (CP)—In the well-stocked Dublin bookstore a James Bond addict scanned the rack of paperback thrillers by Ian Fleming. They all seemed to be there and yet . . .
"Have you a copy of From Russia With Love?"
"Ah no, didn't you know that was banned?"
The Irish censors, more unobtrusive these days but still capable of causing minor irritations in everyday life, had

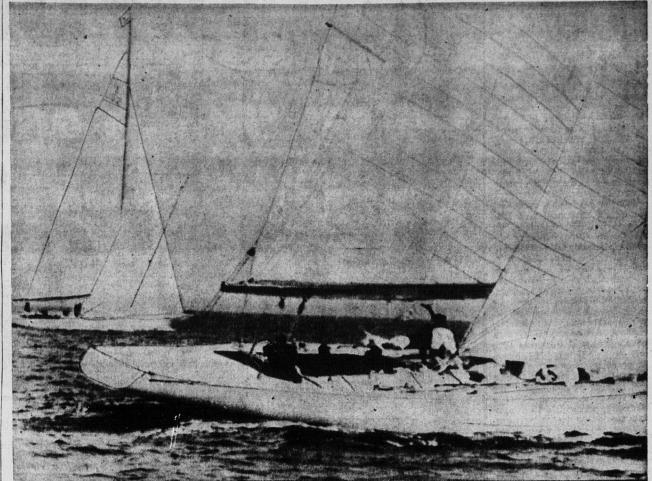
hardly have happened a few years ago—would urge complete abolition of censorship.
Meanwhile the subject provides a rich source of cocktail-party conversation. There was much amusement recently that a Dublin evening newspaper managed to run a series on censorship without once actually mentioning the word.
People tend to search out banned books and movies on trips to London and Belfast, but those who defend censorship accept this as inevitable. They say it is not aimed at the sophisticated minority who are capable of distinguishing between art and trash, but that its object is to protect the under-educated majority of Irish people.
Students can obtain banned books by special licence for "serious" study, but a censorship board officially admitted it would be difficult to get a licence for a modern work of fiction.

BOOK BURNED
Not only was the book banned, but three priests burst into the tailor's cottage one day and forcing the old man down on his knees, made him burn a copy in his own fireplace. The book now has been reissued with the full story told in a foreword by Frank O'Connor.
Things have been easier, most people agree, since 1958—the year more liberal, worldly men were appointed to the five-man Censorship Board.
Recently Judge Conroy, chairman of the board, went on television to be quizzed by three young reporters. That could

INDIAN CLASSIC BANNED
Plato's Phaedrus was banned in an edition that coupled it with the erotic Indian classic Kama Sutra. In some cases "suggestive" cover might be enough to condemn a paperback classic, censors, authorities say.
Most Dubliners tolerate the banning of books and mutilation of movies with a mixture of humor and mild contempt. The Irish Times, the vigorously independent newspaper, has said it is time the law was changed,

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gry old man." A non-Catholic he thinks the trouble began when "the church took over the revolution."
Frank O'Connor, the short-story writer whom Yeats called the Chekhov of Ireland, has said there is "basically a Fascist attitude" about those in authority.
In a conversation with a reporter in his book-lined apartment overlooking Dublin's Grand Canal, O'Connor, a

pick the defender of the American Cup against British challenger next September. The yachts Constellation and Columbia are also competing in races to choose the defender. (AP Wirephoto)

craggy giant of 61 with a resonant Cork drawl, expanded:
"It's largely based on fear and a great suspicion of literature. They don't like writers because writers ask questions. Gladly he recalled that President Kennedy had quoted some Irish writers in his address to the Dail whose names in those surroundings had once been "nothing but dirty words."
"But they had to sit there and take it from him."
Some of O'Connor's works are still banned, though an edition of his short stories is prominent on sale in Dublin. But years of frustration sometimes break loose in his urbane talk like a growl from a sleepy lion.
"The men who banned my books were a bunch of criminals!" He says he doesn't know why they were banned—"They never tell you."
Most writers feel cynically that any attempt to portray human relationships in a realistic way must lead to trouble.
You venture that things seem easier and O'Connor flashed back. "It's worse than the impression you're allowed to get."
Yet O'Connor, who spent 19 years in the United States, has returned to live in Dublin though he says its intellectual atmosphere is "stagnant." Like dozens of expatriates with grievance, he felt painful tugs on the umbilical cord and was to come back from New York once a year. He finally settled down two years ago because "I write about Ireland and my work is relevant here."
"It's a matter of dialogue and voices," he says. "I have to hear voices."
Like Clarke, O'Connor blames Irish Catholicism for fostering subservience.
"It's a majority behaving like a persecuted minority," O'Connor said, adding that the late Pope John was regarded as the "liberal" in some quarters of the Irish hierarchy, especially for his work in bringing the churches closer and advocating tolerance towards Communists.
"There was even talk that popes can be deposed."
This is, perhaps, an extreme view. The church is changing in Ireland and many liberal priests are shaking people out of hidebound ideas. Father John Kelly, a Jesuit, deliberately provoked controversy in Dublin's Catholic University College by speaking in favor of the debate: "Irish Catholicism is hostile to genius."
Summing up a visitor's impressions: A certain apathy and lack of protest do exist in Irish public life; church influence is sometimes arbitrary; do-gooders or "holly Joes," as they are derisively called, often occupy influential positions. But the feeling is Ireland is changing so much that public opinion must in time change too.
Meanwhile, the official innocence of Irish life has some attractive aspects. There are no strip joints in Dublin and sex crimes are practically unknown.
And, as Dubliners say with a flash of cynical humor, if you want forbidden joys, "there's a fast train to Belfast."

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