

Hi there, I'm Leonie van der Meer, 3<sup>rd</sup> year English, and I've decided to step out of my comfort zone and study at University College Dublin for a year.

## The Life and Opinions of a Harting Scholar The Bookshop

I feel like I've been there at least a million times, and every single time I pass the threshold something happens that makes me have to go back. It's as if a force beyond me is pulling me towards it, like in that Eagles song, Hotel California. If I weren't an atheist I would believe that I'd committed some mortal sin and that Satan and his minions were taking it upon themselves to make sure I can never leave for good. Combine atheism with the need for peace of mind and you will understand why I refuse to spend a minute's thought on the possible existence of such a place as Hell, but I must say, this place is sure starting to feel like one.

Stacks of books, hundreds, no thousands of them, have been carefully gathered here. Vast quantities of lifelong learning and dedication, in paperback and hardcover, are lying peacefully side by side here, countless scholars have spent their entire lives in libraries, perusing other books, in order to fill up a mere few inches of its shelf space.

Now don't go thinking I don't like books. On the contrary, I love books, I dream about books, I live and breathe books, and if it weren't for their lack of nutritional value I'd probably have books for dinner. Still, despite all that, the UCD campus bookshop really isn't doing it for me right now.

I apologize if I come across as an ungrateful little b\*\*\*\*. I am not, promise. Not in this respect, at least. Yet I can't help but cringe every time I see the same old shop assistant, with his ridiculous haircut, his outdated shirts and broken glasses. Get them fixed already, one rod obviously isn't enough to make them stay in place, and while you're at it, do something about that permanent head cold, will you? Not only is a thick stuffy nasal voice very unsexy, it is actually quite annoying to listen to. Especially if I don't want to be talking to you in the first place.

But I'm getting carried away here. I love living in Ireland, moving here has been one of the most exciting experiences of my life and I don't regret it in the least. Nor do I hold a personal grudge

against the said shop assistant, but he just happens to be the personification of the only annoying aspect of Irish culture that I have come across so far. The Irish are so laidback that an ignorant Dutch girl could easily confuse it with idleness, or even outright indifference.

Obviously this little idiosyncrasy is not all bad. Their incessant tardiness makes mine go unnoticed. And some of the people in my class still haven't paid their tuition fees, but no-one seems to be the least bit concerned about that. Oh, and the English department calls week one week one, but don't ask me why, because in fact week two is week one. Are you still with me? But, even though it was really rather nice to have an extra unexpected week off, when in week two I still wasn't enrolled properly for all my classes, I was starting to worry. I was alone in that.

With my stress levels high, I was surprised I could still muster up the patience to queue at the International Office for at least an hour every day for a week. But when I was simultaneously faced with the struggle to get the right books, I was starting to lose it. See, the department doesn't provide booklists here. In fact, if you ask for one, they look at you as if you're seriously deluded. I guess they just trust the students to have cultivated an amazing insight, and simply guess which texts are on the curriculum. I am not at that level yet, apparently. So I turned to the people at the bookshop for help. I'll be nice and refrain from boring you with the details of my quest, but let's just say I went to there many, many times. And every single time Mr Headcold there managed to sell me exactly the wrong editions of the books I needed, despite his claim to "know exactly what I needed".

So when he called me the other day (at 8.30 am mind you, I was still sound asleep) to tell me that my much-requested Penguin Annotated Student's Edition of Ulysses had finally arrived, I thanked him, only barely managing to keep my sarcasm within boundaries, and snuggled back into my duvet. I still haven't picked it up.

*By Leonie van der Meer*