

Dress and the home: aspects of women's changing gender roles, 1910-1937

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## Dress and the home: aspects of women's changing gender roles, 1910-1937.

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This research examines women's changing gender roles and related changes in female dress in the period 1910-1937. Women's increasing role in the public sphere, for example, necessitated a move towards practical dress. Both women's shifting gender roles and changes in choice of clothing were regularly debated in newspapers and prescriptive literature throughout the period in question. Despite changes in women's roles, the dominant discourse in Ireland in this period was still that of separate spheres, particularly after 1922, with women viewed as belonging to the private or domestic sphere. Therefore, women's gender roles in the period cannot be discussed without an examination of representations of the home. Fashions and trends relating to home interior also changed as women's roles slowly changed and evolved. Changes in dress and home furnishings in Ireland saw influences from Paris, London and New York despite the anti-modernist discourse of the early Free State. With due reference to class it can be said that Irish women participated in contemporary international trends and displayed such engagement in their dress and home furnishings and design. Prescriptive literature provides the images, descriptions and public discourse for this research.

## Introduction

Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street,  
fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.

-Coco Chanel

This research examines women's changing gender roles and related changes in female dress in the period 1910-1937, demonstrating that fashion both reflected and shaped change in gender roles. Fashion, as contextualised in this research, is understood to be the latest style of clothing, hair or accessories. Fashion was not a new phenomenon for early twentieth century Ireland but advances of the early twentieth century allowed fashion to be explored and experimented with making fashion a popular interest among the middle and upper classes by the early 1900s. It is these middle-class women that are the primary subject of enquiry as this research explores an era in which advances in communication allowed ideas of fashion permeate and spread more quickly.

The turn of the twentieth century in Ireland was a key time in Irish women's history. Women had organised themselves politically for the suffrage campaign: the Northern Ireland Society for Women's Suffrage was founded in 1871 and the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association was founded in 1876. Women had gained educational rights<sup>1</sup> and property rights.<sup>2</sup> From 1896 women could be elected as poor law guardians and from 1898 they could be elected to some local councils and in 1900 Inghínidhe na hÉireann, an Irish women's nationalist organisation, was founded. So by the time the twentieth century had come round women were getting louder and more visible in a society of separate spheres where patriarchal values were dominant. This activity would have only affected a small number of women in Ireland, the middle and upper classes and mostly Protestant or Quaker, but gender roles had been changing slowly and more progressively for nearly thirty years. Women's role in society became a topic of concern for society in the early twentieth century and it remained so into the Free State period. The traditional idea of femininity was being challenged by women's shifting gender role. This was translated through her appearance, her clothes and therefore her fashion.

Irish women's history, for the past thirty years, has been a rich area of study. Previous to this, Irish women's history was overlooked. The Women's History Association of Ireland was founded in 1989 with the aim to promote research into this overlooked history. Since its foundation historians such as Cliona Rattigan,<sup>3</sup> Leeann Lane,<sup>4</sup> Maria Luddy<sup>5</sup> and Mary

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<sup>1</sup> The Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act 1878 and the Royal University of Ireland Act 1879 gave girls and women the right to sit for public competitive examinations and to take university degrees.

<sup>2</sup> The Married Women's Property Act 1870 & 1882 allowed women to own and control their own property.

<sup>3</sup> Cliona Rattigan, *What Else Could I Do?: Single Mothers and Infanticide, Ireland 1900-1950* (Dublin, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Leeann Lane, *Rosamond Jacob: Third Person Singular*, (Dublin, 2010).

Cullen<sup>6</sup> have enriched the topic of Irish women's history. The history of fashion has also been a topic of rich research for the past thirty years. Christopher Breward<sup>7</sup>, Valerie Steele<sup>8</sup> and Jennifer Craik<sup>9</sup> among many others have been significant contributors to research into the history of fashion. This research, however, has excluded Ireland. There has been some discussion of Irish women's fashion and dress by Caitriona Clear<sup>10</sup> and Diarmaid Ferriter<sup>11</sup> but nothing significant and never taken as a subject in itself. Fashion is a rich topic of research and reveals a multitude about people. It has historical, psychological, economic and communicative connotations. From a history of fashion one can see dramatic changes have occurred over time. For example, King Henry VIII in the 16<sup>th</sup> century wore knee-length embellished dresses, elaborate coats, tights or stockings and a lot of jewellery. The purpose of this fashion was to portray his wealth and status. This adornment of the body was to help differentiate this man as superior to everyone else. A modern king such as King Albert II of Belgium would contrast significantly. To show his status he may wear a sash or a badge but with an unadorned tailored suit. His wealth is not showcased on his person. Another example, a woman of any class in the late Victorian era would have opted for a floor length gown with a high collar and a cinched in waste. Activity was restricted for these women by this style of fashion. Activity for middle-upper class women was also restricted by a society of separate spheres. Fashion author, Anne Hollander suggested, 'Clothes can suggest, persuade, connote, insinuate, or indeed lie, and apply subtle pressure while their wearer is speaking frankly and straightforwardly of other matters.'<sup>12</sup> Fashion is a diverse commodity and changes its appearance for a range of reasons be it by designers or the individual consumer-wearer. Fashion is instant visual language. One can communicate a story through fashion. This is the aim of this research, to tell the story of women through an examination of fashion in the early twentieth century.

Prescriptive literature such as *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* will comprise a central primary source for this study. Prescriptive Literature includes conduct-of-life books, domestic arts manuals, etiquette guides and women's magazines. *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* contained sections on how to behave correctly, how to improve personal appearance and the home, cooking and cleaning tips and many more instructive literature type sections. Prescriptive literature can challenge both change and tradition in gender roles.

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<sup>5</sup> Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland, 1800-1918: A Documentary History*, (Cork, 1995), *Prostitution & Irish Society, 1800-1940*, (Cambridge, 2007), *Women & Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century Ireland*, (Cambridge, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Mary Cullen (ed), *Girls Don't Do Honours: Irish Women in Education in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Dublin, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Breward has published numerous history of fashion books including *Fashion and Modernity*, *Fashion* (Oxford, 2005), *Fashion* (Oxford, 2003) and *The Hidden Consumer* (Manchester, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Valerie Steele has also published numerous history of fashion books including *The Corset: A Cultural History* (Yale, 2003), *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* (Yale, 1997), *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (Oxford, 1988) and *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power* (Oxford, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Craik has published *Fashion: The Key Concepts* (Oxford, 2009) and *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (New York, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Caitriona Clear, *Women of the House: Women's Household Work in Ireland, 1926-1961: discourses, experiences, memories* (Dublin, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, (London, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York, 1978) p355.

*The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* held a different ethos on the role of women. *The Lady of the House* appeared to support changing gender roles for women. *Our Girls* encouraged a more traditional gender role for women. Women's magazines aimed to define womanhood. Prescriptive literature is an interesting resource as it indirectly reveals how social, cultural and political influences constructed women's lives and how the notion of femininity was shifting as required or instructed by society. Irish prescriptive literature has been an untapped resource for research. Some study has been done by Caitriona Clear in her book *Women of the House: Women's Household Work in Ireland 1922-1961* but Clear examines later prescriptive literature with a focus on how it constructs the ideology of women. In this context, prescriptive literature will be utilised with a focus on fashion in dress and the home and women's relationship to both.

Chapter one aims to provide the cultural and political context of Ireland in the period in question 1910-1937. Women's role in society will be the main focus; how it changed over the period and why. Understanding women's lives at that time is paramount to the relevance of the following three chapters. The various movements and political events of the period in question will be examined but with a focus on how they strongly affected women's gender role. Evidence will be put forward to show how the traditional view of femininity was challenged as women's roles evolved and shifted. It will be argued that women's gender roles broadened to accommodate society's needs. Once this shift in women's role happened there was unease throughout society about this. Legislation began to appear throughout the 1920s to address the issue of changing women's gender roles. As a consequence of women's gender roles expanding the ideology of femininity was a constant topic of conflict in society. Chapter one will also explain how for many women their increased activity in the public sphere instilled in them a sense of confidence as women and encouraged individual personality which was to be portrayed through dress.

Chapter two will examine Irish women's clothes in the early twentieth and prove links between women's changing gender roles and changing fashions and dress. This research argues that women's activity, personality, role and level of personal freedom all contributed to what clothing and new fashions they were wearing. For example the advent and popularity of the bicycle among Irish women from the 1890s demanded a reform of women's dress. Victorian fashions and Victorian sensibilities did not allow for women to operate a bicycle. A heavy, long, multi-layered dress and a restricting corset made cycling for women impossible. Brian Griffin discussed the impracticality of women's clothing in the wake of the bicycle in his article 'Cycling and Gender in Victorian Ireland'. 'The ultimate transgression against accepted norms of female behaviour by female cyclists was the adoption of the supposedly masculine "rational clothes," whether in the form of "bloomers" or short tunic with knickerbockers.'<sup>13</sup> 'Rational clothing' was a topic of much concern in the early twentieth century as Griffin discusses in his paper. Prescriptive literature will be the main primary source for examining women's fashion.

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<sup>13</sup> Brian Griffin, 'Cycling and Gender in Victorian Ireland' in *Éire-Ireland*, xli, no. 1&2, (Spring/Summer 2006) p238.

Chapter three will study the issue of class. Ireland was a society with a strong class system. 1910-1937 in Ireland was a period of social restructuring and witnessed the consolidation of the power of the Catholic middle classes in formation since the post famine period. This resulted in a new way of shopping and new buying behaviours as wealth fell into new hands. New identities and lifestyles were evolving and a need to display catholic middle class respectability coupled with status manifested itself. This 'front' or 'necessary impression management' was the responsibility of women. The home was the ideal tool to display status and fashion of the home became as important as that of clothing. Women's link to the home became stronger. The Census of Ireland 1911 and auction listings provide details of living conditions for the period in question.

Chapter four will discuss the public debate and reaction to women's fashion and changing gender role in the early twentieth century. It will argue women's fashion and changing gender role was a constant and dominant topic in society throughout the period 1910-1937. They were topics to the fore of public concern and often came hand in hand. The public's response to such changes was recorded in prescriptive literature, newspapers and periodicals. Suffragists, clergy, government all found space in the public forum to air their opinion, grievances and advise on changing fashions and changing women's gender role. Foreign influence was to blame for many new changes in fashion; cinema, returning emigrants and political celebrities were some factors of foreign influence. As a result of changing women's fashion and gender role public order and morality were at risk according to the churches and government. This risk to public order and morality was a topic of frequent discussion. Evidence of this will be presented in chapter four.



## **Chapter One**

### **Becoming Citizens: Women's roles in early twentieth century Ireland**

Ireland in the early twentieth century experienced large scale political and social change. The early twentieth century witnessed a large number of events which influenced change in Irish society: the Dublin Lockout 1913; the Easter Rising April 1916; the first meeting of Dáil Éireann, January 21 1919; the War of Independence 1919-1921 and the establishment of the Irish Free State 1922. Amongst other social and political change this period witnessed shifting gender roles for Irish women. A lot of men went to war, were arrested or died during the revolutionary period and their roles left vacant. Women had to adapt to this change in society. Women's gender roles broadened to accommodate society's needs. Some had to become the breadwinner for their family. Some had to sacrifice their domestic duties to go to work. However, there was unease at shifting gender roles. This necessary extension of women's roles caused tension and agitation within society and this study will discuss such fears. The aim of this chapter is to provide the cultural and socio-political context of women's lives in the early twentieth century.

This chapter will show how through some women's efforts all women gradually had more opportunities as citizens whether they chose to carry out their new duties or not. Some women became involved in the major historical events. The early twentieth century, witnessed a growing number of women's political organisations within nationalism, unionism, labour and suffrage. Women over the age of 30 gained the franchise in 1918, entry into parliamentary politics and more access to public sector work. This chapter will also convey the journey women had insofar as they came into the twentieth century with little or no civic rights or duties, gained an immense amount in such a short time and then faced a situation after 1922 where rights already in place were in danger of being retracted. The future looked bright for women as citizens before 1922. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case with the establishment of the Free State. The discourse of separate spheres, central to thinking on women's roles in the nineteenth century, once again became dominant. This chapter will discuss how this specific ideology of femininity was a topic of conflict that was to the fore throughout the early twentieth century.

In retrospect, the life of women, particularly female activists, growing up in early twentieth century must have been one of hope, excitement, rejection and then confusion. At the turn of the twentieth century women could not participate in society like their male counterparts. One major inequality was that they could not vote. By the close of the nineteenth century women had only gained the local government franchise.<sup>14</sup> Traditionally, Ireland was a society of separate spheres, public and private. Women belonged to the private sphere also called the domestic sphere. Their duties were to the home and the family. The public sphere was everything outside the home. It contained and was related to the running of

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<sup>14</sup> The Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898 allowed women to be elected to urban and rural district councils and town commissions.

government, industry and business. When women tried to alter this tradition they were consistently faced with challenges and obstacles from government and society as a whole. Women argued for active citizenship through the suffrage movement. Women by participating also in the campaigns for unionism, nationalism and labour in the period indicated their interest in a political role in the public sphere. Women were gradually becoming more active as citizens but their acceptance into the public sphere was not uniform among the different classes of society and any major activity of women in the public sphere was stymied after 1922. Those women who chose to partake in the suffrage movement, the nationalist movement, the unionist movement or the labour movement met with a lot of opposition, both male and female. The gendered nature of patriarchy was buttressed by the Churches, the medical profession and the legal profession. This chapter will examine what ignited the political mobility of women. It will also observe how their political activity evolved over a relatively short period of time. It will explore the informal political activism of women and witness the enthusiasm developing in women for formal activism. This chapter puts women's lives in context and offers an important backdrop for the analysis of women's changing fashion and dress and prescriptive literature which will be the subjects of chapter two and three. An overall pattern seems to run through women's activity whatever the movement and that theme is success and then rejection. Women were successful in their respective roles in the public sphere but withdrawn from those roles by society through legislation and pressure channelled through newspapers and prescriptive literature. Women were used by male activists when the necessity arose but once the revolutionary period was over and the Free State established the discourse of separate spheres arose again.

### **Women's Informal Politics and the Beginning of their Formal Activism**

Women had an informal role in politics prior to the twentieth century. They were politically active but in a 'behind the scenes' manner. Middle and upper class women canvassed during elections and heavily influenced the vote and political stance of their male family members. Irish women like Delia Larkin, Anna Haslam and Anne Jellicoe were examples of female activists on the other hand who campaigned for reform in labour, social, property and educational rights in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Women also gained significant property rights in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1870 and gave women the same rights as unmarried men.<sup>16</sup> Anne V. O'Connor argues that the passing of the Married Women's Property Act was a clear

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Galway (1864-1928) was Ireland's first woman full-time trade union official. See Theresa Moriarty, 'Mary Galway (1864-1928)' in Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy (eds), *Female Activists: Irish Women and Change 1900-1960* (Dublin, 2001), pp9-36. Anne Robertson of Dublin was the first leading figure in Irish women's suffrage organising meetings from 1868 ([http://www.nationalarchives.ie/topics/DWSA/DWSA\\_2.html](http://www.nationalarchives.ie/topics/DWSA/DWSA_2.html)) (12 August 2012). Isabella Tod and Anna Haslam headed the campaign for women's property rights. Anna went on with her husband to establish the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (<http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Feminism>) (12 August 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Prior to the passing of this Act, any money, property or inheritance a woman possessed upon marriage became the property of her husband. See, <http://www.archive.org/stream/marriedwomenspr01grifgoog#page/n10/mode/2up>.

indication that the role of the woman in the family was changing ‘dramatically’.<sup>17</sup> As a result of the Act, she could possess money and property which gave her a sense of independence. She would no longer be completely financially dependent on her husband. She gained some control of her own life. This Act marks the beginning of legislation passed for the rights of women. Married women were worth something in their own right and were safeguarded from poverty if a marriage failed or was one of an abusive nature. They were supported by the laws of the state. The 1882 Married Women’s Property Act enabled married women to buy or sell her own property. It also recognised married women as legally independent of their husbands.<sup>18</sup> The Acts relating to married women’s property rights shows a move towards gender equality.

Reform in education was also a primary concern for female activists in late nineteenth century Ireland. Margaret Byers founded the Ladies Collegiate School, Belfast in 1859. Anne Jellicoe, established the Queen’s Institute in 1861, Alexandra College in 1866 and Alexandra School in 1873, all in Dublin. Isabella Tod founded the Belfast Ladies’ Institute<sup>19</sup> in 1867. Tod was also the driving force for the establishment of Ulster Head Schoolmistresses’ Association founded in 1880. This association and the Central Association of Irish Schoolmistresses worked closely to represent approximately seventy Protestant girls’ schools in Ireland. O’Connor argues that they worked at a crucial stage in the development of girls’ secondary education.<sup>20</sup> Notably, these were Protestant schools and offered a curriculum similar to that of a boy’s curriculum. There were sixty-two convent boarding schools in Ireland by the end of the nineteenth century but only six were run by Irish religious orders.<sup>21</sup> The others were run by European religious orders such as The Sacred Heart Sisters, The Faithful Companions of Jesus and Sisters of St. Louis. The convents run by Irish religious orders offered a more traditional girl’s curriculum. They were subjects associated with the home and personal accomplishments all aimed at attaining a husband and maintaining a home. Education was a privilege for young girls if affordable for their family. Boarding schools were expensive and even with the introduction of day schools the fees were only manageable for wealthy farmers or shopkeepers<sup>22</sup>, notably the rising Catholic middle-classes. O’Connor points out that there were schools called, ‘select schools, benefit schools and private schools’<sup>23</sup>, therefore there was an attempt to provide education for girls of all classes. The introduction of the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act 1878 and the Royal University of Ireland Act 1879 acknowledged that girls and women had the right to sit for public competitive examinations and to take university degrees. These were the most significant educational Acts for women. They were given an option and a door into the public sphere

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<sup>17</sup> Anne V. O’Connor, ‘The Revolution in Girls’ Secondary Education in Ireland 1860-1910’, in Mary Cullen (ed), *Girls Don’t Do Honours, Irish women in education in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries*, (Dublin, 1987) pp. 31-32.

<sup>18</sup> See Mary Beth Combs, ‘A Measure of Legal Independence: The 1870 Married Women’s Property Act and the Portfolio Allocations of British Wives’, in *The Journal of Economic History*, lxx, No.4 (Dec., 2005), p1033.

<sup>19</sup> The Belfast Ladies Institute was a successful women’s organisation who agitated for educational reform. See Claire Rush and Judith Hartford (eds), ‘Women Who Made a Difference: The Belfast Ladies’ Institute, 1867-1897’ in *Have Women Made a Difference: Women in Irish Universities, 1850-2010*, (Bern, 2010) pp29-47.

<sup>20</sup> O’Connor, ‘The Revolution in Girls’, p32.

<sup>21</sup> O’Connor, ‘The Revolution in Girls’, p38.

<sup>22</sup> O’Connor, ‘The Revolution in Girls’, p43.

<sup>23</sup> O’Connor, ‘The Revolution in Girls’, p43.

was opened. As promising as this sounded, the possibility and reality of pursuing such standards of education for most women was unattainable but ultimately it was a step in the right direction for the emancipation of women and the beginning of shifting gender roles. Again, this access to education shows a move towards gender equality. It also showed that their campaigning and hard work was beginning to show results. This chapter will later discuss the manner in which education facilitated a more self-confident woman and in that way was a driving force in the struggle for equality in the early twentieth century.

Women also campaigned for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts 1864, 1866 and 1869. The British government were so fearful of an epidemic of venereal disease they set in place over a period of time three Acts to curtail the spread and further detriment to their armed forces. The Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 implemented compulsory medical examinations on prostitutes in certain military areas in both England and Ireland. If a woman refused this she could be imprisoned. If she was found to have a venereal disease she was sent to a lock hospital for up to nine months. Men did not undergo such examinations. Opposition quickly arose and brought about the first women's organisations in Ireland. The 1866 Act made a number of additional provisions. The 1866 Act changed a number of technical details and the final 1869 Act extended the number of military areas from eleven to eighteen. It also expanded the area in which a prostitute could be arrested from five miles to fifteen miles. The National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (NARCDAs) and the Ladies National Association (LNA) were both formed in England in 1869 but by 1871 had branches in Belfast, Dublin and Cork. Anna Haslam and Isabella Tod were strong campaigners for the repeal of these Acts from the beginning. The organisations lobbied MPs, organised petitions, raised funds, held meetings and distributed information pamphlets. Women campaigned against these CDAs for a number of reasons: they were solely aimed at women; they promoted a double moral standard among men and women and they were an infringement to women's privacy and independence. Another issue of concern was who and what defined a prostitute. The Acts were repealed in 1886.<sup>24</sup>

Women in this period were campaigning on the basis of a move towards equal rights and treatment under the law. Women were also publically involved in philanthropy. Maria Luddy argues that religion gave middle-class women an excuse 'to organise voluntarily, to enter the public domain and engage in work which was considered socially useful'.<sup>25</sup> Religion was women's framework upon which they could carry out philanthropic work in Irish society. Philanthropy was a way into the public sphere and a way for women to demonstrate their value in society. They argued that their traditional role could and did benefit the public sphere. Typical philanthropic work included child welfare, prostitution and rescue work and prison work. Quaker women and protestant women dominated the philanthropic work. Catholic women were not inclined to take up such work. There was no place for them to do so because this type of work was dominated by nuns. An example of such a philanthropist would be Quaker Anne Jellicoe, as previously mentioned. She carried out important philanthropic work throughout Ireland to improve standards of working and

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<sup>24</sup> See Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940*, (Cambridge, 2007), pp140-152.

<sup>25</sup> See Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, (Cambridge, 1995) p23.



living for women. In 1853 she founded a lace embroidery school in Offaly, helped run a school for the poor in Dublin's Liberties area, monitored and reported working conditions for young girls in Dublin factories and visited women prisoners in Mountjoy jail to report also on their conditions. This high level of activism in philanthropy fed a minority of women's hunger for political activity. Such women had a taste of what their work could achieve. They saw successful results from their participation in public life and wanted more. Crucially they believed that to effect real change women had to have the parliamentary vote.

Nationalist women had formally organised themselves politically since January, 1881. Under the leadership of Anna and Fanny Parnell, the Ladies Land League was established. They were established at the request of the men of the Land League. This in itself was a significant moment for men to ask women to take control. The Land War had gained huge momentum by the 1880s and The Land League was carrying out vital work across the country in securing people's homes. They represented thousands of tenants who had no rights against landlords. The Land League fought on their behalf for fair rent, fixity of tenure and free sale. In 1881 the British government outlawed the Land League after they began a 'no rent' campaign and the Ladies Land League took over the reins of control in response to the incarceration of the Land League members. On 31 January 1881, Irishwomen were asked by Irishmen to take control of the Land League as they were expecting their organisation to be outlawed at any time. The Land League members were not entirely happy with women taking over their role but their work was vital in the Land War and needed to be continued. The formation of the Ladies Land League was outside the terms of the Coercion Act. The Land War was at its height and the work could not cease. The Ladies Land League was a highly successful and effective organisation in the capable hands of Anna Parnell and ran for eighteen months. Rosemary Cullen Owens argues that the women showed themselves more radical and determined opponents than the imprisoned leaders.<sup>26</sup> Margaret Ward writes in *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* how the Ladies Land League were given no instruction or policy to follow and were basically given keys to the office and left to their own devices. The male members of the outlawed Land League did not expect much from the Ladies Land League and only expected them to 'keep up a semblance of organisation...'.<sup>27</sup> However, upon the release of the Land League members the Ladies Land League was dismissed immediately. The British government released the men under the 'Kilmainham Treaty in 1882', however, one of the terms of the treaty stated that the Ladies Land League was to be quashed. Charles Parnell, former president of the Land League and brother to Anna, and the British government both desired to get rid of the Ladies Land League as they feared their radicalism.<sup>28</sup> In this case, it was temporarily acceptable for women to be politically active. Circumstances occurred which required women's assistance and both men and women had to adapt. Both men and women's gender role was challenged and experimented with. Women's role was extended outside of the domestic sphere and into the public sphere. This may have left a feeling of inadequacy among the men. This temporary acceptance occurs again in the

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<sup>26</sup> Rosemary Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times: A history of the Irish women's suffrage movement, 1889-1922*, (Dublin, 1984), p28.

<sup>27</sup> As quoted by Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: women and Irish nationalism*, (London, 1989) p14.

<sup>28</sup> See Ward, 'The Ladies' Land League 1881-82', in *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, pp4-39.

early twentieth century, for example, women's participation in the 1916 Easter Rising, World War I and the War of Independence. These will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter. However, women proved they could assert themselves. Women in the Ladies Land League proved they could run a political movement and effectively execute its principles. They proved they could be successful and productive in the public sphere. Margaret Ward argues that they were 'more efficient and strategically aware than their male colleagues'.<sup>29</sup> Men may have felt threatened by the women's success thus making them insecure in their gender role. They would have felt a need to reassert themselves in the public sphere and redefine women's place in the private sphere. Women's acceptance into political organisations was to prove difficult for decades to come.

Another significant women's organisation to be formed was The United Irishwomen, founded in 1910. It was an organisation that encouraged women to treat their rural work as a business so to improve both their personal and family's living conditions. They also informed women about welfare rights and promoted education<sup>30</sup>. They were concerned for the welfare of young women and in turn the rest of society. Diarmaid Ferriter writes in *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* when speaking of The United Irishwomen:

In 1913, their preoccupation with the welfare of young women was revealed in a resolution that emphasised the urgency of preventing the exploitation of 'imbecile' girls by unscrupulous men 'who were increasing the population of Ireland with children predestined to be idiots, lunatics or criminals, or girls who at best could not be useful citizens'.<sup>31</sup>

They believed by protecting vulnerable girls from being impregnated by corrupt men they could control the standard of citizens for the future. The organisation was a conservative, non-sectarian and non-political organisation with a traditional agenda. They worked to secure the role of women in the domestic sphere<sup>32</sup>. In many respects the United Irishwomen promoted the ideology of separate spheres. N. Gubbins Hurley, member of the United Irishwomen, stated their objectives to be, 'Poor Law, sanitation, education, nursing of sick, amusements, concerts, flower shows, and numberless other activities tending to the brightening of rural life'<sup>33</sup>. Clearly from this statement one can see that the United Irishwomen operated within the terms of the ideology of domesticity.

The Ladies Land League and the United Irishwomen were in total contrast to each other on a number of levels and represented totally opposite ideologies. The Ladies Land League represented a body of women who were willing and eager to enter the public political sphere and perform outside the traditional private sphere. The United Irishwomen represented a body of women who wanted to embrace and strengthen the role of women as homemakers and mothers. However, the United Irishwomen did offer an opportunity to organise. Despite

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<sup>29</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, p5.

<sup>30</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *Mothers, Maidens and Myths: A history of the Irish countrywomen's association* (Dublin, 1995), pp3-10.

<sup>31</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, (London, 2004), p178.

<sup>32</sup> See Leeann Lane, 'Female Emigration and the Cooperative Movement in the Writings of George Russell', *New Hibernia Review*, xvi, no.4, (winter, 2004), pp.84-100.

<sup>33</sup> N. Gubbins Hurley, 'The Need for Guilds of Irish Countrywomen', *Irish Homestead*, 23 April, 1910, p.329.

different perspectives on women's roles in society women were engaged increasingly in the public sphere in this period.

### **A Society of Separate Spheres**

The dominant discourse in Irish society in the late nineteenth century was the ideology of separate spheres. Female activists in the period had to engage with the ideology of separate spheres and did so most usually by arguing that the virtues of the private sphere could be extended to the public if women were to be granted political rights. Many women in support of the parliamentary vote still saw the home and childrearing as a central and unique role of women. Women carried out their role as mother, wife and home maker in the private or domestic sphere and men carried out their role as breadwinner and authoritarian in the public sphere. Expected modes of behaviour for women were also a feature of the late nineteenth century. They were supposed to be quiet, meek, gentle, loyal and humble. Any boisterous behaviour from women was not tolerated. Most Irish women accepted their subordinate role to men and adhered to a life of domesticity in the private sphere. However, employment opportunities had opened up for women from the 1880s and jobs in teaching, shops and offices were available to the educated woman. Therefore, women were entering the public sphere but not at a cost to their role in the private sphere. Women in the late nineteenth century were beginning to step outside their expected roles and modes of behaviour. This slowly gained support but there was also objection.

One argument for women entering the public sphere was the utilisation of their maternal qualities for the good of all society. Their role as care givers and moral guardians could nourish society. Maria Luddy wrote, 'For many activists women's moral nature, their imputed moral superiority, became the primary element in the concept of gender difference that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century'<sup>34</sup>. This 'imputed moral superiority' was women's gateway into the public sphere. Women could influence and provoke legislation in areas that were being overlooked by men, for example, the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Work in the area of local government was another area where women showed an active interest. From 1896 women could be elected as poor law guardians and by 1899 there were eighty five women elected as poor law guardians. This also gave women entry into the public sphere. As society was evolving in the late nineteenth century, the boundary line of separate spheres was becoming more permeable and would remain unclear territory until the issue was readdressed by the 1937 constitution. Indeed, even before the restrictive role of women was enshrined in the 1937 Constitution, the 1920s and 1930s was a period in which legislation was passed which restricted the role of women in the public sphere. The Juries (Amendment) Act 1924 and 1927 and the Civil Service Amendment Act 1925 were examples of such. These will be discussed later in the chapter. It should, of course, be noted, that not all women

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<sup>34</sup> Maria Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', in Angela Bourke (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Volume V Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, (New York, 2002) p72.

were politically active. Most were content with their role in the domestic sphere. It was only a minority of women who wanted to participate in the public sphere. Constance Markievicz, nationalist and suffragist, delivered a speech at the Students' National Literary Society, Dublin, in 1909. In this speech she spoke of the women active since the 1798 Rebellion. She went on to say:

But for the most part our women, though sincere, steadfast Nationalists at heart, have been content to remain quietly at home, and leave all the fighting and striving to the men. Lately things are changing. As in the last century, during the sixties, a strong tide of liberty swept over the world, so now again a strong tide of liberty seems to be coming towards us, swelling and growing and carrying before it all the outposts that hold women enslaved and bearing them triumphantly into the life of the nations to which they belong.<sup>35</sup>

Markievicz comments on women's previous acceptance of their role in the home but she recognised that this was changing and women's identity was developing. She believed women belonged in the national struggle. She appears to be recruiting women into activism. Some women in the late nineteenth century recognised their potential value to society through engagement in the public sphere. At the same lecture, Markievicz said the following, 'Ireland wants her girls to help her build up her national life. Their fresh, clean views of life, their young energies, have been long too hidden away and kept separate in their different homes...The old idea that a woman can only serve her nation through her home is gone...'.<sup>36</sup> Markievicz believed that women can serve her nation outside the home. The view that women could serve her nation through their homes is an old traditional view that is dead according to Markievicz. Throughout history, Ireland was personified as a woman. Erin, Kathleen Ní Houlihan and Hibernia were names given to the female personification of Ireland. Opponents of Irish nationalism used the figure Hibernia who was believed to be the younger sister of the British icon Britannia. Legend tells that Hibernia sought protection from her older sister from the Irish nationalists. Nationalists used the figure Kathleen Ní Houlihan who was believed to be an old woman in need of the young men of Ireland to fight and die for freedom for Ireland. Aisling poems are also a tradition of Ireland dating from the late seventeenth century which depicts Ireland as a beautiful young woman who urges the poet to support the Stuarts in the Jacobite-Williamite War. The female personification of Ireland was therefore, complex and used variously by both sides in the colonial dialectic. So too the position of women in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century was varied and multifaceted. Women were forced to experience and negotiate what were at times competing identities: wife, mother, worker, and activist. Society saw women as an extension of the home but this identity was under challenge as the nineteenth century drew to a close. This notion of women seen as an extension of the home will be discussed in chapter three.

The dominant nationalist thought was that nationalist women should bring the cause into their home and contribute to the national cause by educating future nationalists within the home and by contributing their sons and husbands to the cause. This thinking as to

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<sup>35</sup> Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', pp99-100.

<sup>36</sup> Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', p100.



women's role in the home also permeated unionist discourse. Edith Helen Vane-Tempest, the seventh Marchioness of Londonderry wrote the following quote. She was a suffragist but acknowledged women's primary role as home-maker. She wrote in a pamphlet:

Women in demanding to be released from the indirect bondage of her position, should always endeavour to raise the tone of her life and surroundings higher, and as her responsibilities increase, so will her loyalty and sense of honour correspond, but in her eagerness to have her just political rights accorded her, she must never surrender the position she already occupies, nor with it the best, the highest, and most sacred duties which women, and woman alone, can fulfil in her home, her children and her surroundings.<sup>37</sup>

Edith Helen Vane-Tempest believed women could and must better themselves but this should make their loyalty to their homely duties more prevalent. The domestic duties of the woman were not just a routine fact of life. They were sacred and women were to hold these duties dear. Men could not carry out the duties. The role of mother and homemaker was highly revered in Irish society. Thus, although gender roles were shifting in the late nineteenth century and women were slowly entering the public sphere in the context of political activity and educational advancement, essentialist discourse on women's unique role as mothers in the domestic sphere was still to the fore. No female activist could jettison the discourse but was forced to engage with it. Thus, the ideals and values of the ideology of separate spheres were central to debate on changing gender roles in the period.

Another way women's strong link with the home came to the fore was through the cultural revival. The Gaelic League, established in 1893, aimed to restore the Irish language into society. This restoration began from the home and therefore the responsibility to enforce this lay with women, 'the homemaker'. Women were welcomed into the organisation as teachers and promoters of all things Irish. Mary E.L. Butler of the Gaelic League addressed the women of Ireland in a pamphlet published by the Gaelic League in the early years of the 1900s. Butler writes:

One thing remains to be said. This power is in the hands of the whole people of Ireland, it is true, but it is in an especial manner in the hands of the women of Ireland. Why? Because this language movement is not an academic one. It is a living one. What is wanted is to make the language living in the land; to do this it is necessary to make it the home language; and to make it the home language it is necessary to enlist the co-operation of women-the home maker... This movement in which Irishwomen are now earnestly asked to join, is frequently described as 'the language war', and rightly so. It is a war to the death between Irish ideals and British sordid soullessness... it is a warfare of an especial kind, warfare which can be best waged not by shrieking viragoes or aggressive amazons, but by gentle, low-voiced women who teach little children their first prayers, and, seated at the hearth-side, make those around them realise the difference between a home and a dwelling. To most Irish people it is extremely distasteful to see a woman mount a platform and hold forth in public... Let it then be thoroughly understood that when Irishwomen are invited to take part in the language

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<sup>37</sup> As quoted by Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', p88.

movement, they are not required to plunge into the vortex of public life. No, the work which they best do is work to be done at home.<sup>38</sup>

Butler believed women could partake in their own important war against the 'British sordid soullessness'. That war was the language war. Butler discourages women from activities that constitute a virago. This would include any 'unladylike' behaviour, possibly, a reference to the behaviour of a suffragist. The women of the suffrage movement were regularly spoken of as shrieking viragos. Any woman seen on a political platform of any sort was deemed boisterous. Butler was very clear in her views of where women belonged, the home. Butler's implied criticism of the suffrage movement indicates that women did not think on homogenous lines in the period. The female responses to the various cultural and political campaigns, and changing female roles of the period were varied and complex.

In 1903, a prominent Jesuit priest, Lambert McKenna wrote that the women's intrusion into the public sphere contributed to the decline of the 'modern world'. He blamed the 'modern woman': 'in pressing women into the rough and tumble fight for existence, in putting before her, as her ideal, the modern virago instead of the gentle maid of Nazareth, in setting her up, not as a help but as a rival of man, the modern world is working its ruin'<sup>39</sup>. Once again the term virago was used to describe the modern woman. Modern women were seen to rival man and unable to work in conjunction with man. McKenna believed the problem of politically active and demanding women was so huge it would surely destroy the modern world and society would cease to operate. McKenna was a keen believer in separate spheres. That is how society flowed and worked. He believed that any disruption or change in this would bring society down. He does not believe they are capable of the public sphere, the 'rough and tumble' and therefore all society will suffer in ruin. Women for the sake of society were to remain in the private sphere.

The issue of 'separate spheres' was a very topical one in the early twentieth century. From the above extracts one can see it was debated and discussed among a broad range of organisations and people including clergy, suffragists, nationalists and revivalists and amongst women themselves, often with competing viewpoints. The reality was many women were entering the public sphere out of necessity. They needed to work and they needed to fight for their political freedom. Working class women, of course, were obliged to work to maintain their families. The issue of political equality for women tended to be a middle class concern in the period. A varied discourse manifested itself in response to the gradual move of middle class women into the public sphere. The dominant view was that women should remain within the home. Female activists argued that rights in the public sphere made civilised that sphere and made women better wives and mothers. Few challenged the discourse of separate spheres outrightly to argue on the basis of an equal rights approach.

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<sup>38</sup> Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', p85.

<sup>39</sup> Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-1912*, p74.

## Facilitating Gender Equality: The Role of Education

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, women gained more access to education in the second half of the nineteenth century. The passing of The Intermediate Education Ireland Act 1878 and the Royal University of Ireland Act 1879 enabled girls and women to sit state public exams and to undertake university degrees. Education instilled confidence in women and confidence in their ability to achieve their goals. After 1908, all the universities were open to women. In 1902 the Association of Women Graduates and Candidate Graduates record women with Bachelor of Arts and Master's degrees<sup>40</sup>. This association was formed in 1902 after a meeting of women graduates and candidate graduates in the Gresham Hotel, Dublin. Their objective was to form an Irish association of university women to protect their interests. Over two hundred members were enrolled throughout Ireland with branches in Derry, Belfast, Cork and Galway<sup>41</sup>. Alice Oldham was the first elected President of the association. In 1882 Oldham received a first class honours in English and in 1884 graduated with an honours in logic, ethics and history of philosophy. In 1886 she became a teacher in Alexandra College<sup>42</sup>, Dublin and in 1904 began a series of lectures at a postgraduate level. Oldham worked with Isabella Tod in fighting for the Irish Intermediate Education Act. She was also involved in the campaign for admission of women to Trinity College<sup>43</sup>. Isabella Mulvaney, B.A., LL.D., succeeded Alice Oldham. Mulvaney was hired as head mistress to reconstruct Alexandra College. Student Lydia Frazer wrote the following extract in the Alexandra College magazine in December, 1927:

The result was something more than making a success out of a failure...It prepared the way for the broader outlook of the present day...Years of effort were needed to break through the walls that convention and prejudice had reared against the admission to men's colleges of women as students, free to attend lectures, and to share all the privileges that their graduation would imply.<sup>44</sup>

Frazer highlights the fact that the outlook for women's education previously was a narrow one but that had changed to a somewhat broader one by the time she was writing in 1927. She acknowledges the efforts made to acquire education for girls.

L. Gabhanach Ní Dhubhthaigh recalls what it was like to be a woman student in St. Mary's University College, 23 Eccles Street, Dublin, from autumn 1907. She remembers the emancipation that came for women by just sitting side-by-side with the male students, '...but the small science group attended lectures in University College and worked with the men

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<sup>40</sup> *National University Women Graduates' Association 1902-1952*, (Dublin: Women's Graduates' Association, n.d.) p13.

<sup>41</sup> *National University Women Graduates' Association 1902-1952*, p15.

<sup>42</sup> Alexandra College Dublin, of Earlsfort Terrace, was established in October 1866. It was modelled on Queens College, London, the first institution for the higher education of women in England which was established in 1848. The College was affiliated to the Church of Ireland, however, it was open to women of all denominations. Alexandra College aimed to provide a challenging academic environment while avoiding popular 'accomplishment subjects' such as writing, music and needlework. These 'accomplishment subjects' were believed to better the girl and make her better wife material. See Judith Harford, *The Opening of University Education to Women in Ireland*, (Dublin, 2008), pp. 24-39.

<sup>43</sup> *National University Women Graduates' Association 1902-1952*, p31.

<sup>44</sup> *National University Women Graduates' Association 1902-1952*, p31.

students-a most emancipated proceeding'<sup>45</sup>. She also summarizes the life of an undergraduate female:

Dinner, which we shared with the Convent boarders, was at 3 o'clock, the end of their school day. When it was over, we proceeded down to the National Library, with, perhaps, a diversion to the Café Cairo or the Princess when we were affluent, or when funds were low to the Vegetarian Restaurant in College Street, where an incredible variety of wonderful teas were served at sixpence a head. We studied in the Library till 6 o'clock or so, then went back to "23" for tea, and usually to the Library after that until it closed at 10 o'clock...Still we patronised the Abbey Theatre...some of us frequented the National Literary Society's meetings and the Contemporary Club, besides a few more frivolous entertainments: and we set great store by our own debate evenings and the plays occasionally got up in "23."

That was a university girl's life nearly fifty years ago. We worked pretty hard and we got plenty of fun out of existence, though there were no pictures, no games and a few dances. I believe the Undergraduate life of to-day is a better preparation for the future...<sup>46</sup>

One can assume various conclusions from this extract. By the undergraduates sitting with the school girls they would be leading a good example to the younger generation. The younger girls would be inspired to further their education as a result of their intermingling. The women managed to balance a social and academic life. Their social life was quite cultural but steered clear of the cinema, sport and they rarely attended dances. These activities were perceived to be immoral by the Catholic Church. These women were still conforming to acceptable modes of behaviour.

These women would have required a sponsor or funding from family to aid their study and social life, therefore, education was only accessible for middle-class women wealthy enough to maintain the lifestyle of a student and pay the college fees. Thus, the women who were involved in the various movements at a powerful level were mostly middle or upper-class. Working-class women did not benefit or participate as much on the grounds that they were not educated nor did they have the time to educate themselves on the politics of their country as maintaining a home and job was so time and energy consuming. Education was one of the key driving forces facilitating a demand for gender equality in the wider society.

### Suffrage

Early twentieth century Ireland did not allow women to vote and in essence women remained second class citizens until 1918 when women over the age of thirty who owned property could vote. In 1922 all women over the age of 21 obtained the vote. This inequality encouraged a gender hierarchy among society. Women had no formal political influence on how their society ran. Laws were made by men. As a consequence of this, Ireland's tradition of a patriarchal society was strengthened. Power and privilege remained the preserve of men.

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<sup>45</sup> *National University Women Graduates' Association 1902-1952*, p37.

<sup>46</sup> *National University Women Graduates' Association 1902-1952*, pp37-38.

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the beginnings of the women's suffrage campaign. This campaign was to last into the early twentieth century and caused an immense amount of political and social unrest. Equal rights was not an end in itself. Equal rights were a necessity for self-worth and identity. It was also a gateway to active citizenship.

The suffrage campaign in Britain was a strong influence on the women of Ireland.<sup>47</sup> Rosemary Cullen Owen quotes MP John Stuart Mill writing to Thomas Haslam in 1867 on the achievability of starting a suffrage movement in Dublin as saying 'the immediate prospects are not encouraging'.<sup>48</sup> According to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 'The votes for Women movement in England some years later stirred a responsive chord in some Irish feminist breasts...'.<sup>49</sup> The first Irish women's suffrage group, The Northern Ireland Society for Women's Suffrage (NISWS) began operations in 1871 and was led by Isabella Tod. The Irish Women's Suffrage Society (IWSS) followed suit in 1873. The Dublin Women's Suffrage Society (DWSS), later renamed The Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA), was founded in 1876 by Anna and Thomas Haslam<sup>50</sup>, once described by Francis Sheehy Skeffington as 'The Pioneers of Feminism in Ireland'.<sup>51</sup> These organisations all used constitutional methods to agitate; petitions, public lectures, lobbying of MPs and letters to the press. First on the agenda for the IWSLGA was to extend Poor Law Guardianship and Local Government to women and after twenty years they were successful<sup>52</sup>. Owens argued that attainment of the 'lesser' franchises were essential as they gave women experience in public affairs and gave them the opportunity to prove themselves.<sup>53</sup> She also argues that women's participation in local government boards was 'too often' seen as an extension of their traditional role in the home with their advice being sought on issues of the poor, the sick, education, health and housing.<sup>54</sup> Owens argues that there were a number of reasons for the slow progress of the IWSLGA. The first, many women were actively engaged in with other issues such as the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act which Anna Haslam believed threw the suffrage movement back ten years. Another reason was the condition of politics in Ireland in the final twenty years of the nineteenth century. The association held no public meetings from 1886 to 1896 due to political controversy. The Land League and Home Rule campaigns diverted women from the suffrage course. Some women prioritised political freedom from Britain over women's suffrage.<sup>55</sup> Membership of the IWSLGA is recorded as being forty three in 1896, 647 in 1911 and 240 in 1917.<sup>56</sup> Noticeably there was a major drop in membership. The reasons for this, the tensions between suffrage and nationalism, will be discussed later in the chapter.

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<sup>47</sup> See Owens, *Votes for Women*, p6.

<sup>48</sup> Owens, *Smashing Times*, p22.

<sup>49</sup> Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', in Owens, *Votes for Women*, p12.

<sup>50</sup> Owens, *Smashing Times*, pp22-25.

<sup>51</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p5.

<sup>52</sup> The Women's Poor Law Guardians (Ireland) Bill was passed in 1896 allowing women to be elected as Poor Law Guardians. By 1899, 85 women were elected as Poor Law Guardians. Thirty one of these were also Rural District Councillors and four were Urban District Councillors. See Owens, *Votes for Women*, p5.

<sup>53</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p26.

<sup>54</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p34.

<sup>55</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p27.

<sup>56</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p25.



Suffragists pointed to women's success in the public sphere as proof of their capability and entitlement to the parliamentary vote. Suffragists continued petitioning and lobbying in the early twentieth century but some were eager to adopt a new approach. In 1908, the 'Votes for Women' campaign developed and the militant suffrage campaign began with the founding of The Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL). This group was led by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins. They were adamant on votes for women to be included in the Home Rule Bill of 1912 and in protest adopted a policy of heckling Irish MPs. Many members of the IWFL were arrested for public disorder offences.<sup>57</sup> This organisation was no doubt bolstered by the fact that many of the women involved were the first generation to achieve third level education. This instilled a strong sense of confidence and right of place in the IWFL. They published their own newspaper called the *Irish Citizen*, produced by Frank Sheehy Skeffington and James Cousins, which was in circulation from 1912-1920. Their motto was, 'For men and women equally the rights of citizenship; from men and women equally the duties of citizenship'. The IWFL were a very active and flamboyant element in everyday Irish life, 'We had colours (orange and green), a Votes for Women badge, slogans; we made use, with feminine ingenuity, of many good publicity devices and stunts... We held parades, processions, pageants'.<sup>58</sup> They also staged a census resistance along with regular poster parades, Daffodil Fetes, Pageants of Great Women and Christmas Fairs (with cockshots of Redmond, Asquith and Carson).<sup>59</sup> There were many suffrage societies throughout Ireland in the early twentieth century; the Conservative & Unionist Women's Suffrage Association, the Irish Women's Suffrage Society and The Munster Women's Franchise League. In 1911, the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation was established by Louie Bennett and Helen Chenevix in an effort to link together all the different societies.<sup>60</sup>

The suffrage campaign in Ireland faced numerous obstacles. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, suffragette and nationalist, wrote 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette' in 1941. Her memoirs provide an insight into the experiences of an active suffragette. On becoming a suffragist Sheehy Skeffington wrote, 'I was then an undergraduate, and was amazed and disgusted to learn that I was classed among criminals, infants and lunatics-in fact, that my status as a woman was worse than any of these.'<sup>61</sup> She also declared:

The Press, both National and Conservative, official Sinn Féin, the clergy on the whole (organised religion generally) were opposed to the militant movement, primarily because revolt of women for their own emancipation is always frowned on by organist males, and partly because the Churches are opposed to any change.<sup>62</sup>

From the above extract, it is clear suffragettes met with a lot of opposition from all quarters of society.

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<sup>57</sup> Between 1912 and 1914 there were 36 women convicted for suffrage activities in Ireland. See Owens, *Votes for Women*, pp9-11. Also see, William Murphy, 'Suffragettes and the transformation of political imprisonment in Ireland, 1912-1914' in Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (eds), *Irish Women and the Vote: Becoming Citizens*, (Dublin, 2007) pp114-135.

<sup>58</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p13.

<sup>59</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p26.

<sup>60</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p7.

<sup>61</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p12.

<sup>62</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p17.

In Dublin the 'Hibs' (Ancient Order of Hooligans, Francis Skeffington called them) used to close our open air meetings to the strains of 'God Save Ireland' or 'A Nation Once Again.' In Belfast our movement was regarded as tainted with Nationalism (of the Craigs, one brother, later Craigavon, was a suffragist, the other an anti; of the Redmonds, John was an anti, Willie a suffragist,) while in the South we were held to be opposed to Home Rule because of our opposition to the Liberal Government then holding back suffrage.<sup>63</sup>

Sir Edward Carson and his party were equally opposed; the Orange Order is exclusively male, humbly served by women in a strictly ancillary capacity. They too wanted no diversion of forces, busy on the Covenant and all that.<sup>64</sup>

Suffragettes seemed to offend all the political associations in Ireland. All from different perspectives but with common stance: women should not participate in the public sphere. The opposition felt threatened by these women. This sense of threat can also be seen in the following quote and concurs with Sheehy Skeffington's statement. John Dillon, Home Rule supporter and leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1918, said, 'Women's Suffrage will, I believe, be the ruin of our Western civilization. It will destroy the home, challenging the headship of man, laid down by God. It may come in your time- I hope not in mine!'.<sup>65</sup> This carries resonances of Lambert McKenna's comment mentioned previously. The belief was that women's suffrage was destroying a sacred law, a man's superiority. Sheehy Skeffington wrote of how the women of the IWFL coped with such opposition:

Women speakers who could hold their own, who could lift their voices in the Fifteen Acres, meeting heckling on their own ground, being good-humoured and capable of keeping their temper under bombardments of rotten eggs, over-ripe tomatoes, bags of flour, stinking chemicals, gradually earned respect and due attention: Suffs were good sports.<sup>66</sup>

The Suffragettes were confident and articulate according to Sheehy Skeffington. Of course, the two leaders of the IWFL were third level graduates; education, as discussed facilitated female confidence and in this way gave momentum to the cause of votes for women. It appears they met with a bad reception although were strong enough to rise above it. They had to be thick skinned and hard workers to survive in the suffrage campaign. Sheehy Skeffington also notes that they were gradually earning respect and attention. This would indicate that their political activity was becoming a usual occurrence and the public were getting used to their displays. By the time of the militant campaign the issue of votes for women had been before the public for nearly thirty years. If many were opposed to violence in the cause many were increasingly more accepting of the principle. At another point in Sheehy Skeffington's memoirs she writes of the abuse she personally went through in her home town of Limerick on 12 October 1913. Sheehy Skeffington, unrecognised, managed to get on the platform of a public meeting with John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party:

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<sup>63</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p16.

<sup>64</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p18.

<sup>65</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p18.

<sup>66</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p14.

I was begged to give a promise of non-intervention but declined, unless Mr. Redmond promised to include votes for Irishwomen in the Home Rule Bill. So my protest took place duly, and I was pinioned and rapidly hustled down the steps a threatening mob accompanying. An infuriated male relative came along, partly to see me off the field, but also to prevent mob violence: his cousinship struggling visibly with his Party feelings. At the gate, the women-they are swift actionists-tore my cap from my head, and the hairpins tumbled down. An elderly 'bum' thrust a dirty face close to me and shouted beerily: 'Are ye a Suff?' I said, 'Yes', whereupon he spat copiously into my face...<sup>67</sup>

Clearly from this extract one can see that the public opinion of Suffragettes in Limerick was a negative, hostile and violent one. Even Sheehy Skeffington's close relative was enraged by her activities and although he tried to protect her he did so violently. His loyalty to John Redmond was stronger than his loyalty to his own kin. A number of members of the IWFL eventually found themselves imprisoned in Mountjoy Prison for breaking windows at the GPO, the Custom House and Dublin Castle. Sheehy Skeffington writes of the public reaction, '...we got excellent publicity from an enraged Press, and mixed feelings from the general public, but on the whole, naturally, condemnation. Not only were we the enemies of the Home Rule, but rebels as women.'<sup>68</sup> The most violent experience Sheehy Skeffington writes of is with the visit of Herbert Asquith, Liberal Prime Minister 1908-16, in the summer of 1912, to Dublin. An English suffragette threw a blunt hatchet at the podium where Asquith and John Redmond were standing. The hatchet grazed Redmond's ear and the altercation that followed was quite intense. Sheehy Skeffington recalls:

There was a devil to pay; of course, the public and Press worked up a fine hysteria, women were mobbed, any suspected of being Suffys were mobbed-our secretary, Mrs. Emerson, was seized and about to be rushed to the Liffey and flung over the low parapet at O'Connell Bridge, when she was rescued by some friends; another group attempting to hold a meeting at Beresford Place, had the platform rushed by a mob and tried to take refuge in Liberty Hall, but the doors were closed upon them.<sup>69</sup>

The suffragettes were infuriating the public and they became the target of a passionate mob mentality that condemned violence yet used violence against them.<sup>70</sup> They were insulting the Catholic Church and its fervent parishioners by rejecting their belief of womanhood. The Church of Ireland also condemned the suffragettes. The Very Reverend C.T. Ovenden, dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, refused a service for the imprisoned suffragettes. In 1914, the *Church of Ireland Gazette* argued that suffragettes should be deported. Mary Leigh, member of the WSPU, was nearly placed in a mental asylum according to prison board records. Authorities constantly referred to her as being mad. She had been force fed for forty-six days.<sup>71</sup> This notion of women being 'mad' or 'away with the fairies' if not conforming to their traditional role was an old belief and more examples will be shown in the next chapter.

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<sup>67</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragist', p16.

<sup>68</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p20.

<sup>69</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p22.

<sup>70</sup> See Owens, *Smashing Times*, pp56-60.

<sup>71</sup> Owens, *Smashing Times*, p64.



Women were faced with threats of deportation, imprisonment and mental asylums for militancy.

The suffragettes were strategic and cunning with their stunts, for example, in 1912, in protest to women's exclusion from the Home Rule Bill, the IWFL smashed the windows of the Government buildings, the GPO, the Custom House and Dublin Castle. However, they did not just go out and simply smash windows. They were conniving and strategically planned their protests. They planned which buildings to attack first, separated into teams and went out in the early hours. Their intention was to give the police the impression of a larger force. Eight were arrested for the protest.<sup>72</sup> On the 13 June 1912, eight women were arrested for smashing windows and sent to prison for sentences ranging from two to six months.<sup>73</sup> They used prison as publicity exploit, 'we got excellent publicity from an enraged Press.'<sup>74</sup> The Press was eager to report on the imprisonment of women as it was so scandalous and controversial. The suffragettes who were imprisoned were able to inform the Press as they were allowed privileges as political prisoners such as letters, visits and association with other suffragettes.<sup>75</sup> Ironically, prison was an opportunity for suffragettes to be seen and heard. Their imprisonment produced propaganda. The suffragettes were the first in Ireland to use hunger strike as a weapon of symbolism and a bargaining tool<sup>76</sup>. 15 August 1912, four Irish suffragettes in sympathy with the three hunger striking English Suffragettes were imprisoned in Mountjoy for attacking Asquith. Two of the English suffragettes were force fed. The Irish suffragettes were not.<sup>77</sup> Sheehy Skeffington felt that this method made the public more sympathetic to their cause. Owens also argues that suffragettes won some public approval for their dedication and willingness to go to prison and to hunger strike if necessary.<sup>78</sup> She wrote, '...a feeling began to be voiced that there was something unreasonable in refusing women the vote'.<sup>79</sup> Women were sacrificing their health and lives by using this torturous method of protest for 'Votes for Women'. The public upon hearing of these activities were sympathetic to suffragettes perhaps because they were still seen as meek, vulnerable and naïve women who were being exposed to unnecessary harm. By the end of the brief militant campaign, suffragettes were deliberately committing regular crimes to get into prison and the General Prisons Board were using the Temporary Discharge for Ill Health Act<sup>80</sup> to release them within days of their admittance<sup>81</sup>. There were thirty-five women convicted between 1912 and August 1914 for suffrage related offences.<sup>82</sup> Holding these women in detention was costing the prison authorities too much time and too many resources. They were constantly under the

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<sup>72</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', pp19-20.

<sup>73</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p55.

<sup>74</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p20.

<sup>75</sup> See Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', pp20-22.

<sup>76</sup> See William Murphy, 'Suffragettes and the Transformation of Political Imprisonment in Ireland, 1912-1914'.

<sup>77</sup> Owens, *Smashing Times*, pp62-64.

<sup>78</sup> Owens, *Smashing Times*, p67.

<sup>79</sup> M. Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', pp97-98.

<sup>80</sup> This Act, more commonly known as the Cat and Mouse Act, was passed in April 1913. In an attempt to tackle hunger strikes, this Act enabled prison authorities to release a prisoner temporarily with a date of return to prison to carry out their sentence. The return of prisoners was not heavily enforced in Ireland. See Owens, *Smashing Times*, pp64-66.

<sup>81</sup> W. Murphy, 'Suffragettes and the Transformation of Political Imprisonment in Ireland, 1912-1914', p127.

<sup>82</sup> Owens, *Smashing Times*, p64.

watchful eye of the public. By 1915, militancy in Dublin had almost ceased. Owens explained that for the exception of one case, all militant acts by suffragettes were in response to parliamentary developments on women's suffrage, and most referred specifically to the role of the Irish Party in such developments. She also suggests that women in the south of Ireland were abstaining from militancy due the extreme tactics of the WSPU who had at that stage become arsonists. Irish suffragettes did not want to be associated with such extremity.<sup>83</sup> Irish suffragettes also did not want the IWFL to be seen as a branch of the WSPU.

Suffragettes sacrificed a lot to carry out their activities, professionally and personally. For example, in the biography of Rosamond Jacob, *Rosamond Jacob: Third Person Singular* by Leeann Lane, Lane writes of the strong relationship between Jacob and Sheehy Skeffington's son Owen. Jacob stayed with the Skeffingtons and witnessed Hanna's uncommitted approach to parenting. Lane observed from Jacob's diary that Hanna's political activism was a hindrance to her ability to fully carry out her parental duties. The same was said for Hanna's relationship with her husband. They would go weeks without really seeing each other.<sup>84</sup>

Sheehy Skeffington also wrote of what the IWFL meant to the women involved:

The movement was a liberal education for all those who took part in it; it developed a new camaraderie among women, it lifted social barriers, it gave its devotees a new ideal, a revelation as of a new religion, it helped women to self-expression through service, calling forth that spirit of sacrifice strong in most women (too potent perhaps), but this time, for the first time in history, not for a man's cause but their own.<sup>85</sup>

According to Sheehy Skeffington, the women's movement provided a valuable and beneficial opportunity for the women involved. Sheehy Skeffington indicates that social division and class was an obstacle for women. Different classes and religions tended to stay together and not mix. There was no reason or similar interests for them to mix. For example, higher education was for the middle and higher classes, philanthropic work was generally done by middle-class Quakers or Protestants. However, the Suffrage movement brought women from all religions and all social classes together on neutral ground with a united agenda, 'Votes for Women'. With the advent of war in 1914 came a lessening of militant suffragism as many devoted themselves to the nationalist cause.<sup>86</sup> Under the Representation of the People Act, in January 1918 the parliamentary vote was extended to women over the age of thirty who were householders, wives of householders, occupiers of property of at least £5 annual value or university graduates. Universal adult suffrage was achieved in 1922 under the Free State Constitution. All women and men over the age of 21 could vote.<sup>87</sup>

The ideal woman in Ireland in the early twentieth century was a homemaker, wife and mother. A new ideal was constructed by the IWFL. They believed in a woman with a voice, an education and a vote but who could remain as a wife and mother. They also derailed the

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<sup>83</sup> Owen, *Smashing Times*, pp71-73.

<sup>84</sup> Leeann Lane, *Rosamond Jacob: Third Person Singular*, (Dublin, 2010) p141.

<sup>85</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p14.

<sup>86</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p10.

<sup>87</sup> Owens, *Votes for Women*, p11.

stereotypical impression of suffragettes, 'The myth of the hard-faced man-hating spinster was dispelled; these women were charming, they made a pleasing impression; they showed courage and resourcefulness; they were ready to make sacrifices.'<sup>88</sup> Sheehy Skeffington also mentions women's spirit of sacrifice that Irish women were renowned for. They were to sacrifice everything for their families. This may be the potency Sheehy Skeffington refers to. The sacrifices of female activists in the suffrage campaign improved the position of women in Irish society, although it should be noted that the most tangible benefits were to be experienced by middle class women. Through this sacrifice and activity they enabled self-expression. Self-expression was something that would have been discouraged in the traditional ideal Irish woman. Any unladylike behaviour such as militancy was also discouraged. This was to be an issue for the women involved in nationalism also.

### Nationalism

Nationalism and the move towards advanced nationalist thinking was an interest for some women but they were not accepted into nationalist organisations such as the Irish Volunteers or The Irish Republican Brotherhood. Maud Gonne wrote in her autobiography *A Servant of the Queen* of her struggle to get involved in such organisations. Timothy Harrington, an Irish Parliamentary Party politician, who was helping her to get involved said the following to her 'None of the parties in Ireland want women; the National League, the Fenians, the Celtic Literary Society, the Contemporary Club, have all refused me membership because they accept no women members, so I have to work all by my lone, till I can form a women's organisation'.<sup>89</sup> Maud Gonne founded Inghinidhe na hÉireann in 1900 when it became apparent that there was no place for women in the formal nationalist movement. Women tended to set up separate groups where they sometimes played a supportive role to the male exclusive organisations. Maud Gonne was one of the women who worked for the release of the Land League men<sup>90</sup> (later renamed the National League). As mentioned earlier, the Ladies Land League maintained the role of the Land League while the Land League members were imprisoned.

Inghinidhe na hÉireann was an Anglophobic organisation that promoted all things Irish, politically, culturally and economically. Countess Markievicz was a member of Inghinidhe na hÉireann. Sinéad McCooie argues that many of the members who joined were young working women and joined so to enjoy the liberty of attending lectures, céilís and debates.<sup>91</sup> They also published their own newspaper *Bean na hÉireann* from 1908, edited by Helena Molony, feminist and labour activist. The paper published Gaelic-language columns and republican poems and stories. They advertised Irish-made goods in an attempt to revive

<sup>88</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', p14

<sup>89</sup> Maud Gonne, *A Servant of the Queen*, (Chicago, 1938) p119.

<sup>90</sup> Gonne, *A Servant of the Queen*, p124.

<sup>91</sup> Sinéad McCooie, *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years* (Dublin, 2003) p21.

Irish past and establish new fashion trends<sup>92</sup>. They did this also to relieve unemployment, 'To relieve unemployment every woman has in her own hands one simple and swift remedy, the support of Irish manufacture.'<sup>93</sup> The paper provided an advanced feminist commentary sympathetic to labour and feminism. Its January 1909 issue stated on the front page:

We would like to foster amongst Irishwomen a desire to work, rather than talk about it in the columns of newspapers...our *raison d'être* is to awaken Irishwomen to their responsibilities and long neglected duties...There is little use in us women starting to abuse men and their methods of thought and action. We must remember the humiliating fact that they are largely what their women-folk made them. Neither must we waste time bemoaning our past disabilities. We must set about raising the present position of women in the social and political life of the country, and we must labour to make their present environment compatible with their moral and intellectual advancement, which incidentally means the development of the nation and of the race...we look for the advent of women into public life for a loftier idealism and a purer atmosphere...men will soon have to frankly admit that is only by working hand in hand that we can hope to make Ireland free.<sup>94</sup>

Inghinidhe na hÉireann fostered the political activism of women.

The Gaelic League, founded in 1893, technically accepted women on equal terms as men. Jenny Wyse-Power<sup>95</sup> remarked that the work of The Gaelic League was of 'such a nature that women's help was essential' and 'From the beginning, women sat on its Branch Committees and Executive'.<sup>96</sup> Rosamond Jacob<sup>97</sup>, however, criticised the poor participation levels of the women of The Gaelic League.<sup>98</sup> The Gaelic League was a cultural nationalist organisation which adopted a non-political stance. It sought to revive the Irish language and culture. Women's role in this organisation was often, however, despite the discourse of gender equality within the organisation, a traditional and supportive one according to Jacob and they were often commended for their catering skills and pretty attire.<sup>99</sup>

The nationalist organisation Sinn Féin, founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith, allowed women into its organisation and had never been without a woman on its Executive.<sup>100</sup> Jennie Wyse Power, member of Inghinidhe na hÉireann, was voted onto the executive in 1911. Sinn Féin was a new organisation and this meant it was founded in a society where women were politically active. It was not a long-standing organisation restricted by traditional gender stereotypes with policies based upon such. It may be argued that they only allowed women membership to acquire more support for elections. Within a decade such equality in Sinn

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<sup>92</sup> *Bean na hÉireann*, Vol.1. No.3., January 1909 advertises 'Irish Made Fur', 'Irish Fern' and 'Irish Art Jewellery'. These were regular advertisements in the paper. See Karen Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics During the Irish Revival*, (New York, 2007) p191.

<sup>93</sup> *Bean na hÉireann*, January 1909.

<sup>94</sup> *Bean na hÉireann*, January 1909.

<sup>95</sup> Jenny Wyse Power was a member of The Ladies Land League, The Gaelic League and vice-president of Sinn Féin.

<sup>96</sup> As quoted by Margaret Ward in *In Their Own Voice, Women and Irish Nationalism*, (Dublin, 1995) p14.

<sup>97</sup> Rosamond Jacob was a suffragist and nationalist.

<sup>98</sup> Lane, *Rosamond Jacob*, p240.

<sup>99</sup> Lane, *Rosamond Jacob*, p45.

<sup>100</sup> M. Ward, *In Their Own Voices*, p15.



Féin seemed to decline. In April 1917 a group calling themselves the 'Conference of Women Delegates' wrote to Sinn Féin with a demand for equality of status for women within their organisation. At that time there was only one woman on their executive, Countess Plunkett. Sinn Féin had expanded their council but only recruited more men and not women. The Conference of Women Delegates found this to be a betrayal of the 1916 Proclamation.<sup>101</sup> This letter supposes that there was a lack of gender equality among members of Sinn Féin. Dr. Kathleen Lynn pleaded women's value to Sinn Féin at a 1917 Convention:

We see all around us a system rotten with corruption and intrigue. If women have their place it will be much easier to keep it open and honest and open and straight... We are inexperienced, different and timid. We ask the men with centuries of experience to give us a little help and encouragement at the start, so as to give us a fair share in the great work before us.<sup>102</sup>

The founder of Sinn Féin, Arthur Griffith stated, 'From the day we founded Sinn Féin we made no discrimination as to sex for any office in the organisation...It must be made clear that women are just as eligible as men for any position in the country'.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, on paper equality was policy for Sinn Féin but in practice it was not the case. Women had technically been granted equality but it was still difficult to implement due to society's discomfort on the subject. Equality was to remain an on-going struggle. The removal of legal barriers was not enough to remove women's subordination. In practice many barriers remained.

The Ulster Volunteer Force founded in 1913 in opposition to Home Rule, enlisted three thousand women between 1913-1914. Their role was similar to the role women were to play in the 1916 Easter Rising. They worked in the ladies' signalling section, as ambulance and dispatch riders, typists, postal workers and some as intelligence workers who deciphered police messages. Some women were also gun and ammunition runners.<sup>104</sup> An Ulster woman wrote in 1914, 'One cannot go anywhere in Protestant Ulster without finding women whose whole time is occupied in preparing [UVF] hospitals, collecting money, holding meetings, and organising deputations'.<sup>105</sup> These women were dedicated. The Nationalist response was the formation of the Irish Volunteers in November 1913 of which there were no women members. Women formed a separate auxiliary organisation called Cumann na mBan. Countess Markievicz became President of Cumann na mBan. They were a support group to the Irish Volunteers. Their objectives were, "To advance the cause of Irish liberty, to organize women in the furtherance of this object, to assist in arming and equipping a body of Irishmen for the defence of Ireland, to form a fund for these purposes, to be called 'The Defence of Ireland Fund'".<sup>106</sup> By 1914, Inghinidhe na hÉireann became affiliated with Cumann na mBan.

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<sup>101</sup> Minutes of Conference of Women Delegates, 1 August 1917: *Sheehy-Skeffington Papers* MS 21, 194. National Library of Ireland.

<sup>102</sup> *Sinn Féin Convention Report* MS 21, 523. National Library of Ireland.

<sup>103</sup> *Sinn Féin Convention Report* MS 21, 523. National Library of Ireland

<sup>104</sup> Diane Urquhart, *Women in Ulster Politics, 1890-1940: A History not yet told*, (Dublin, 2000) p64.

<sup>105</sup> As quoted by Urquhart, *Women in Ulster Politics*, pp63-64.

<sup>106</sup> Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', p104.

In essence, women's role in nationalism was as a support similar to the role of wife and mother conforming to the idealized traditional Irish woman. They were an administrative body. They worked public relations and rallied support by fundraising. They financially sponsored the nationalist struggle. One could argue they were used. Their work was crucial to the nationalist cause and they did not receive the gratitude they deserved. Some women may have been content to be used in this capacity and some were not. Margaret Ward argues that there were two different types of women who engaged in nationalism. The type who demanded equality of status and the type who carried out any duty required of them and were content to do so, similar to a traditional homemaker. Ward argues that the former type constantly tried to prove their worth and therefore never fulfilled their needs. She wrote:

As anomalies within the rigidly masculine tradition of Irish nationalism, they were either deliberately suppressed or eventually compelled to amalgamate with the wider movement where, in a desperate attempt to gain equal status they become hyperactive, constantly dreaming up new schemes to prove their capabilities and justify their existence, but unable to develop any clearly defined programme which would have added cohesion and credibility to these disconnected gestures.<sup>107</sup>

Those women were never comfortable taking an inferior or support role and according to Ward this drove them into desperation. They were never content with their position in the organisation and desired for acknowledgement. These women had a working relationship with nationalism that was unrequited.

## Labour

The labour movement in Ireland, particularly Dublin, was gaining momentum in the early twentieth century. The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union was founded in 1909 by James Larkin and James Connolly. By 1913 it had a member count of ten thousand. Women were also attracted to the trade union movement and in September 1911 the Irish Women Workers' Union was formed by Delia Larkin, sister of James Larkin. Conditions of employment for women were substandard. Most women worked in domestic service.<sup>108</sup> There were few industries in Dublin to absorb a female workforce. Therefore, many women who had to work went into domestic service which because of the high availability of workers was a badly paid job with no standard of working conditions or regulations. Another option for women was prostitution. Dermot Keogh writes that the women workers did not receive any sympathy from trade unions as they were seen as cheap labour who would undercut tradesmen.<sup>109</sup> By 1911, women were entering the work force in larger numbers so

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<sup>107</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, p248.

<sup>108</sup> 128,918 women state their occupation to be in domestic service in the 1911 census, See The National Archives of Ireland

([http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/results.jsp?census\\_year=1911&surname=&firstname=&county=&townland=&ded=&age=&sex=F&relationToHead=&religion=&education=&occupation=domestic+servant&marriageStatus=&birthplace=&language=&deafdumb=&marriageYears=&childrenBorn=&childrenLiving=&search=Search](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/results.jsp?census_year=1911&surname=&firstname=&county=&townland=&ded=&age=&sex=F&relationToHead=&religion=&education=&occupation=domestic+servant&marriageStatus=&birthplace=&language=&deafdumb=&marriageYears=&childrenBorn=&childrenLiving=&search=Search)) (09/02/13).

<sup>109</sup> Dermot Keogh, *The Rise of the Irish Working Class: The Dublin Trade Union Movement and Labour Leadership 1890-1914*, (Belfast: 1982).

the interest of women in their working rights and conditions grew. They were also concerned for their families' living conditions. In September of that year, Delia Larkin wrote in the 'women workers' column of the *Irish Worker*:

It was, in reality, a surprise to all present. It has also been a source of conversation and comment to the general public, because an idea has always been uppermost in the people's minds that it was utterly impossible to get a number of women to come together for any demonstration. In fact, I myself, have always felt that women were apathetic in their attitude towards their own betterment, but Tuesday's meeting has once and for all dispelled that feeling.<sup>110</sup>

Previous to the IWWU meeting, there was the view that women would not fight or act to better themselves. This was the view of the general public. After their first meeting that view was ousted. The Dublin Lockout of 1913 saw thousands of women striking for many months. During that time many became politicised through anger and necessity. Helena Molony of Inghinidhe na hÉireann was also a labour activist. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington of the Irish Women's Franchise League was also a member of the Irish Socialist Party. The Irish Citizen Army was founded in 1913 by James Connolly for the protection of workers. Women were welcomed into this army on equal terms as their male counterparts. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington wrote in her memoirs that James Connolly welcomed women rebels 'wholeheartedly' unlike some of the other Labour leaders.<sup>111</sup> Connolly also supported the IWFL. Members of his union, the Irish Trade and General Workers Union, often publically proclaimed their support and protected the suffragettes at their meetings.<sup>112</sup> Some women gradually became active in all areas of politics. They were active citizens. They had achieved what many more before them had fought for.

### **The Relationship between Organisations**

The relationship between organisations was complex. Some women chose to be active in one or more organisations. Those women active in the suffrage movement were from both protestant and catholic backgrounds. Some women did have to choose between the nationalist and unionist movements. Eventually, they also had to choose between the nationalist campaign and the campaign for female suffrage. The second stage of the campaign for votes for women was overshadowed by the nationalist movement. Evidence of this can be seen in Hanna Sheehy Skeffington's memoir 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette'. She wrote the following when speaking of Irish feminists and the Irish Women's Franchise League:

Then, in the late summer of 1908, stimulated by English revolt, a group of us got together and planned an Irish 'Suff' group which was to have the same aims- Votes for Women- but to work on independent Irish lines; that was essential, and we were strongly Irish-minded, most of us, realizing that, though the House of Commons was

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<sup>110</sup> Maria Luddy, 'The labour movement in Ireland, 1800-2000', in A. Bourke; S. Kilfeather; M. Luddy; M. Mac Curtain; G. Meaney; M. Ni Dhonnchadha; M. O'Dowd; C. Wills (eds), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vol V Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, (New York:2002), p.550.

<sup>111</sup> Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', p93.

<sup>112</sup> Owens, *Smashing Times*, p61.

still the arbiter of Irishwomen's as well as Irishmen's destinies, we should have to adopt slightly different tactics and begin at once on our own M.P.s pressing to have a clause embodying Votes for Women in our measure of Home Rule.<sup>113</sup>

And that is what they did do. They lobbied MPs to include a Bill for women's votes in the Home Rule Bill of 1912. They were continuously rejected. The IWSLGA and the IWSS had already been in operation for over thirty years at that stage but were viewed by Nationalist women to work too closely with their English counterparts. Nationalist women believed the franchise should come not from a foreign parliament. Countess Markievicz said in 1909 while giving a lecture to students, 'But I would ask every Nationalist woman to pause before she joined a Suffrage society or Franchise League that did not include in their Programme the Freedom of their Nation. "A Free Ireland with No Sex Disabilities in her Constitution" should be the motto of all Nationalist women...'<sup>114</sup> In the same lecture she stated, 'No one can help you but yourselves alone; you must make the world look upon you as citizens first, as women after'.<sup>115</sup> The belief was once Home Rule was achieved suffrage could follow. Nationalists believed that suffrage detracted from the nationalist cause. Many nationalist women did not condemn the suffrage campaign. The conflict or tension among the two movements came down to priority. *Bean na hÉireann*, the newspaper of Inghinidhe na hÉireann, discussed women's franchise in the February 1909 issue. It shows that the relationship between suffrage and nationalism was a complex one. It is not simply an issue of one over the other. The article portrays a hunger for equality not simply achieved through franchise. What is required is equality in quality of life; education, business, politics and work opportunities:

A vote may be the hall-mark of equality, but it is in our daily lives-in matters of education, in commerce on local administrative boards, and in the labour market, that we need real liberty and equality. It is from Irishmen that this must be won... We respectfully submit to the Irish Women's Franchise League that this is an unworthy and humiliating position for them to take up. If the English Parliamentary vote is not, in itself a source of power, then we should not stultify ourselves by wasting time and energy agitating for it. It is disappointing to find women simply wanting to follow blindly in men's footsteps, instead of profiting by their experience and avoiding their mistakes. 'Bean na hÉireann' is, and will always be, as keen and enthusiastic an advocate for the Cause of Women as the most extreme 'Suffragette' could wish. It is not a question of putting Nationality before sex, or sex before Nationality. The two questions do not clash at all, although at first sight they appear to. The feminist cause in Ireland is best served by ignoring England... At all events, women should first set their own house in order... The Gaelic League and the Sinn Féin organisation are the only ones in existence at present where women are on equal footing with men. For that reason they are worthy of the support of every Irish woman Suffragist.<sup>116</sup>

According to this extract, equality can only be obtained from an Irish government. Many nationalist women supported suffrage but it meant nothing from a foreign government. The

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<sup>113</sup> Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', pp91-92.

<sup>114</sup> Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', p100.

<sup>115</sup> Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', p100.

<sup>116</sup> Luddy, 'Women and Politics, 1860-1918', p101.



article emphasises Inghinidhe na hÉireann's feminist persuasion. It even states that nationalism and suffrage do not clash as issues. 'At all events, women should first set their own house in order'; this was a traditional Irish mind-set. The image of a house in order is very much an image based on the discourse of separate spheres. Nationalist women's religious devotion and loyalty meant they adhered to the church's view of women as subordinate to men and traditionally this suited the gender hierarchy that existed in the nationalist movement. The Catholic Church teaching on women was that their primary role was in the home as wife and mother. As wife and mother they were to support, nourish and provide care. Their role in the nationalist cause was exactly this. Yet, this article offers evidence to suggest that in 1909 some nationalist women wanted a more significant role. Inghinidhe na hÉireann pledged their support for the Gaelic League and Sinn Féin on the merit they were accepted as equals to men and they were the only organisation that did so. Another article in the January 1909 *Bean na hÉireann* echoes the desire for national freedom before suffrage:

Now, look at the position that vote-grabbing man has assigned to what he chooses to call the weaker sex. She is bracketed among criminals, soldiers, and paupers, and robbed of the initial right of citizenship- the vote. The vote that is the hallmark of a free citizen is not hers- politically she does not exist...Consider also our nationality- our poor nationality- tattered as it is, and its edges blurred and indistinct from the English nation...The men of our race, descended like us, from a long line of martyrs in the cause of liberty, will not try to keep our rights and our duties from us, and the day that Ireland stands free before the world shall be see our emancipation too.<sup>117</sup>

Analogous to nationalist women, unionist women also chose to support the fight against Home Rule leaving the women's movement aside and second in the ranks of priority. Another distraction for the women's movement was the First World War. They had to choose whether to engage in the war efforts or remain engaged in the fight for suffrage, although, this was more of an issue for English suffragists,

Another piece of evidence to support the priority argument in the context of suffrage versus nationalism is a piece written by Mary MacSwiney in 1914 in the *Irish Citizen*. Mary, sister to Terence MacSwiney, was a nationalist. She pleaded with the Irish suffragists for common sense. She believes the English suffragists are right in their efforts for the vote but believes Ireland has a more important battle to focus on:

But in Ireland even those who have placed Suffrage first must take the special circumstances of the country into consideration if they wish to win adherents to their cause. Ireland is struggling to settle not a Party question, but a National one, and opposition to the Government in the present crisis means opposition to Home Rule. The fact that many Irish suffragists play the political ostrich and refuse to recognize the essential difference between this and English party questions, does not minimise that difference; it simply blinds their political intelligence and injures the cause they wish to promote.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *Bean na hÉireann*, January 1909, Vol. i, No.3.

<sup>118</sup> *The Irish Citizen*, 23 May 1914.

According to MacSwiney, Irish suffragists were damaging their own cause by discounting the national issue. 'Irish suffragists are rather losing their heads and by their present tactics injuring their own cause. This does not apply to Militants only...' <sup>119</sup>. On the other hand, suffragists argued their cause was bigger than national politics. Diarmaid Ferriter quotes suffragist and trade unionist Louie Bennett as saying that 'the women's movement was not anti-nationalist but was greater than the cause of a nation because it was "the cause of humanity"' <sup>120</sup> Ferriter argues that this is a reminder that the middle-class women who were politicised had a much broader sense of politics and social concern than their male counterparts. <sup>121</sup> Women could see the bigger picture. Some female activists such as Bennett, a pacifist, saw politics as something beyond nationalism and unionism, once again emphasising the fact that the position of female activist was not homogenous in the period.

The relationship between the labour movement and the suffrage movement was also a hostile one even though James Connolly was a supporter of gender equality. The tension came from class difference. Ferriter writes, 'And yet it was also the trade unions that shabbily treated Delia Larkin, sister of James, because of her militancy, her independence, but above all her class'. Sheehy Skeffington was also prejudiced towards the working class having been heard to say that consorting with servants was demoralising to one's mood. <sup>122</sup> This suggests that class category was another contributing factor to add to the conflict in society among women, along with religion and political stance. Conflict was a running theme for women's lives in the early twentieth century and some women even found themselves participating in the domestic war conflict which was the Easter Rising of 1916. This was the height of women's activity early twentieth century Ireland and the events to follow, particularly after 1922, brought women's role ultimately back into the private sphere.

### 1916 Easter Rising and Beyond

'There would have been no Easter Week had it not been for the women who urged the men to take action boldly.' <sup>123</sup>

Nationalist women played various active roles in the 1916 Easter Rising. Their role and activity was varied among posts. Women were dispatch messengers, spies, couriers, gunrunners, first-aiders and snipers. The women of Cumann na mBan and the Irish Citizen Army fought alongside their male counterparts. The only garrison that did not allow women to take part was at Boland's Mill which was commanded by Eamonn de Valera. Countess Markievicz was Second-in-Command at the Royal College of Surgeons garrison at St Stephen's Green. All the roles women played were vital and key roles. Historically their participation has been underplayed. Women were successful in their role in the rebellion.

<sup>119</sup> *The Irish Citizen*, 23 May 1914.

<sup>120</sup> Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, p174.

<sup>121</sup> Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, p174.

<sup>122</sup> Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, p177.

<sup>123</sup> Dr. Kathleen Lynn argued this at a Sinn Féin Convention in 1917, *Sinn Féin Convention Report* MS 21, 523. National Library of Ireland.

They did not receive any gratitude nor were any named heroes. Women's participation made some men uncomfortable, De Valera's refusal to have women serve with him, it may be suggested, is a case in point.

The 1916 Proclamation was read outside the General Post Office by Patrick Pearse and announced Ireland's independence from Britain. It also announced women as full citizens, 'The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights, and equal opportunities to all its citizens'. Elizabeth O' Farrell played a key role in the surrender of the GPO. She risked her life by approaching the British forces delivering the surrender documents. The original photograph of Padraig Pearse surrendering to General Lowe shows Elizabeth O' Farrell standing beside him. In subsequent remakes of the photograph O'Farrell is eliminated from the picture. This is an example of women's key involvement and subsequent elimination. They were written out of history in an attempt to cover up women's involvement in the war. A retreat back to a society of separate spheres could not have this history in the public arena. It was a bad example for women and made men uncomfortable. They were used and then disposed of.

The period following the Rising gave women the opportunity to participate more in the nationalist movement as most of the male activists were imprisoned or executed. This was reminiscent of the temporary control women adopted in 1881 when the male Land League members were imprisoned. They campaigned for their release and they supported families from the Defence of Ireland Fund which Cumann na mBan had organised. They continued the fight for independence.

In 1918 The Representation of the People Act was passed. This enabled women over thirty with specific property requirements to vote. Sinn Féin put two women Constance Markievicz and Winifred Carney forward for the 1918 election and Markievicz became the first woman to ever become elected to Westminster. She did not take her seat but instead formed part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Dáil Éireann. Women were, in this period, increasingly visible in the public sphere. Women had acquired franchise, participated in the Rising, gained access to education, made legal breakthroughs with the Contagious Diseases Acts and Property Acts and it appeared their future was bright after all those significant successes.

The shift in gender roles began in the late nineteenth century gaining momentum around the time of the Rising. Women were optimistic about their future; however, the 1920s was laden with a sense of anti-climax and betrayal. By 1922, all women over twenty-one could vote but they were discriminated against on so many other levels. The Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act 1922 made provisions for unmarried mothers and children to be institutionalised. Unmarried mothers were classified into two categories; 'first offenders' to be dealt with in the same institution as children and 'old offenders' to be sent to Magdalen Asylum where they 'shall be offered an opportunity of relief and retrieval'.<sup>124</sup> Women had limited access to the public sphere, for example, jury duty curtailments and job promotion, opportunity and pay were far from on par with men. The Civil Service

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<sup>124</sup> Irish Statute Book Produced by the Office of the Attorney General, 'Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923 (<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1923/en/act/pub/0009/sched1.html>) (28/01/2013 17:38).

Amendment Bill 1925 sought to exclude thousands of women from of the civil service by barring them from certain civil service exams.<sup>125</sup> Jennie Wyse Power, founder member of Inghinidhe na hÉireann, argued against the Bill, 'I regret that this has come from the men who were associated in the fight with women who played their part at a time when sex and money were not a consideration.'<sup>126</sup> Women felt a sense of betrayal as these men were once their colleagues. The Jury Bills of 1924 and 1927 sought to exclude women from jury service. Ultimately, women who wanted to carry out jury duty had to apply to have their names included on jury lists. Jennie Wyse Power also opposed this Bill. The following extract is taken from Jennie Wyse Power's argument against the Bill as recorded in the Seanad on the 30 March 1927:

...if this Bill becomes law the civic spirit that is developing in women will be arrested...But by the happenings, political happenings if you like, during the last 50 years the men who led political movements and carried them in the main to success, utilised women in order to achieve their object. That utilisation of women helped in a great degree their civic spirit, and some of them encouraged more or less by the way they have been thrust out, as it were, to do work that they never did before, came gradually into public life and have done social work which is generally regarded as successful...<sup>127</sup>

The civic spirit of women was still developing according to Wyse Power and if interrupted at that stage would cause damage. Wyse Power believed women had been used for the political gains of men for fifty years. She also believed women were happy to be utilised that way as it fulfilled them personally. It enabled them to enter the public sphere if they so wished. When speaking of the Minister, 'He is doing such an injustice to what is really a necessary asset to every State, the co-operation of its men and women. Now that men had achieved their political goals through the utilisation of women there was no further requirement for women to be in the public sphere. Again in 1927, in the Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor, illegitimacy and unmarried mothers came under the spotlight. Unmarried mothers were characterised into unmarried mothers with one child who 'may be amenable to reform' and repeat offenders who are 'the less hopeful cases.' Remedial measures included a period of forced detention and segregation.<sup>128</sup> In 1932, a public service marriage bar was introduced which prevented women holding certain jobs in the civil service after marriage. The Conditions of Employment Act 1935 extended the marriage bar to all civil service jobs

<sup>125</sup> Seanad Éireann, Díospóireachtaí Párliminte (parliamentary debates); Tuarisc Oifigiúil (official report), vol. vi. 17 December 1925, (<http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/S/0006/S.0006.192512170006.html>) (28/01/13 17:56).

<sup>126</sup> Seanad Éireann, Díospóireachtaí Párliminte (parliamentary debates); Tuarisc Oifigiúil (official report), vol. vi. 17 December 1925, (<http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/S/0006/S.0006.192512170006.html>) (18/10/11 13:10).

<sup>127</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas (Tithe an Oireachtas), Seanad Debates, Public Business- Juries Bill, 1927- Second Stage, Wednesday 30 March 1927 (<http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/Debates%20Authoring/DebatesWebPack.nsf/takes/seanad1927033000007>) (28/01/13 19:39).

<sup>128</sup> Anthony Potts and Tom O Donoghue, *Schools as Dangerous Places: A Historical Perspective*, (USA, 2007) p131.

and gave the government powers to restrict the numbers of women in any industry.<sup>129</sup> This was an attempt by men to re-define women's role in the home and to promote, once again, the primacy of women in the home to the detriment of their role and rights in the public sphere. The State after 1922 distinguished between men and women as citizens. To bring this period of discussion, 1910-1937, to a close was Bunreacht na hÉireann. The 1937 Constitution defines the family as the basic unit of society. Woman's primary role in this basic unit was as mother and wife. Irish women did organise themselves and campaigned against the draft constitution but the campaign was short-lived lasting less than two months. Articles that were offensive in the 1937 draft constitution were 9, 16, 40, 41 and 45. Omission of article 3 of the 1922 constitution granting equal citizenship was also of grave concern.<sup>130</sup> Most women were content with their position in the home so were not offended by the 1937 Constitution.

Margaret O'Callaghan writes of the stigma that was attached to the women still involved in politics. She quotes the derogatory phrase 'nationalist harridan' in describing how these women were perceived. This stigma against them was used as a weapon for rejecting women from politics. They were seen by wider society as irrational, emotional and incapable of behaving coherently in politics. Politician P.S. O'Hegarty wrote:

Just as, on the male side, the gunman came to be the dominant personality, so his counterpart, the gunwoman, came to be the dominating figure of the woman's side of the movement. The gunwoman lived on war, on excitement, on stunts and gradually shut out everything but those. War, and the things which war breeds- intolerance, swagger, hardness, unwomanliness- captured the women, turned them into unlovely, destructive minded, arid begetters of violence, both physical and mental violence... They became practically unsexed, their mother's milk blackened to make gunpowder,... It was a woman who said, before even the Treaty vote was taken 'If no man be found to shoot Michael Collins, I'll shoot him myself' and it is women who were largely responsible for the bitterness and the ferocity of the civil war... It is woman, woman adrift with her white feathers or whatever else fulfils in other conditions the same purpose, with her implacability, her bitterness, her hysteria, that makes a devil of him (man).<sup>131</sup>

O'Hegarty believed women who were involved in war became genderless. He uses harsh terms to describe these women especially when he states they risked their natural role as mothers, 'their mother's milk blackened to make gunpowder'. From the language used one can sense the distain this man held for women active in nationalism. He even goes so far as to blame them for the ferocity of the Civil War.

Margaret O'Callaghan makes the point that most women left in the political sphere were there because of their links to dead rebels<sup>132</sup>. Take for instance Nora Connolly, daughter

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<sup>129</sup> Caitriona Beaumont, 'Gender, Citizenship and the State, 1922-1990', in Scott Brewster (ed), *Ireland in Proximity: History, Gender, Space*, (London, 1999), pp97-98.

<sup>130</sup> Maria Luddy, A 'Sinister and Retrogressive' Proposal: Irish Women's Opposition to the 1937 Draft Constitution', in *Transactions of the Royal History Society*, (Sixth Series), Vol.15, (2005), pp. 175-195.

<sup>131</sup> Patrick Sarsfield O'Hegarty, *Victory of Sinn Féin: How it won and How it used it* (Dublin, 1998), pp.102-5.

<sup>132</sup> Margaret O'Callaghan, 'Women and Politics in Independent Ireland, 1921-1968', in Bourke (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology*, p121.

of the executed James Connolly, Kathleen Clarke, sister of the executed Edward Daly and wife of the executed Thomas Clarke. These women would have carried their emotions into their politics but society emphasised this as hysteria, bitterness and irrationality denying them agency or political opinions in their own right.

Post-independence women were driven back into the domestic sphere where their existence was to be lived in relation to their home, husband and children. There was no requirement for women to partake in public life anymore according to society. Legislation was introduced to ensure women were pushed back into the home. Male public opinion of women was published in newspapers and magazines and the role of women in society came to the fore of public concern. This will be discussed in detail in chapter four. This in turn led to the mass exodus of women from Ireland. They sought not just economic opportunity. They emigrated for personal freedom.

Margaret Ward argues that women were written out of Ireland's historiography<sup>133</sup>. The thousands of politically active women who were involved in nationalism, suffrage and trade unionism disappeared on paper, never to be written about until recently. In a sense, they had a short time in the sun and were shunned, quickly, into the darkness of a political abyss. Yet, types of women emerged in the early twentieth century that did not exist in the previous century; university educated women, suffragists, nationalists, intellectuals, trade unionists, professional working women and female politicians. The identity and role of women was extended. Her function and status in society changed. Her everyday actions, roles and responsibilities changed. Women could not carry out such varied activities in long gowns with excessive fabrics or encased in restrictive undergarments. Women's clothing had to match their lifestyles. Clothing was also a device to channel new found identities and express personality. Both these factors contributed to the fashion and dress of the early twentieth century.

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<sup>133</sup> See Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism*.

## Chapter Two

### Early Twentieth Century Irish Women's Dress

To borrow Christopher Breward's understanding of fashion, fashion means clothing designed predominantly for expressive and decorative means. It is related closely to the current short-term directives of the market and does not consider clothing for work or ceremonial purposes.<sup>134</sup> Valerie Steele defines 'fashion' to be the cultural construction of the embodied identity.<sup>135</sup> Eugenia Paulicelli argued that fashion and dress are important components of culture.<sup>136</sup> The Oxford dictionary defines fashion as 'a popular or the latest style of clothing, hair, decoration, or behaviour.'<sup>137</sup> In this chapter, fashion will be discussed in terms of clothing for the body and personal style in the period 1910-1937. Gianna Manzini, Italian fashion writer, believed fashion 'is seen to its greatest effect against the background of its historical and cultural context as an area of enquiry, that is, that has roots and traditions that stretch back into time'.<sup>138</sup> This chapter will examine Irish dress and female fashion in the context of changing gender roles in the early twentieth century discussed in chapter one. The history of fashion and dress has been a topic of rich research for the past thirty years. Christopher Breward<sup>139</sup>, Valerie Steele<sup>140</sup> and Jennifer Craik<sup>141</sup> among many others have been significant contributors to research into the history of fashion. This research, however, has not focused on Ireland for the most part.

A range of primary sources were utilised for this research. *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* contributed significantly to this chapter. These were magazines aimed at women and girls and fall under the heading of prescriptive literature. Prescriptive literature will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter. The Census of Ireland, 1911, will also be referred to in this chapter and the following chapter. The census returns of 1911<sup>142</sup> provide a detailed account of people's lives. It provides information on where people lived, how many people lived in a home or on a street, and how many rooms that home had. It also provides personal information like what occupation people had, their religion, age, marital status, children born to them living and dead, literacy capabilities and country/county of origin. This information provided critical primary information to this research as it enabled an insight into the different classes in society and how they lived.

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<sup>134</sup> Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress*, (Manchester, 1995) p5.

<sup>135</sup> 'Valerie Steele Fashion' (<http://valeriesteelefashion.com/blog/category/publications/>) (29<sup>th</sup> April 2012).

<sup>136</sup> Eugenia Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Shirt*, (Oxford, 2004) p2.

<sup>137</sup> Oxford Dictionaries (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/fashion>) (02/02/13).

<sup>138</sup> Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, p5.

<sup>139</sup> Christopher Breward has published numerous history of fashion books including *Fashion and Modernity*, *Fashion* (Oxford, 2005), *Fashion* (Oxford, 2003) and *The Hidden Consumer* (Manchester, 1999).

<sup>140</sup> Valerie Steele has also published numerous history of fashion books including *The Corset: A Cultural History* (Yale, 2003), *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* (Yale, 1997), *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (Oxford, 1988) and *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power* (Oxford, 1996).

<sup>141</sup> Jennifer Craik has published *Fashion: The Key Concepts* (Oxford, 2009) and *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (New York, 2005).

<sup>142</sup> Census of Ireland 1911 ([www.census.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie)) (19<sup>th</sup> July 2012).

Fashion takes its form from many factors; society, the economy, gender, function, occasion and influence. Fashion has roots in history and has evolved throughout the ages in accordance with the factors listed. After providing a historical and cultural context for the lives of women in the early twentieth century in the previous chapter with an emphasis on gradually evolving gender roles, this chapter will study the changes in women's dress in Ireland in the period 1910-1937 as presented in *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls*. This chapter will argue that political and social change in Ireland influenced women's dress in the sense of what colours they chose to wear, what style of dress they wore and for a very brief period during the cultural revival, the creation of a national dress. This chapter will also present an idea of femininity that was shifting as required or instructed by society throughout the period in question. The idea of femininity altered in unison with women's changing gender roles. For example, during World War I women in England were required to take up posts left vacant by men active in the war. The concept and typical understanding of femininity had to be altered for the duration of the war. For functionality purposes dress would have also had to alter to physically enable the women to carry out their newly adopted role. How women dressed expressed changing notions of femininity. There was a large emphasis on dress as an expression of femininity. Femininity was a huge theme in women's dress and shifts in the definition and understanding of femininity was portrayed through changing women's dress. After an examination of women's changing gender roles in chapter one the aim of this chapter is to understand the history of women's fashion in Ireland in the early twentieth century in accordance with changing gender roles as presented in the two magazines under analysis.

This research offers interpretations of Irish women's dress while taking into consideration cultural and social influences. These interpretations are theoretical and this research appreciates the complex nature of all factors contributing to fashion. For instance clothing could reflect emancipation for women but emancipation meant different things for women at different times. Wilson and Taylor articulate this perfectly:

The standard interpretation of the fashions and customs of the 1920s is precisely this: to translate short skirts, cosmetics and cigarette smoking into 'freedom' for women. As in the 1960s, the situation was more complex and more contradictory. The popular meaning of 'emancipation' for women had shifted away from the ideas of social and political rights that had been so important before 1914. Social emancipation- the freedom to drink, to smoke, even to make love, to dispense for ever with chaperones- served as a substitute for possibly more solid economic freedoms, and was in any case an option only for those few women who were socially and economically independent.<sup>143</sup>

One can see significant changes in fashion occurring alongside women's changing roles. Women required freedom of movement in a working physical environment. They needed to appear professional when working in the public sphere. One can also see changes as new influences emerged such as the cinema. Interpretation of fashion can be difficult and more complex than one would at first perceive. Christopher Breward wrote: 'Hackneyed

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<sup>143</sup> Wilson and Taylor, *Through the Looking Glass*, (London, 1989), p79.



comparisons between skirt length and negative cultural conditions haunt twentieth-century fashion journalism, and as we have seen, influences and conditions of clothing consumption and production are too diverse to suggest such singular explanations.<sup>144</sup>

Irish women were not slaves to fashions. As a people steeped in patriarchal and religious tradition they were slow to alter their ways. Ireland had a rigid society insofar as changing the status quo of behaviour and appearance. Any change to that society was done so slowly and with a lot of discussion as will be seen later in chapter and in more so in chapter four. However, Ireland was still exposed to fashion change and influence. It is clear from examining Irish magazines, notably, that Irish women's dress was influenced by Paris and London despite a desire in the period amongst Irish Irelanders to preserve Ireland free from outside cultural influences. Middle and upper class Irish women's clothing adapted aspects of the latest trends from London and Paris, albeit at a slower pace. Ireland was a country steeped in traditional stereotypes, women as homemakers and mothers and men as providers. Anything that challenged the status quo was met with apprehension and hesitation. This is evident in the May 1913 edition of *The Lady of the House*. The 'Fashion of the Hour' section discusses dress shape briefly, 'There has been an effort to launch a frankly long waist, but the majority seem chary of accepting it. The fact is, everyone has been pleased with the fashions of late, and they therefore shirk any radical change in the silhouette.'<sup>145</sup> As will be shown further in the chapter this 'long waist' was to become a feature of early twentieth century dress. As will be shown in this chapter, prescriptive literature like *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* was the forum for fashion display and discussion.

### Prescriptive Literature

Prescriptive Literature includes conduct-of-life books, domestic arts manuals and etiquette guides. Women's magazines also fall under this category of literature and often then include all of the above topics. A woman's magazine could have a section on how to behave correctly, how to improve personal and home appearance, cooking and cleaning tips among many more instructive literature type sections. Prescriptive literature can challenge both change and tradition in gender roles. Different magazines would hold a different ethos on the role of women and in the section for reader's letters and contribution different opinions were published to either promote change or tradition for women's roles. *The Lady of the House* appeared to support changing gender roles for women. *Our Girls* encouraged a more traditional gender role for women. Women's magazines sole target audience was women. The aim was to define womanhood and ensure women were educated to understand their role as described in the literature. They consistently told women who they were supposed to be and how they were supposed to behave. There was often conflict in the attempt to construct this definition, a conflict between the views of State and Church and the various organisations and classes. Prescriptive literature is an interesting resource as it indirectly reveals how

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<sup>144</sup> Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p187.

<sup>145</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1913.

social, cultural and political influences construct women's lives and how the notion of femininity was shifting as required or instructed

Numerous books with in depth research can be found on prescriptive literature and women's magazines for the UK including Alison Adburgham's *Women in Print* and Irene Dancyger's *A World of Women*. Prescriptive literature in Ireland has been overlooked by historians for the most part. Some study has been done by Caitriona Clear in her book *Women of the House: Women's Household Work in Ireland 1922-1961*. Clear examines later prescriptive literature with a focus on how it constructs the ideology of women of the home. She also focuses a lot on literature aimed at the middle-classes such as the *Catholic Bulletin* and literature from the 1940s such as Maura Laverty's *Kind Cooking*<sup>146</sup>. This chapter will examine Irish prescriptive literature from the perspective of dress and fashion. Marjorie Ferguson wrote about the influence of women's magazines in the period 1950-1980:

They contribute to the wider cultural processes which define the position of women in a given society at a given point in time...the journals help to shape both a woman's view of herself, and society's view of her...For these periodicals are about more than women and womanly things, they are about femininity itself- as a state, a condition, a craft, and an art form which compromises a set of practices and beliefs.<sup>147</sup>

Ferguson understands femininity to be a construction of much complexity. Fergusons likens women's magazines to a cult, 'The Cult of Femininity'. They were a vehicle by which the values of the cult of femininity were disseminated:

The direct parallels are these: the oracles that carry the messages sacred to the cult of femininity are women's magazines; the high priestesses who select and shape the cult's interdictions and benedictions are women's magazine editors; the rites, rituals, sacrifices and oblations that they exhort are to be performed periodically by the cult's adherents. All pay homage to the cult's totem – the totem of Woman herself.<sup>148</sup>

According to Ferguson, women's magazines contain the doctrine of femininity. The Editor conditions and shapes the concept and form of femininity. The message of the doctrine is that women are 'separate and different from men'<sup>149</sup>. The ideological woman is put on a pedestal and if readers mimic their idol woman in appearance and behaviour they are successful. Themes covered in these journals include motherhood, cookery, domestic management, fashion and beauty, political and social issues, etiquette and conduct, religious life, employment and work outside the home, and marriage. Readers are presented with images and descriptions of the epitome of femininity and they are expected to emulate that. There were also child friendly versions of this literature. This literature groomed children into future readers of women's magazines. Young girls would get an introduction to what's expected of them as they are growing into young women. Young girls could look at *The Little Cook* (1903) or *The Mary Frances Housekeeper* (1916) for guidance on ideal feminine behaviour.

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<sup>146</sup> *Kind Cooking* was a household advice book produced in Ireland by Maura Laverty. It contained recipes but also contained prescriptions about the priorities of women. See Caitriona Clear, *Women of the House: Women's Household Work in Ireland 1922-1961*, (Dublin, 2000) p78.

<sup>147</sup> Marjorie Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*, (London, 1983) p1.

<sup>148</sup> Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*, p5.

<sup>149</sup> Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*, p39.

Although published in England they regularly made their way into Irish homes. This may have been due to family sending over magazines for their relatives or subscriptions attained by young Irish girls. This instruction was done through the mediums of poetry, pictures, songs and stories.

Prescriptive literature and women's magazines were a centuries' old tradition before 1910. As far back as 1727, *A Ladies Journal* was launched in Dublin and printed by W. Wilmot. The editor, described as a 'love-sick bachelor'<sup>150</sup>, declared himself to be a 'Champion of women, defending them...with a little Instrument, call'd a PEN, as sharp as the best point'.<sup>151</sup> It was a weekly journal and its pages consisted of poems and tales of love. There was a gossip feel about the magazine and a deliberate attempt to scandalise well known members of society.<sup>152</sup> This type and style of magazine was to remain for centuries to come. There were an immense number of weeklies and magazines to choose from. Before World War I, in Ireland, there were 250 weeklies and in the 1930s about 400 were recorded. If fortnightly and monthly magazines were to be included there was well over 1000.<sup>153</sup>

Some feminists believe women's magazines reinforced women's subordinate and secondary social status. They believe pressure was put on women to conform to their idea of femininity. Another argument is that advice given in these magazines invented the average woman.<sup>154</sup> Women's magazines available in Ireland in the period 1910-1937 were *The Lady of the House*, *The Signpost*, *Our Girls*, *Woman's Own*, *Woman's Weekly*, *Tatler*, *Woman's Mirror* and *Woman's Life*. Due to Ireland being an anglophone country, publications from Britain also found their way into Irish homes. Tony Farmer wrote, 'Extensive circulation of British weekly and daily mass-market publications made obvious what was often called the "slow process of denationalisation", as English goods and frankly vulgar mass-market English publications flooded into the new markets.'<sup>155</sup> In the late nineteenth century Irish journals could not compete with the English publications imported. Many Irish publications were circulated but did not last past their first edition. In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom, read the English publications *Lloyd's Weekly News*, *Pearson's Weekly*, *The Lady's Pictorial* and the *Gentlewoman*.<sup>156</sup>

In Britain, the women's magazine industry expanded massively from the 1880s. However, so much social and political upheaval occurred in the early twentieth century that by 1918 magazines had to restructure its content and targeted readership.<sup>157</sup> The Boer War and WWI resulted in rationing and political divisions. Publication houses had to be careful in their content and message in order to continue sales. In the case of Ireland, this also would

<sup>150</sup> Iona Italia, *The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century: Anxious Employment*, (Oxon, 2005) p40.

<sup>151</sup> Italia, *The Rise of Literary Journalism*, p39

<sup>152</sup> Alison Adburgham, *Women in Print: Writing Women and Women's Magazines from the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria*, (London:1972) p77.

<sup>153</sup> Louis Cullen, *Eason & Sons: A History*, (Dublin, 1989) p335.

<sup>154</sup> Caitriona Clear, *Woman of the House: Woman's Household Work in Ireland 1922-1961*, (Dublin, 2000) p69.

<sup>155</sup> Tony Farmer, *Ordinary Lives: Three Generations of Irish Middle Class Experience: 1907, 1932, 1963*, (Dublin, 1991) p59.

<sup>156</sup> Cullen, *Eason & Sons*, pp81-82.

<sup>157</sup> Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p200.

have been the situation. A growing Catholic middle-class, a squeezed out Anglo-Irish aristocracy and a Celtic revival led to a social unrest in Ireland. There was also a tremendous amount of political unrest that magazines distributed in Ireland would need to comment on as people wanted to read about the issues of their country; Home Rule, the outbreak of World War I, the Easter Rising and the Armistice had all occurred by 1918. Topics such as suffrage and trade unionism were also common discussions in the media as will be seen in the final chapter.

Cynthia White in her examination of prescriptive literature identifies an editorial shift in women's magazines during the mid-1930s. The shift was a return to a 'traditional' view of femininity that once again emphasised the home and family over fashion.<sup>158</sup> This is evident in the prescriptive literature of Ireland. *Our Girls* certainly portrays this shift. Although only printed from October 1930, in its 1930s columns one can read articles entitled, 'The Home Beautiful- The Essence of Cosiness', 'Do you Sleep Enough?', 'The Art of Conversation', and 'Helpful Household Hints' among others. There was a serious lack of articles that addressed political or social issues. Breward writes, 'There has undoubtedly been a tendency within cultural history generally and fashion history in particular to prioritise the modern, the revolutionary and the metropolitan at the expense of a sense of continuity.'<sup>159</sup> This is also evident in Ireland as under the extensive publicity about modern trends in dress, Ireland still remained a traditional country insofar as most women still remained in the domestic sphere, religion still held a stronghold over the lifestyle choices of the people and the views of society. Magazines and newspapers were inundated with the term 'modern' and all its connotations in the early twentieth century generating a degree of criticism and concern from magazines such as *Our Girls*.<sup>160</sup> The harem skirt is debated and the 'emancipated western woman'. 'Modern conventions' are mentioned in the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1911 edition of *The Lady of the House*. 'Those modern girls' got some bad press in *Our Girls* 1933. 'Make your Home Modern' was an article in the *Irish Independent* on the 21 May 1929. 15 November 1930, a Dublin store advertises in the *Irish Independent* that all their stock is modern. 'All About Modern Dancing' graces the pages of *The Irish Times* on the 8 October 1927. 'Modern days, modern methods, modern tastes, modern blends, moving with the times and striving after the Peak of Perfection in plug tobaccos, we have evolved' states Clarke's in an advertisement in the *Irish Independent* on September 11 1936. This is just a miniscule example of the number of articles and advertisements that mention in some way the term 'modern'. The term was referenced to fashion, the home, behaviour and furniture proving there was an excitement surrounding the notion of modernity. Yet despite such references to the modern the ideology of separate spheres and the 'traditional' idea of femininity still remained for the majority of the people. Women's magazines always had a home section with cooking and cleaning tips. They also always contained advertisements for groceries and baby products. This suggests that these subjects and areas of life were still in the woman's domain. According to society, women were always the caregivers and the homemakers regardless of the wave of modernity

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<sup>158</sup> Cynthia White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968*, (London, 1970) p112.

<sup>159</sup> Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p208.

<sup>160</sup> See 'The Fashion of the Hour', *The Lady of the House*, 15 March 1911 where they discuss the 'modern silhouette'. Also see, 'The Women's Parliament', *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1911.

that was supposed to be 'consuming' the country. This was very much the case in the 1920s and 1930s. The ideology of separate spheres was strengthened by legislation<sup>161</sup> which indicated that women's role was in the domestic sphere.

Women's magazines were a tool for 'dream peddling'. They represented the 'pop-culture' at the time. They reported on popular people's lifestyles. They defined what femininity was. They were also a barometer of social, stylistic and economic change. Further in this chapter, the context of these magazines will be examined to show how they set the standards of femininity, how they channelled the latest trends from Paris and London and how they gave women something to mimic. Women's magazines acted as a reference guide for women carrying out 'necessary impression management'. This notion of 'necessary impression management' will be discussed in fuller detail in the next chapter.

### *The Lady of the House*

*The Lady of the House* was a very popular magazine among Irish women. It was founded by Henry Crawford Hartnell, an established historical writer<sup>162</sup>, and published in Dublin, 1890-1923. It was published for the up-market grocery chain Findlaters, which was heavily advertised in the magazine, and claimed a circulation of 20,000 copies.<sup>163</sup> Hartnell was a scholar who disapproved of 'gossip' columns.<sup>164</sup> This may have been a reflection of the other magazines available at that time. It was later renamed *Irish Sketch* and then *Irish Tatler and Sketch*.

Its pages included topics on beauty, the home, fashion and economic, political and social matters. Its February 1911 edition asked 'Which Reform is Most Worthy of Our Energies?' 'Votes for Women' was the most popular reform. 'Proportional Representation, 'Women's Trades Unionism', 'The Crusade Against Tuberculosis' followed with a mention of alcoholism and the care of the impoverished child. *The Lady of the House* very much encouraged women in the professions. It can, therefore, be said to have been liberal in terms of women's equality issues. Titles of articles included 'The Girl Engineer'<sup>165</sup>, 'Women's Aircraft Work'<sup>166</sup>, 'The Lone Squatter: A Woman's Interesting Experiment in Farming'<sup>167</sup> and 'My Hairdressing Saloon'<sup>168</sup>. It also encouraged recreational activities such as dancing and sport.<sup>169</sup> John Strachan and Claire Nally argue that the New Woman is signified in *The*

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<sup>161</sup> The Juries (Amendment) Act 1924 and 1927 placed restrictions on women from serving jury duty impeding their duties as citizens and ultimately denied them this right. The Civil Service Amendment Act 1925 barred women from certain civil service exams.

<sup>162</sup> 'A Victorian Christmas' (<http://dublincitypubliclibraries.com/story/victorian-christmas>) (13<sup>th</sup> October 2012).

<sup>163</sup> Farmer, *Ordinary Lives*, p11.

<sup>164</sup> 'Happy Birthday', *The Irish Times*, 10 October 1960, p6.

<sup>165</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1917.

<sup>166</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1917.

<sup>167</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1917.

<sup>168</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1917.

<sup>169</sup> The front page and second page of *The Lady of the House*, 15 Mar 1919, were dedicated to Dancing and the fashion sections often included illustrations for sports outfits.

*Lady of the House* through an appeal to work and to physical well-being.<sup>170</sup> *The Lady of the House* was not a conservative magazine and appeared to embrace modernity and change with a particular focus on changing gender roles for women in society. Although, Strachan and Nally, through an examination of the advertisements in *The Lady of the House* conclude that the matter was more ambiguous and the magazine did not simply encourage or discourage one ideal and they sometimes contradicted themselves. They give an example of such contradictory advertising. In 1891 an advertisement for J.W.Elvery & Co. depicts a woman cycling her bicycle in the rain wearing waterproofs. The advertisement is for waterproofs but also notes for sale 'Waterproof Bed Sheeting, Nursing Aprons, Cushions, Water Beds, Enemas etc.' Strachan and Nally describe the complexity of the advertisement, 'While seemingly offering the possibility of freedom and independence, it also situates the female reader in her traditional role as caregiver and mother, neatly encapsulating the contradictions and debates surrounding a woman's role in society.'<sup>171</sup>

It is quite possible to ascertain a type of reader from the title of the magazine; the word 'Lady' is used. This suggests a middle or upper class adult reader. The rest of the title 'of the House' suggests a typical stereotypical Irish woman as homemaker. Its content also revealed a type of reader with a focus on middle class activities at the higher end of that class spectrum. Fashion columns dictated appropriate attire for 'luncheons'<sup>172</sup> and many evening gowns were illustrated<sup>173</sup>. The magazine also advertised fur products<sup>174</sup>. An advertisement for vacuum cleaner rental stated 'You can Spring-clean without upsetting your servants through extra work'<sup>175</sup>. The following advertisements show the lady of the house being assisted by their domestic servants:

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<sup>170</sup> John Strachan and Claire Nally, *Advertising, Literature and Print Culture in Ireland, 1891-1922* (London, 2012) p128.

<sup>171</sup> Strachan and Nally, *Advertising, Literature and Print Culture*, pp128-130.

<sup>172</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 March 1910.

<sup>173</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1910.

<sup>174</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1917.

<sup>175</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 February 1910.





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Domestic servants were typical for middle and upper class homes as seen in the census returns for 1901 and 1911<sup>178</sup> and as the example in the appendix, tables A-C, shows. All advertisements in *The Lady of the House* would indicate a middle and upper class readership.

<sup>176</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1913.

<sup>177</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1917.

<sup>178</sup> Appendix: 'Servants on Haddon Road 1911', table C. Haddon Road in Drumcondra, Dublin, was a middle-class residential street. See 'Occupations of Heads of Households on Haddon Road 1911', table B. All the Heads of Household were Professionals or Merchants if not widowed. There was a mix of religious denominations on the road but predominantly it was Roman Catholic. See 'Residents of Haddon Road 1911',

Fashion was a very popular topic in *The Lady of the House*. Advertisements for fashion houses and dressmakers were frequent:

New Spring Fashions

**COSTUMES TO ORDER,**

In Latest Spring Fashions, in New and Exclusive Shades  
of Whipcords, Linton Cheviots, and Diagonal Suitings,

**From 35/-**

**Fit, Style, and Finish Guaranteed.**  
PATTERNS FREE.

**MCCORMY & CO.**

23 and 24 North End St., DUBLIN 1  
75 and 76 North End St., DUBLIN 1

TO BE OPENED 1913

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table A. The houses were all categorised as second class with between seven and nine rooms. There was one family in each house. Only four houses on the street out of thirty seven were without servants. One house belonging to a Catholic Christopher M Grimes, Solicitor, had four employees; Nursery Governess, Midwife and two Domestic Servants, see The Census of Ireland 1911

([http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Clontarf\\_East/Haddon\\_Road/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Clontarf_East/Haddon_Road/)) (18<sup>th</sup> October 2012).

<sup>179</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1913



**ROWAN & CO.**  
SMART  
**Spring Costumes**

The very latest and best Models are now on view in our Showrooms, and they make a most interesting exhibition of the beautiful styles created for this season's wear.

We have a wide reputation for **Costumes and Dresses** at all times, and the present collection is the best we have ever shown.

A nice selection **Navy Serge Costumes**, fashionably finished and well tailored, from 27/6.

**Sports Costumes** in Imitation Donegal Tweed, very smartly turned out, from 15/11.

COSTUME (as Illustrated) is new Bedford Cord and Improved Cloth; Colours: Grey, Tan, Purple, and Navy, 42/-

We send Goods on approval to any address on receipt of order and satisfactory city reference. :: :: :: Phone 2885.

**64 & 65 South Gt. George's St., DUBLIN.**

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The pages of *The Lady of the House* were filled with illustrations of the latest trends and appropriate attire for women of the middle classes in particular.

<sup>180</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1913.



The following illustration came with the description the 'Good-Time Dress':

<sup>181</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1914.



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Fashion articles and images encouraged discussion and debate on certain looks and trends. In January 1910, *The Lady of the House* published an article over two pages entitled 'One thousand Years of Fashion' where it discussed the fashions of the Renaissance. The same magazine contained the regular features 'World of Dress' and 'Fashions of the Hour'.<sup>183</sup> The subject of fashion was consistently channelled to these women through this medium of prescriptive literature. Therefore, one can assume it was a subject its readers were keen on.

*The Lady of the House* also provided detailed instructions on how to home-make fashionable items indicating that the magazine may also have targeted an audience at the bottom end of the middle class spectrum. Individual garments were described in intense detail so replicating the garment was very possible. Readers of *The Lady of the House* could buy a 'full size pattern, cut to measure by an experienced ladies' tailor' for just 1/6 in 1917.<sup>184</sup> These patterns were modelled on the latest fashions and on standard modes. This enabled lower-middle class women to involve themselves and participate in the preoccupation of appearance. Indeed, the June 1913 edition of *The Lady of the House* debated 'Should Frocks

<sup>182</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 September 1913.

<sup>183</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1910.

<sup>184</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 March 1917.

be Home Made?’ The majority verdict was ‘no’ but there was some ‘ayes’. The justifications for the yes-side were to alleviate poor working conditions for the women-workers of the factories. When some women discussed ‘home-made dresses’ it is not they themselves who make the dress. Their understanding of ‘home-made’ was someone coming into their home and being paid to create a dress. Therefore conditions for the employee would better and as a consequence the standard of dress superior. The no-side argued that home-made was ‘dowdy’ and ‘tacky’.<sup>185</sup> The women of the middle classes became the primary consumers of fashion by the mid-nineteenth century. The topic of fashion played a significant part in *The Lady of the House*. Strachan and Nally argue ‘...women’s emergence from the private domestic sphere into the public realm (be it simply shopping unaccompanied or travel, sports, agitation for voting rights and education) were all signalled by the promotion of modern fashion.’<sup>186</sup>

### *Our Girls*

*Our Girls*, first printed in October 1930 priced 2d, was a conservative and nationalist magazine for Irish girls which was the female equivalent of *Our Boys*. The second issue indicates that the first issue completely sold out proving that it was very popular from the outset. It was recorded as having a substantial circulation of almost 20,000 in 1931.<sup>187</sup> It contained a strong Catholic ethos evident in most of its content, as will be seen. The first letter from the Editor sets out its aims and objectives. There was an attempt to form a close relationship and loyalty between the magazine and its readers. The Editor stated and emphasised that there was a need for a home grown magazine. The magazine aimed to provide ‘clean and wholesome,’ material that was ‘redolent of the Faith and racy of the soil’. The letter states that the magazine is not just a ‘counteractive influence’. It does intend to be that but also intends to be the ‘encouragement and development of latent literary talent’<sup>188</sup>. Of course, this demand for an Irish published magazine for girls which began publication in 1930 must be seen in the context of the debate over the 1929 Censorship Act. The magazine’s popularity was so strong that groups of girls gathered together to form *Our Girls* clubs. Below is the *Our Girls* club from St. Mary’s Technical school, Dunmanway, Co. Cork. The caption notes that their clothing was entirely of Irish manufacture:

<sup>185</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1913.

<sup>186</sup> Strachan and Nally, *Advertising, Literature and Print Culture*, p135.

<sup>187</sup> Cullen, *Eason & Sons*, p238.

<sup>188</sup> *Our Girls*, October 1930, p1.





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Sister M.B. wrote from Dundee that 'the paper has been a great success here, and I will have to increase the number of copies in the course of the year.'<sup>190</sup> Glowing reviews for the magazine came from the *Mayo News*, *Tipperary Star*, *The Kerryman*, *Drogheda Independent*, *Southern Star*, *Irish Catholic*, *Munster Express*, *Ballina Herald*, *Meath Chronicle*, *Sligo Champion*, *Clonmel Nationalist* and the *East Galway Democrat*<sup>191</sup>. They all highly recommended the magazine and the phrase 'long over-due' was common.

Contents, generally, were educational, informative, entertaining and instructive. A regular feature called 'Famous Women in Irish History' delved deep into the history of Ireland to educate its readers on heroic or legendary women. 'Saints for Our Girls' was another regular which featured one saint each month and provided their story. Etiquette guides were also published, 'The Etiquette of Introductions'<sup>192</sup> and 'When to apologize'<sup>193</sup> for example. 'Laughs for all' was a page dedicated to jokes, albeit, still carrying a message, for example, "'Tut! Tut!" exclaimed auntie, crossly, "The modern girl doesn't know what needles are for!", "I do, auntie," answered her niece. "They're for playing gramophones with!"'.<sup>194</sup> Funny epitaphs and short story competitions were regulars. 'Uncle Tim's Corner' was a regular feature and was solely for the younger readers under eighteen. 'What Shall I be?' was a regular feature for women who pondered their futures. 'Careers for Our Girls' was also a feature with writers such as Maura Lavery conducting many interviews with experts and professionals in the relevant areas. Careers Lavery covered were secondary teaching, domestic science, nursing, medicine, sales<sup>195</sup>, national teaching, civil service and masseuse<sup>196</sup>. According to the August 1932 edition of *Our Girls* 'Most girls and women now have to earn

<sup>189</sup> *Our Girls*, June 1931.

<sup>190</sup> *Our Girls*, January 1931.

<sup>191</sup> *Our Girls*, December 1930.

<sup>192</sup> *Our Girls*, December 1932.

<sup>193</sup> *Our Girls*, January 1933.

<sup>194</sup> *Our Girls*, October 1930.

<sup>195</sup> *Our Girls*, June-October 1931.

<sup>196</sup> *Our Girls*, January-June 1932.

their own living...'<sup>197</sup> In a following article on women's participation in commerce, the author wrote 'But now, with the general and ever increasing adoption of modern business methods, there is a regular demand for trained girls in every type of business, from wholesale engineering to the smallest office...In addition to the necessary typists, a large concern will have several girls employed at such work as bookkeeping, filing, supervising, or as receptionists, telephonists, and secretaries.'<sup>198</sup> These jobs which were considered suitable for women were all of a supportive nature drawing on the perceived natural characteristic of women as caregiver.

Short stories were published with strong moral teachings. For example, the January 1933 edition, tells the story of 'Around the Corner, The Tale of a Too-Impatient Girl'. Although a fictional story, it can reveal some truths about reality. It not a fantasy story and reflected true life. Its purpose was to be a parable to the readers. It was a story of an Irish girl, Pearl, who went to live with her uncle after leaving a 'high- class convent'. Pearl's parents died when she was a young girl. Pearl's uncle owned his own business but suffered some financial loss. Ireland being a hierarchal society, Pearl was left concerned over their position on the social ladder. They also had a housekeeper. Therefore, we can assume that the family was of the middle-classes. When Pearl finished school, 'Uncle Joe had been proud and happy to see her take up the reins of government in his home'<sup>199</sup>. She is not expected to utilize her education. The 1890s saw Irish convent schools providing academic education to third level for many Catholic girls. Protestant schools had earlier provided an academic education most notably Alexandra College, Dublin, founded in 1866. The Intermediate Education Ireland Act of 1878 and the Royal University of Ireland Act 1879 enabled girls and women to sit public competitive second level exams and to sit Royal University examinations. Although, some girls did have access to second level education it did not necessarily mean they would continue to third level or go into the workforce using this acquired education. This educated woman abandoned the public sphere and entered the domestic sphere. This gave her uncle pride. This conveys the opinion that society was proud of domestic women. It was admirable for women to embrace domesticity. The parable also gives a clear indication of the influence the Catholic Church held over its followers. Pearl is enticed to go see a fortune teller but 'Vaguely the words of the Catechism floated through her brain. "The first commandment forbids all superstitious charms and spells..."'<sup>200</sup>. Pearl, against her better judgment, goes anyway. Ultimately, this results in disaster. Pearl impatiently acted upon the fortune teller's prophecies for wealth and romance. She foolishly and irrationally risked her uncle's fortune and her relationship with her fiancé. By the end of the story, a lesson has been taught. The aim of the story was to teach girls not to be foolish, not to dream and to appreciate what they have. This links in with the argument Cynthia White made in her examination of prescriptive literature. White identified an editorial shift in women's magazines during the mid-1930s. The shift in ethos was a return to a 'traditional' view of femininity that once again emphasised the home and family over fashion and an emphasis on women's roles in the public sphere. Fashion was a minor attribute to *Our Girls*. Fashion features were small and

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<sup>197</sup> *Our Girls*, August 1932.

<sup>198</sup> *Our Girls*, April 1932.

<sup>199</sup> *Our Girls*, 26 January 1933, p2.

<sup>200</sup> *Our Girls*, 26 January 1933, p2.

irregular. There were some advertisements but not on the same scale as *The Lady of the House*. *Our Girls* was a Catholic magazine and Catholic social teaching promoted heavily the concept of women in the home. This was reflected in the role of women in the 1937 Constitution. Below is an example of the few dress focused advertisements with an emphasis on the utilitarianism of dress with the focus on gym, school and basic outerwear:

**Outfit the Girls at TODD'S**

Todds are contractors for the principal Schools, Colleges and Convents in Ireland, and any article of juvenile wear can be supplied from our department at keener prices than are obtainable elsewhere. We make huge quantities of juvenile wear.

**GIRLS' BLAZERS**  
 Beautifully tailored in checks, in navy or black or school colors.  
 12/11

**DRESSING COWNS**  
 Beautiful shades of navy, school colors, etc.  
 8/11

**GIRLS' CARDIGANS**  
 Girls' Navy Cardigans  
 9/11

**POST ORDERS**

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This shift in women's magazines to a more traditional view of femininity related to the views of society whose tolerance for women in the public sphere was reducing. Women, while single, could partake to some level in the public sphere but upon marriage were expected to dedicate themselves fully to that sphere. Legislation passed cemented this expectancy. From 1933 national schoolteachers by law had to resign from their posts. The passing of the 1935 Employment Act extended the marriage bar to all women in the civil service.

There was also a Gaelic section where stories and poems were published. There were non-regular features such as 'Fireside Hobbies' and 'Poultry Keeping'. Advertisements for shops, schools and churches also donned the pages of *Our Girls*. 'Fashions for Our Girls' began to make an appearance from April 1931 but only lasted three issues. A fashion series was not to begin again until December 1932 and again only lasted a short time. The magazine supplied patterns to home-make dresses. Home dress-making seemed to be a common occurrence as *Our Girls* in April 1931 began a series of lessons on dress-making at home<sup>202</sup>. Although not so much of an emphasis was placed on fashion in *Our Girls* magazine it can

<sup>201</sup> *Our Girls*, November 1932.

<sup>202</sup> *Our Girls*, April 1931.

still be examined as a barometer for social and fashion change with a focus on what was deemed acceptable by a conservative publication in the context of gender roles.

### Fashion Influences

Paris was the fashion capital of the world and arguably the strongest influence on European fashion in the early twentieth century. Most of the biggest fashion designers began in Paris, Madeleine Vionnet and Coco Chanel for example. *The Lady of the House* regularly contained articles about the latest Parisian trends; 'How the Parisienne Dresses To-day',<sup>203</sup> and 'New designs by Famous Parisienne Costumiers',<sup>204</sup> for example. This indicates the manner in which Irish society in the early Free State period was not as insular as often depicted or as desired by Irish Irelanders who promoted the notion of the values of cultural self-sufficiency in an attempt to create a bulwark against modernising and hence immoral influences from abroad. 'It is all the rage in Paris',<sup>205</sup> wrote Mildred Wilson when describing a style of dress for *The Lady of the House*. The 'How the Parisienne Dresses Today' article was accompanied by the following illustrations:



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The latest Parisian trends were a regular feature of *The Lady of the House*:

<sup>203</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1919.

<sup>204</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 'New Designs by famous Parisienne Costumiers', 16<sup>th</sup> March 1917.

<sup>205</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1917.

<sup>206</sup> *The Lady of the House* 'How the Parisienne Dresses To-day', 15<sup>th</sup> April 1919.



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Within the first decade of the twentieth century, designer Coco Chanel understood what the changes in women's role would mean for women's lifestyle and recognised the change in dress needed to accompany those changes. She identified in women's clothing a need for greater freedom of movement. Chanel was always envious of the practicality and ease of men's tailoring. Chanel incorporated knitted fabrics, less-structured tailoring and simple use of the line into her designs.<sup>208</sup> Coco Chanel was not one to abide by rules in dress. She was passionate about fashion and designing. In 1931, she received an invitation by MGM in Hollywood to design for actress Gloria Swanford. A conflict between Swanford and Chanel resulted in Chanel snubbing the invitation and leaving the USA. Chanel refused to adjust her designs to suit the narrative and characteristic needs of the film.<sup>209</sup> Although Coco Chanel designs were expensive to buy these trends were to influence the Irish department stores and the Irish dressmaker.

Jennifer Craik writes of the influences in the fashion system in the early twentieth century:

<sup>207</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1913.

<sup>208</sup> Jean L. Druesedow, 'In Style: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Costume Institute', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, xlv, No. 2 (Autumn, 1987) p55.

<sup>209</sup> Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, p89.

The new approach to fashion was schizophrenic. On the one hand, fashion was democratised as more people had access to the images and clothing preferred by the trend setters. On the other hand, fashion producers were setting the styles. Other changes were also occurring in the fashion industry. The aristocracy was supplanted as the elite fashion community and role models. Socialites, artists and movie stars offered alternative sources of inspiration. These role models offered desirable images and behaviour that were no longer based on emulating one's superiors. Individualism and modernity prevailed.<sup>210</sup>

Craik argues that the new approach to fashion was inconsistent. Craik explains the contradictory elements as more people had access to fashion trends although it was the designers who were setting the trends. There were many streams of influence; the elite fashion community, socialites and artists. However, the influence was not to be merely copied. It was to spark modernity and individualism. Influences from America were also strong. Access to fashion was allowed to the wider demographic through department stores such as the American chain Woolworths and Hollywood films. The department store and Hollywood films began the 'Americanisation' of Irish society. In 1921, Switzers of Grafton Street opened an American-style Soda Fountain in keeping with the Jazz trend.<sup>211</sup> In 1926, Switzers opened a Hairdressing salon and employed a very fashionable London hairdresser called Mr. Lovely.<sup>212</sup> Switzers was all the time keeping up with the latest trends and modernizing. London was also a strong influence from the 1860s. Katherine Hughes wrote, 'London was no longer a distant dream that you might never realize in the course of a long lifetime. It was, instead, the place you looked to for news, gossip, and inspiration for what to wear and how to be.'<sup>213</sup> However, it was Hollywood that proved the most influential.

Gloria Swanson, Theda Barry, Joan Crawford, Barbara Stanwyek and Gracie Fields were all Hollywood actresses who became fashion inspiration. By the 1930s these women were to the forefront as fashion leaders. Films like *Why Change Your Wife?*, *Male and Female*, *A Fool There Was* and *Ladies of Leisure* all displayed a strong and powerful idea of femininity. This was transmitted in the clothing of the film's heroine, structured tailoring, padding and accessories. Breward argues that American women were drawn more to the tougher career roles played by Joan Crawford, Bette Davis and Barbara Stanwyek and British consumers empathized more with the dowdier, homespun glamour of Gracie Fields.<sup>214</sup> Film from England and America impacted on Irish society. In 1934, the *Irish Independent* wrote about a film called *Fashions of 1934*:

"Fashions of 1934" at the Savoy this week is a delightful mixture of really funny comedy and an imposing fashion parade. In the film an American go-getter corners the Paris and New York fashion markets, and sets out to sell women what they really want. He does things in princely style; the picture is one of the most lavishly staged ever shown in Dublin. and [sic] the magnificent fashion show, set in a fashionable Paris atelier, is a woman's vision of earthly paradise. The romance and comedy which season

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<sup>210</sup> Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, p74.

<sup>211</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p66.

<sup>212</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p69.

<sup>213</sup> Hughes, *The Short Life*, p268.

<sup>214</sup> Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p188.



this synopsis of modern fashions is competently handled by William Powell and Bette Davis.<sup>215</sup>

This article is very positive about every aspect of the film. Bette Davis would have been a fashion icon for Irish women adoring her 'modern fashions'. An article in *Printer's Ink* on the 4th February 1926 claimed, 'Not long ago, several large British manufacturers complained that they had been compelled to change the established styles of the shoes they made for their customers in the Far East, and they traced the change directly to the movies from America'.<sup>216</sup> Thus despite the Censorship of Film Act, 1923 the Irish media was openly discussing the social and cultural impact of American and English cinema on Irish society throughout the 1920s. American film had such a strong influence on women's fashion to transcend its trends to the Far East. Breward argues that popular actresses and society women projected a sense of heightened and mature sexuality in newspapers and advertisements. This contrasted with the tailored severity of late Victorian style.<sup>217</sup> Victorian fashion for women was strict. There were items of dress that could only be worn at certain times of the day or at certain events. These women wore clothes for appearance's sake and not for functionality or purpose. The cinema introduced fashion in all its expressive and imaginative forms.

The Volta Cinema opened its doors on the 20 December 1909 on Mary Street in central Dublin. It was the first of many dedicated cinemas to open in Ireland.<sup>218</sup> In Dublin the cinema's dominant audience was the working class and lower-middle class.<sup>219</sup> The interiors of cinemas in Ireland were extravagant and luxurious<sup>220</sup> with carpet flooring, central heating, sensuous decor and comfortable seating<sup>221</sup> thus emphasising a sense of escape and fantasy for the audience. Films shown were a major influence on society insofar as it worried government and a censorship system introduced in 1909<sup>222</sup> to gauge which films could be screened to the Irish public. American films seemed to have the most influence over the Irish audience. James Montgomery, Official Film Censor 1923-1940 stated 'One of the greatest dangers of... films is not the Anglicisation of Ireland, but the Los Angelisation of Ireland'.<sup>223</sup> American influence through the medium of cinema was heavy in Ireland in the early twentieth century. In 1913, *The Leitrim Observer* found the need to explain American slang.<sup>224</sup> In April 1931 *Our Girls* had to address their readers, 'A number of readers have written to the Editor in recent weeks asking his opinion as to the prospects of obtaining employment in Hollywood film studios. A few wanted to know how they could become film stars!'<sup>225</sup> The advice given was to disregard any notions one may have. Cinema allowed women of all classes to fantasise about a different life from their own. Paulicelli wrote of the

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<sup>215</sup> *Irish Independent*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1934.

<sup>216</sup> *Printer's Ink*, 4 February 1926.

<sup>217</sup> Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p185.

<sup>218</sup> Kevin Rickett, *Irish Film Censorship: A Cultural Journey from Silent Cinema to Internet Pornography*, (Dublin, 2004) illustration no.2.

<sup>219</sup> Rickett, *Irish Film Censorship*, p23.

<sup>220</sup> Rickett, *Irish Film Censorship*, illustrations 3-6.

<sup>221</sup> Rickett, *Irish Film Censorship*, p27.

<sup>222</sup> The Cinematograph Act, 1909, See Rickett, *Irish Film Censorship*, p31-62.

<sup>223</sup> As quoted in the *Irish Times*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1943.

<sup>224</sup> *The Leitrim Observer*, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1913.

<sup>225</sup> *Our Girls*, April 1931.

influence of Hollywood actresses such as Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo. She believed those 'Hollywood divas' represented a magic red carpet which bored housewives or women leading ordinary mundane lives could fly on and for that moment live their dreams imagining themselves to be the '*femme fatale*' as 'Cleopatra' or 'Helen of Troy'.<sup>226</sup> *The Irish Times* published results of a cinematic survey taken in London in 1937. The results show Ginger Rogers, Myrna Loy and Greta Garbo were the top three favourite among London audiences.<sup>227</sup> Similar results could be assumed by Irish audiences. Fashion was a big factor of American film. *Women Must Dress* was screened in 1936. The film was described as 'a riot of fashion salons, Parisian dress designers and clothes'.<sup>228</sup> Edward H. Symond, Chairman and Managing Director of Reville's, the House of Fashion, wrote in *The Irish Times* in 1929:

In America film stars are given special camera tests for every dress which they are to wear. Dresses are all especially designed for the particular actresses who wear them...In addition to this, the dresses are also designed with a view to providing pleasure to the eyes of those who visit the cinema...Millions of women, while enjoying the story of a well-dressed film, receive invaluable ideas and impressions in regard to clothes and how they should be worn to produce the best effect.<sup>229</sup>

He argued that the American's attention to dress and detail made their films more successful and liked by women as opposed to British films of which he advised they should have done as the Americans did. Irene Brin states that American films such as *Roberta* and *Mannequins* did little to hide their advertising and propagandistic aims. This resulted in affordable reproductions of film dresses being sold nationwide in department stores.<sup>230</sup> The department store in Ireland will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Cinema exposed American and European fashion to Irish women.

### Women's Fashion in the Early Twentieth Century

...clothing started with long knickers, still usually made by themselves or by devoted elderly relatives, a chemise and a corset, which ran from the breasts to the thighs, shaped the body into the conventional S-shape, with a narrow waist and protruding chest and bottom. Over this another petticoat and a dress, or a skirt and blouse. For day wear the throat was closed; in the evenings the arms, some (a little) of the chest might be revealed.<sup>231</sup>

Farmer was discussing the middle classes in 1907 when he wrote the above extract. Clothing for women in early century was time consuming, systematic, methodical, restraining, restrictive, concealing, orthodox and unnatural to the female form. The style popular among women at the turn of the twentieth century was the 'Gibson Girl'. This Edwardian 'S' shaped figure was very popular internationally. The Gibson-girl was the epitome of feminism. The

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<sup>226</sup> Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, pp86-87.

<sup>227</sup> *The Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1937.

<sup>228</sup> *The Irish Times*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1936.

<sup>229</sup> *The Irish Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1929.

<sup>230</sup> As discussed by Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, p88.

<sup>231</sup> Farmer, *Ordinary Lives*, p31.

dress was floor length with a high neckline and long sleeves covering the majority of her body. Below is an illustration of a Gibson-girl taken from the *Irish Independent* in 1905:



232  
Dainty White Chiffon Hat, with Clusters  
of Lilac and Green Leaves.

Her chest was strongly projected, her waist squeezed in and her bottom accentuated by layers of fabric to give the appearance of a fuller figure. The dress made her figure soft and evocative, albeit concealed. She appeared almost statuesque. This pre-war style could almost be interpreted to be a symbol of taking a stance to the enemy, 'We are ready'. Jennifer Craik wrote:

Although the Gibson Girl was encumbered by her tight-waisted bodice and huge billowing skirt which trailed on the ground, she became popular because she embodied new definitions of gender and lifestyle. Her distinctive S-shaped body dominated the iconography of women into the 1900s...Her success was due to the conjunction of her image (a relatively unrestricted mode of dressing, active lifestyle and outspoken confidence), with major cultural, political and economic changes in Western societies.<sup>233</sup>

The encumbered waist of the Gibson Girl and the constant feeling of restraint could be viewed as analogous to or symbolic of Irish women's efforts to enter the public sphere in the early twentieth century; they were encumbered due to social stereotypes of gender roles and the existence of a society of separate spheres. Regardless of these obstacles women were carrying on in their roles confidently. Her S-shaped figure was a confident embrace of femininity. Below is an image of the adaptation of the 'Gibson Girl' in Ireland. The image is of two ladies walking down Grafton Street circa 1894-1907. They are wearing typical Gibson-girl style clothing:

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<sup>232</sup> *Irish Independent*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1905.

<sup>233</sup> Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*, (London, 1994) pp73-74.

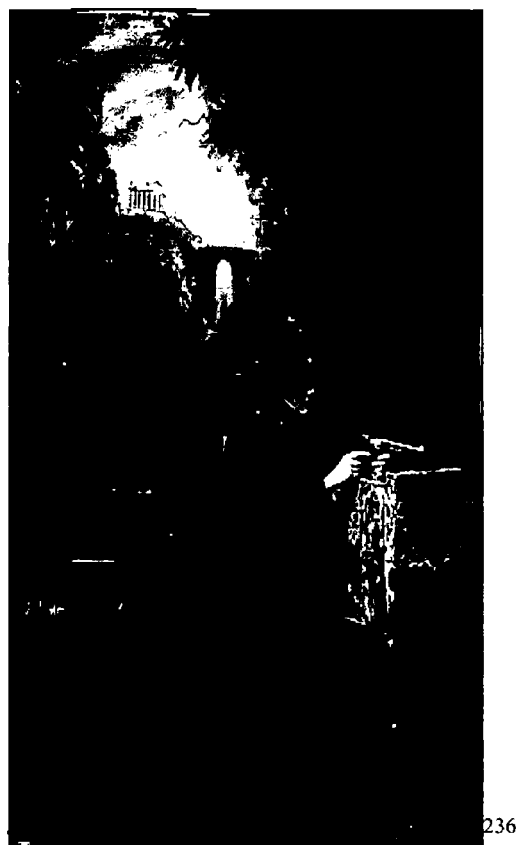
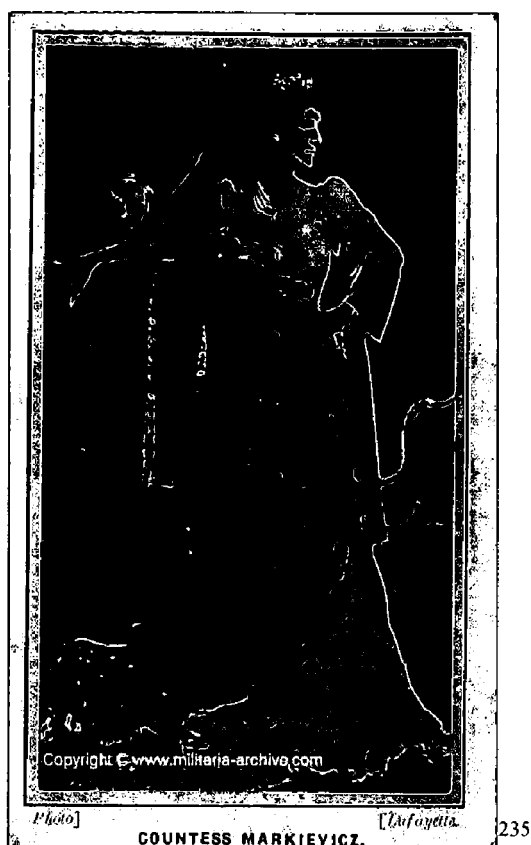


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Below are contrasting images of Countess Markievicz, nationalist and first female Westminster MP. On the left she is wearing a Gibson Girl style dress; tightly corseted waist and huge billowing skirt. She stands confidently feminine. In stark contrast, on the right Countess Markievicz wears her military uniform and appears just as confident. Markievicz was confident in herself and her idea of femininity. She could be both woman and activist:

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<sup>234</sup> J.J. Clarke, 'Two Women Walking Past Jewellers, Grafton Street', ca.1894-1907, (<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000168136>) (30/01/13).



However, the decades that followed brought a dress reform. Novelty trends emerged while women's role and identity was changing. Typically, women as housewife and mother wore a dress to the ground and long sleeved. They did not need for anything else and this style of dress remained for a very long time. According to Joanna Bourke, rural journals in the 1880s encouraged women to make their own.<sup>237</sup> Fashion was changing as women changed.

During the 1910s, in Europe and America, the Gibson-girl was replaced as an iconic style by the Flapper-girl.

<sup>235</sup> Militaria Archive, ([http://www.militaria-archive.com/independence/vb-photo/content/Vinny\\_Byrne\\_Photo\\_17\\_large.html](http://www.militaria-archive.com/independence/vb-photo/content/Vinny_Byrne_Photo_17_large.html)) (23/10/12).

<sup>236</sup> Countess Constance Markievicz in uniform, kneeling against a studio prop holding a gun, ca. 1915 (<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000030145>) (23/10/12)/

<sup>237</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change and Household Work in Ireland, 1890-1914*, (Oxford, 1993), p225.



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Appearing post World War I, the Oxford dictionary defines her as 'a fashionable young woman intent on enjoying herself and flouting conventional standards of behaviour'.<sup>239</sup> Kenneth A. Yellis wrote that she was a total contradiction to the 'Gibson Girl'; she 'bobbed her hair, concealed her forehead, flattened her chest, hid her waist, dieted away her hips and kept her legs in plain sight'.<sup>240</sup> She was a 'repudiation' of the 'Gibson Girl'. The Flapper-girl wore flat, shapeless, short knee-length dresses and her hair was bobbed. Her waistline was dropped. This could be interpreted as abandonment or evading of traditional femininity. The style is in stark contrast to its predecessor, the Gibson-girl, and really lacked traditional femininity. This style was impractical and according to Breward was confined to an elite and metropolitan market.<sup>241</sup> For Ireland this would have meant Dublin's upper elite class. This style was a novelty and short-lived by Irish women. Canice Chisholm wrote in the *Southern Star* in 1925 about the passing of the Flapper-girl, 'She came to us with the war and all its fears and hate and hysteria. Her rapid incursions into fields of activity hitherto monopolised by "mere men" caused her to lose her balance and to adopt mannish clothes and mannerisms and habits'.<sup>242</sup> There is not much evidence to suggest the style was fully embraced by Irish women. This may have been due to its impracticality or the reserved nature of Irish women. Although, elements of it can be seen in Irish women's fashion. Bobbed hair was embraced as shown in the advertisement below for Switzers:

<sup>238</sup> 1920s Woman: Feminists Party Discriminates (<http://1920swoman.wordpress.com/>) (14/04/13).

<sup>239</sup> Oxford Dictionaries (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/flapper>) (04/07/12).

<sup>240</sup> See Kenneth A. Yellis, 'Prosperity's Child: Some thoughts on the Flapper' in *American Quarterly*, xxi, No. 1 (Spring, 1969), pp. 44-64.

<sup>241</sup> Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p185.

<sup>242</sup> The *Southern Star*, 31/01/1925.



Attraction Gowns, Costumes, Wraps, etc.,  
from the splendid variety of inexpensive  
new design on view in Switzer's Season.



**Irene.**  
Extraordinary modern kitchen  
4000 Cooks, Trays, Lin-  
ings, Glass, and  
Cupboards, all with  
electronic finish.  
(Black & White Design)  
Price **£2 19/6**

**Flexfile.**  
Featherweight - 10 lbs  
Medium - 15 lbs  
Heavy - 20 lbs  
Extra Heavy - 25 lbs  
Super Heavy - 30 lbs

**Alcic.**  
A unique Crown-  
cutter system, loaded  
up with ridges to every  
square inch. 20/6

**Greta.**  
 Flute, soprano, Oboe,  
 Clarinet, Bassoon, & Trombone  
 and Drums, in all new  
 variety. **Admission 10  
 Cents.**



**Renealogh.**  
A grand old time was  
had by all the  
ladies and gentlemen  
at the grand  
dinner and  
entertainment  
at the  
club on  
the 1st of  
the month.

**Miriam,**  
The National Student  
Center, with 4000 books  
on library, in a class-  
room building.  
Facial area 7/11

**Aimee**  
All Used Record Store  
100 West Kinross  
Storeroom, 609 rolling road  
Cottrell St. Good quality  
Jazz, Rock, Blues,  
Country, R&B, Gospel.  
Also, Special offers  
each ... \$2.99 / \$3.99

**Redcar.**  
Special United Coal  
Co. Ltd., Redcar, and  
specialist contractors,  
Lancashire & Warrington, will  
be at work on the new  
ship to cost £618/6

**Switzers pay postage on purchases**

**Switzer & Co., Ltd.,** Grafton Street **Dublin**

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<sup>243</sup> *The Irish Times*, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1922.



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Educated middle class women were entering the public sphere professionally and politically. They also frequented artistic and intellectual circles. Women were experimenting with dress to suit their new lifestyles. For example, skirt lengths and styles were altering in the 1910s. Up until the turn of the twentieth century they would have been unquestionably floor length. The early twentieth century witnessed various<sup>246</sup> lengths in skirts. 'Alteration in skirt lengths are coming about more gradually than we hoped for',<sup>247</sup> wrote a disapproving fashion editor for *The Lady of the House* in January 1917. The images below, taken from *The Lady of the House* in 1914 and 1917, shows the fun designers were having with fashion:

<sup>244</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 February 1917.

<sup>245</sup> *Our Girls*, April 1930.

<sup>246</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century opened with floor length skirts. Ankle length skirts were common throughout the 1910s. See *The Lady of the House*, throughout 1910 and again in 1917. Illustrations of dress were consistently showing ankle revealing skirts. Evening gowns still remained floor length in the early twentieth century. Skirt length hiked up to the knee by the 1930s, see *Our Girls* May 1930 and January 1933.

<sup>247</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1917.



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Skirt length was a frequent topic for comment in *The Lady of the House*, Heloise wrote on February 1910 ‘The increasing vogue for tying skirts in just above the ankle, or even, as one sometime sees, on a level with the knees, should, I think, be condemned by everyone, who has the slightest regard not only for her comfort but for the grace and elegance of her appearance.’<sup>250</sup> This shows Ireland’s apprehension and less than eager approach to immediately adopting the latest vogue.

The latest vogue even consumed women’s sportswear. Walking and sportswear had specific styles. Haverty writes when speaking of Dublin:

Sports costumes were the newest vogue. The voluminous style, bustled, ruffled and furbelowed had given way to a graceful silhouette, cut lean and simple. Brown Thomas had the newest patterns from London (which had replaced Paris as the centre of the fashion world) in tennis dresses, archery, rinking and golfing outfits. For Autumn in 1912, sportswear was recommended to be of white velvet corduroy, cut quite short,

<sup>248</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1914.

<sup>249</sup> ‘Fashions of the Hour’, instructions were included in the caption on how to assemble this skirt of varying lengths. *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1917.

<sup>250</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1910.

enabling a pair of neat high-laced boots to be seen. The new coat had capacious outside pockets.<sup>251</sup>

This reflects how women's participation in sports was slowly becoming more acceptable.



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Women's clothes had to adjust to women's current habits and hobbies. Dress structure reformed in the early twentieth century and clothing became more practical. Cesare Meano once wrote of Isabella Inghirani, one of the first female aviators, who had to adapt her dress in 1909 in order to control her plane more effectively. Inghirani tied a cord around her skirt to restrict its volume.<sup>253</sup> This would indicate a link to dress change and changing roles for women in the early twentieth century. Women needed dress reform as they were carrying out new roles. A reader wrote to *The Lady of the House* in August 1911, 'I think that year by year, as her emancipation advances the average woman is gaining more common sense with regard to dress...'.<sup>254</sup> Fashion became simple in structure and enabled greater freedom for movement. There was an ease in wear and care. Clothing became more functional. Although, there were some novel and impractical items of dress to appear in the 1910s.

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<sup>251</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p52.

<sup>252</sup> 'Two ladies playing golf on Golf Links, Ireland' ca.1900-1910  
(<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Search/Results?lookfor=%22%20Glass%20negatives%22&type=Subject>)  
(21/10/12).

<sup>253</sup> As quoted by Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, p79.

<sup>254</sup> *The Lady of the House*, August 1911.



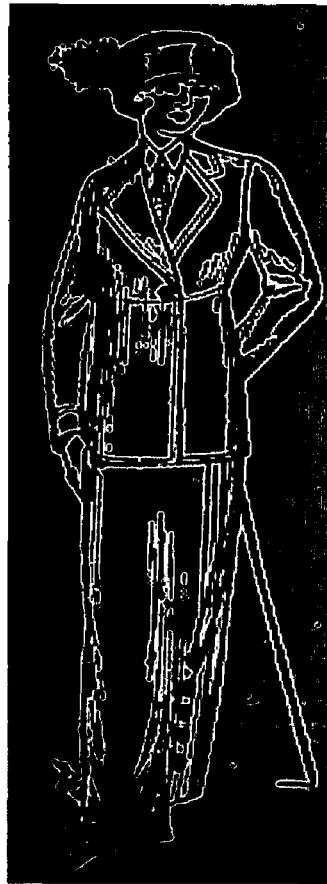
255

Poiret introduced the hobble-skirt in 1910. These skirts were narrow, varied in length and featured no pleats or elasticity that would facilitate much movement of the legs. The hobble skirt found its way to Ireland as evident in the July 1910 edition of *The Lady of the House*. An article asked the question ‘Will the hobbled lady of today revive the crinoline?’ There was a large illustration of a woman wearing a hobble skirt. The hobble skirt was ankle length and tight around the legs. It was quite restraining for movement so strides while walking had to be short hence the phrase ‘hobble’ as the woman would appear to hobble or shuffle as she walked. The caption under the illustration read ‘a newest dress may cause a revival of the crinoline; it is a costume with a skirt so tight that it is impossible to walk in it with ease’. There were smaller illustrations to accompany the article that show the evolution of the crinoline over history. Another caption read ‘The smaller pictures illustrate how the outrageous crinoline gave place to the tied-back gown. Will the “hobbled lady” fashion of today be the parent of another “Girl of the Period”?’ They expected that the impracticality of the hobble skirt would bring about another modern style. The article blames the ‘French costumiers’ and the ‘Parisian arbiter of fashion’ for the new fashion.<sup>256</sup> This is evidence that Parisienne fashions did make it to Ireland but not all the time accepted fully and met with criticism. Hobble skirts were rebuked again by *The Lady of the House* in 1917. There were gradations of the tightness of the hobble skirt. Remnants of this style of skirt were to be seen for decades to come.

When women entered the professional workforce her attire reflected a sense of men’s tailoring. The image below was taken from an advertisement for Rowan & Co. clothing store, Dublin, in the April 1913 edition of *The Lady of the House*. The entire outfit channels a strong element of men’s tailoring; concealed neat hair, shirt collar, neck-tie, lapelled coat with simple one button feature and simple straight lined skirt again with plain button feature. The silhouette is asexual:

<sup>255</sup> ‘The Retro Files: The Latest Freak in Women’s Fashion’, (<http://bapowerdesign.blogspot.ie/2011/01/latest-freak-in-womens-fashion.html>) (14/04/2013).

<sup>256</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1910.



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This could deliver many interpretations. This might suggest women's efforts to fit into the public sphere. One could interpret this utilisation of men's tailoring to accommodate women's adoption of certain new roles. This was to challenge the stereotypical image of women. The early twentieth century witnessed a generation of university educated women and as mentioned in the previous chapter, women in the early twentieth century acquired professions they were previously excluded from; law, poor law guardians<sup>257</sup>, local government and medicine among others. The suffrage movement was also in full campaign. Women were adopting roles in the public sphere. This physical display of men's tailoring in dress would project confidence and a sense of belonging. This style may be viewed as a device used by women to appear to fit in the professional domain. The smart men's tailoring style conveyed professionalism.

World War I had a profound influence on women's role and women's fashion. Women whose male relations went off to war, had to occupy their vacant positions be it running the family business or farm. Women's dress also accustomed to World War I where a sense of militancy was reflected in female dress. Women who worked on farms wore wide leather belts to hold in their breeches and coats. This is an example of early 'military style'.<sup>259</sup> Countess Markievicz encouraged women to 'dress suitably in short skirts and strong boots,

<sup>257</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1913.

<sup>258</sup> Women proved to be a great asset in poor law reform. See *The Freemans Journal* April 20<sup>th</sup> 1900, p3, where the Lord Mayor of Dublin acclaimed their participation.

<sup>259</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p61.



leave your jewels and gold wands in the bank, and buy a revolver'.<sup>260</sup> The image below, taken from the April 1914 edition of *The Lady of the House*, describes the collar to be straight standing or 'military':



Anne Haverty wrote when talking of the 1920s: 'The modern age has arrived. Hemlines rose, garments were lean, sleek and functional, hair was bobbed and marcel-waved. The fashionable young woman wore short dress almost skimming the knee, lots of lipstick, adored jazz, danced the Charleston, and had no objection to being called "fast". Youth Culture was born.'<sup>262</sup> Of course, in Ireland there was a fear of such modern trends. Jazz dancing was denounced by the hierarchy and the Censorship of Film Act, 1923 and the Censorship of Publications Act 1929 were attempts to create a bulwark against modernising and hence contaminating cultural influences permeating Irish society. And yet it is clear that female dress did change in a way that reflected changes in gender roles and influence from abroad. The 1920s, also known as the jazz age, was a novelty decade. Just like the erratic tune of jazz, Ireland was in a state of flux. Politics and war left people un-eased and unnerved. Ireland was in its infancy as a Free State and seeking a cultural identity<sup>263</sup>. The new state adopted an identity that was Catholic, conservative and patriarchal. The following images were taken from *Our Girls* in 1931:

<sup>260</sup> Countess Markievicz, 'Buy a Revolver', in Margaret Ward (ed), *In Their Own Voice*, (Dublin, 1995), pp46-47.

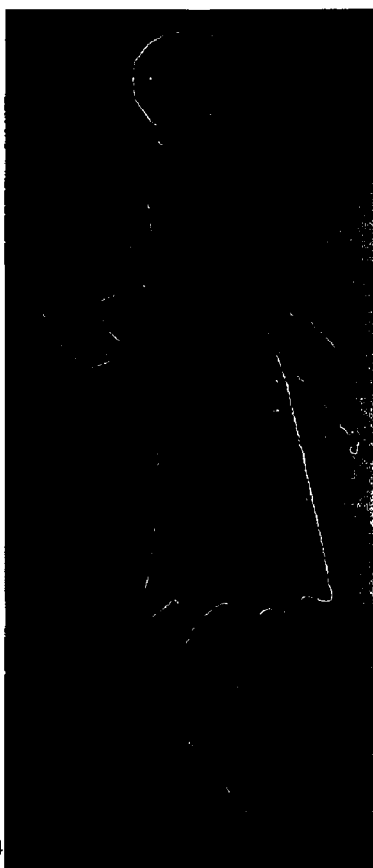
<sup>261</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1914.

<sup>262</sup> Anne Haverty, *Elegant Times: A Dublin Story*, (Ireland, 1995), p69.

<sup>263</sup> The Gaelic League and the GAA campaigned for the de-Anglicisation of Ireland. All things Gaelic were celebrated; language, dress, sport, dress, folklore and history. All things considered Anglo were deemed vile and foreign. By 1907 the Gaelic League had nearly 900 active branches.



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265



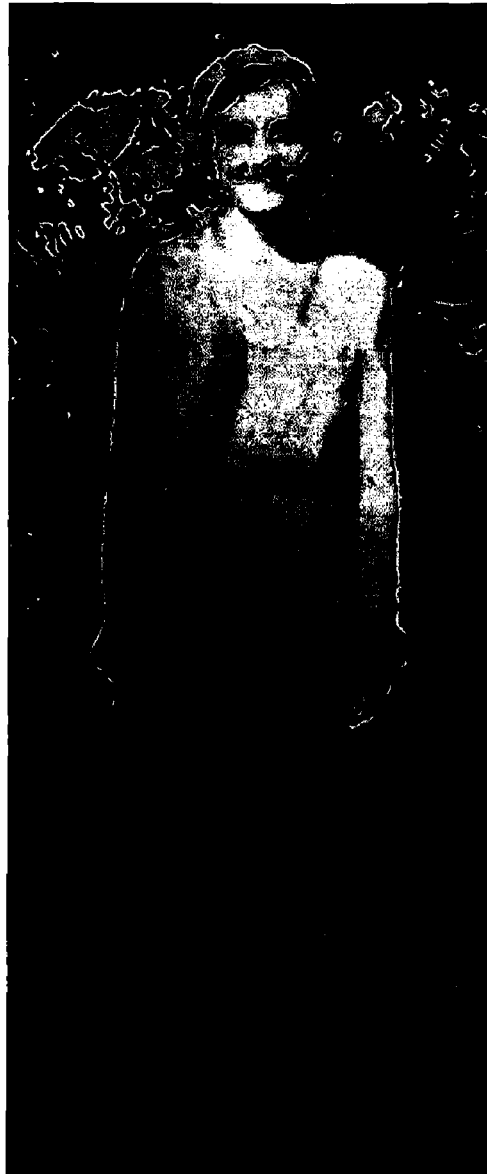
266

The modern age had arrived and is evident in the illustrations. The garments look comfortable and functional. Ease of movement without and restraint of excess fabric or restrictive underwear. Their figures are natural and unaltered. Proof of readers adapting these fashions can be seen in the photographs sent into *Our Girls* by readers:

<sup>264</sup> *Our Girls*, June 1931.

<sup>265</sup> *Our Girls*, June 1931.

<sup>266</sup> *Our Girls*, May 1931.



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As discussed earlier, the Gibson Girl was replaced as a mode of fashion by elements of the flapper style. Any remnants of the Gibson Girl were not to be found in *Our Girls* as it lost its popularity. The flapper style was then replaced by aquiline features and tall wide shouldered silhouettes. The 1930s witnessed new slim line skirts. Coats reached mid-calf and dresses for evening-wear became backless. Breward writes that the desired effect was 'sinuous, sensual, almost drooping, with softly tinted textiles clinging to the body'.<sup>268</sup> Calves were exposed and according to Breward, ankle-strapped high heels had become 'visual shorthand for modern femininity'.<sup>269</sup> This style was aided by the bias-cut perfected in the couture work of Madeleine Vionnet. Madeleine Vionnet, also known as 'Queen of the Bias-cut', revolutionised women's clothing in the 1930s. Vionnet used the inherent structural

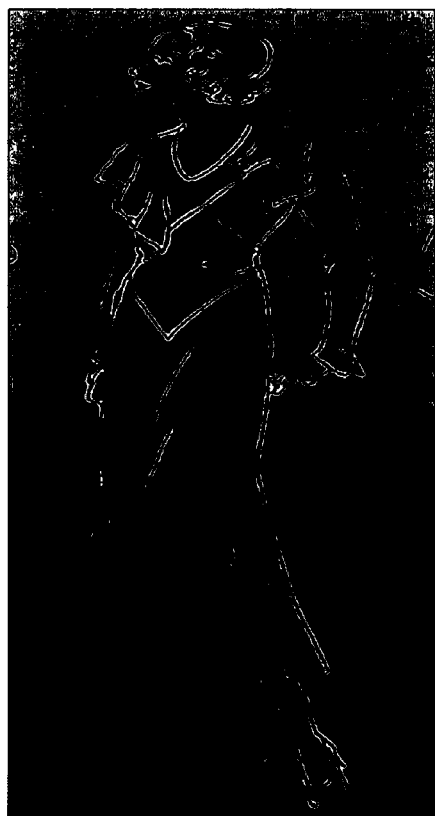
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<sup>267</sup> *Our Girls*, December 1931.

<sup>268</sup> Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p187.

<sup>269</sup> Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p186.

characteristics of the fabric to give shape to the dress. This created a draping effect that complimented the female form more naturally and allowed freedom of movement. Panelling and strict tailoring in women's fashion was diminishing.<sup>270</sup> The image below on the left was taken from the December 1932 edition of *Our Girls* and the image on the right from the January 1933 edition. Both images are perfect examples of Vionnet's design. The image on the left is captioned as being a charming afternoon gown for those festive occasions:



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Influence from Paris encouraged a more relaxed silhouette. In 1906, a dress reform began in Paris. Women's fashion designers Paul Poiret, Lucile (Lady Duff Gordan) and Madeleine Vionnet brought about this reform in dress. They replaced the S-shaped, heavily corseted, fortified silhouette with an un-corseted silhouette. Poiret however is most renowned for this advance. Ireland was influenced by this reform albeit at a later time. In January 1917, *The Lady of the House* wrote about the 'no waist corset'. According to their fashion editor 'the new corsets give an absolutely no waist effect'.<sup>273</sup> In 1903, he also removed the petticoat from his designs. This could be interpreted as a liberating feature of women's dress. No longer did dresses have to hold up and in the women's body. This new dress shape allowed freedom of movement and room to breathe freely. This can be synchronised with women's changing role in Europe. Poiret's designs were far removed from the tailored structures of

<sup>270</sup> Druesedow, 'In Style: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Costume Institute', p58.

<sup>271</sup> *Our Girls*, December 1932.

<sup>272</sup> *Our Girls*, January 1933.

<sup>273</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1917.

traditional women's clothing. Poiret's oriental designs were more draped and he worked with rectangular shapes, straight lines and an emphasis on flatness, a total contradiction to the style of the Gibson girl. Reforms began in Paris but would soon find their way to Irish shores. An advertisement for W. Holmes, a women's fashion store in Dublin, boasted for sale in 1910 'Elegant model gowns for afternoon and evening wear- some of our own creation; others designed expressly for us by the most exclusive Paris houses...'<sup>274</sup>. Fashion features in newspapers and magazines often referenced Paris and used it as a selling feature. Paulicelli wrote that French clothes were synonymous with what was 'chic' just for being French. It can be argued that the descriptive word 'French' became a label in itself. However, Poiret's success was not to live past World War I when modernisation, functionality and practicality<sup>275</sup> out-purposed his popularity and was the result of his designing demise in 1929.<sup>276</sup>

Another dress reform was needed according to the women in Ireland in the mid 1910s. 'The Women's Parliament' section of *The Lady of the House* discussed dress reform in Ireland in May 1917. Mrs. Hanrahan, 'Erinne', of Glenbrook, Co. Cork believed that the 'real' dress reform was to follow after the war. She wrote:

Those of us who have experienced the comfort and convenience of a womanlike [sic] working 'outfit' will not again readily swathe our poor limbs in yards of useless stuff, nor yet hamper them with sheath skirts a yard and a quarter in circumference as was the case a few years ago. Dress reform will mean garments that are convenient, comfortable, hygienic, suitable, simple, and becoming, avoiding the two extremes of bad taste, viz: Eccentricity and dowdiness.<sup>277</sup>

'Greenfly' wrote, 'When the modern woman can be beautiful, picturesque, and artistic, why does she prefer to be merely smart?' 'Greenfly' believed an alternative dress reform was needed. She believed the modern woman was sacrificing femininity for smartness. Dress reform advocates wanted a more utilitarian dress. There was the notion of the masculinization of women by choice of dress. 'White Heather', Miss Gibson, of 54 Palmerstown Road, Dublin wrote also of the needed reform, 'the result should be productive of good; it will help us to develop personal taste, and to accommodate ourselves, and not that erratic tyrant, Fashion.' A desire for practicality was favoured but not at the expense of femininity. Parisienne fashions received mixed reception. Ireland was hesitant in adapting fully to Parisienne trends and sometimes as seen earlier referred to London trends. Ireland also looked to its own heritage for fashion trends.

In the 1930s, there was an attempt in Ireland also to use fashion as a tool to promote and define a national identity. Below is a picture taken from the May 1932 edition of *Our Girls*. The photograph is of a girl in national costume:

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<sup>274</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1910.

<sup>275</sup> See *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1917, where 'Fashions of the Hour' discussed how practical dress was becoming.

<sup>276</sup> Harold Koda, Andrew Bolton, 'Paul Poiret (1879-1944)', ([http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/poir/hd\\_poir.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/poir/hd_poir.htm)) (6 May 2012).

<sup>277</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 May 1917.



278

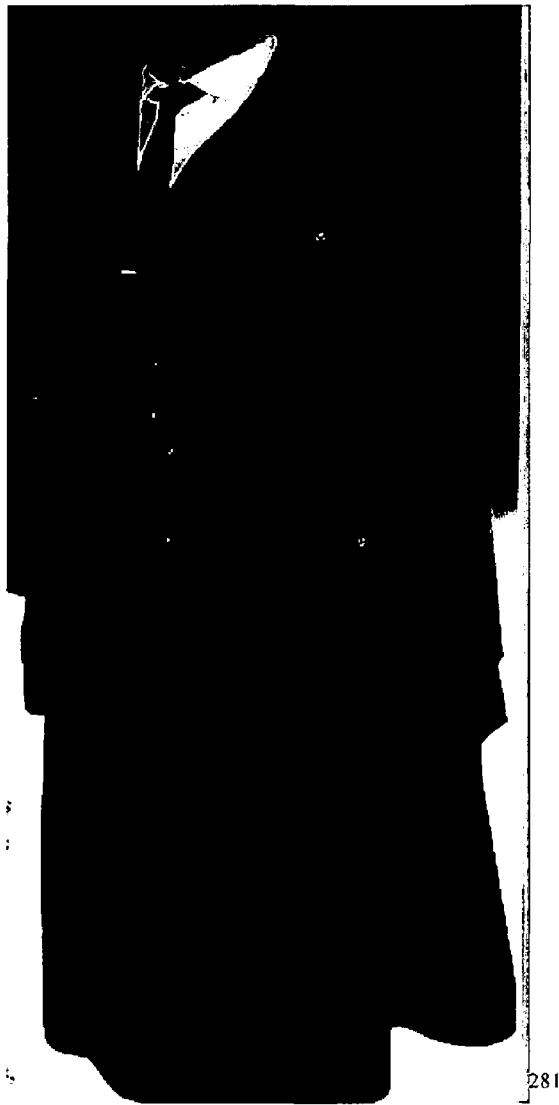
Eugenia Paulicelli argued that Italy also used fashion as a vehicle to promote, create and define a national identity.<sup>279</sup> In 1900, an article in *The Freeman's Journal* detailed colour choice for gowns. It states that in Paris and London khaki was a favourite among women. In Ireland it was the same case, however, in Ireland women were inclined to wear khaki for reasons of patriotism, '...drives everyone into khaki just as patriotism inclines them to the same unbecoming shade over here'.<sup>280</sup> For example see the uniform below for Cumann na mBan. This nationalist group chose khaki to represent them:

<sup>278</sup> *Our Girls*, May 1932.

<sup>279</sup> Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, p2.

<sup>280</sup> 'Our Ladies Letter', *The Freeman's Journal*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1900, p3.





This supports the notion that social and political activity influenced women's fashion. Paulicelli also argued that fashion created a boost in national pride.<sup>282</sup> This would have been the aim of national costume in Ireland.

In conclusion, 1910-1937 was a period of transition for women's fashion as it was for women's gender roles. The decline of the iconic Gibson Girl style was a significant point as it prompted the beginning of many fashion changes to come. Women's silhouette changed radically from the encumbered S-shaped silhouette to the no-waist silhouette, from the full length one-piece gowns to the ankle and lower leg revealing skirts and blouses all while women's roles went from housewife and mother and extended to politician, activist and worker. The Flapper Girl, the Gibson-girl replacement, was a stark contrast to its predecessor. Style iconography went from conservative to liberal just as women were transitioning from the private to the public sphere. Two very different presentations of femininity appeared in the

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<sup>281</sup> Sinéad McCool, *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years 1900-1923*, (Dublin, 2003) p31.

<sup>282</sup> Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, p33.

short space of a decade. Fashion has a timeline of evolution and progression similar to the evolution and progression of women's role.

1910-1937 was dotted with many fashion features; variations of skirt length, sportswear, hobble skirts, men's tailoring, military style, aquiline features, bias-cut dresses and national costume. All these features stemmed from Paris or Hollywood. Coco Chanel, Madeleine Vionnet and Paul Poiret being key designers in dress reform. Irish women's fashion in the early twentieth century was fascinating. It was not fashion for clothes sake. There were social and political factors at work determining and influencing major fashion changes.

This chapter has chronologically examined and portrayed the history of Irish women's fashion through the lens of women's magazines. Links have been made between changing women's fashion and changing women's gender roles. Measured against the backdrop of its historical and cultural context one can see the links between Irish women's fashion and Irish women's changing gender roles. Women used fashion to portray their personality, their political stance and professional status. Evidently, fashion was a significant and constant topic of interest in *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* either to showcase or criticise. However, this examination of *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* highlighted a significant factor in women's changing gender roles and changing fashions. This dominating factor was class. Class determined lifestyle and appearance.

## Chapter Three

### The Department Store: shopping in early twentieth century Ireland

Ireland in the early twentieth century was a country with a strong class system. There were three levels of class; lower, middle and upper. There were also degrees of class within each grouping. Class determined one's quality and standard of life. People portrayed their class through their personal appearance and the appearance of their home. Men relied on women to portray class appropriately through the home, her personal appearance and through children. The responsibility of maintaining the appearance of the home belonged to women. Chapter two discussed the manner in which women were the purveyors of fashion in the area of dress. The same could be said for home interior fashion. This chapter will argue that the home and women were seen as symbols of one another. They were spoken in terms of the other. Beverly Gordon's 'Woman's Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age', will be utilised in this chapter. Gordon discusses the link between women and the home in significant detail in the paper.

In a society of separate spheres, fashion was an interest that belonged to the private sphere but also to classes within that sphere; the middle and upper classes. It can be argued that the Catholic middle classes were the most active grouping in the area of buying and of fashion. This chapter will argue that a growing Catholic middle class fuelled the fashion industry in Ireland. They also pioneered the culture of shopping as we know today. This was done through their efforts to create a new identity for themselves in the context of their growing status in the early twentieth century as an elite in waiting. The Catholic middle classes had, in the post-famine period, increasing wrested economic, social and political power from the Anglo Irish Ascendancy. Members of this growing middle class purchased material goods for their person and home to create and build their new lifestyle. They experienced a significant change in lifestyle and needed to dress themselves and their homes accordingly. Therefore, there will be a focus in this chapter on the Catholic middle classes. These classes witnessed an intense growth in numbers post-famine. This social reshuffle of classes will be discussed in much detail in this chapter using primary sources such as *Without My Cloak* by Kate O'Brien and with reference to *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton* by Kathryn Hughes. The census of 1911 will be utilised to portray the living conditions of two types of homes in Ireland, lower class and middle class respectively. Auction listings will also be utilised to gain an insight to the people's material life. In the case of Ireland, it is wholly apparent that fashion and dress and house furnishings in the early twentieth century were significant components of culture for every class, either directly or indirectly.

A new way of shopping manifested from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Bigger stores emerged selling more than one particular type of goods. Shop-owners previously ran specified stores like haberdashers or draperies but by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century they combined departments and became more general in their stock and services. These stores were called department stores

with the first of its kind being Switzers which opened in 1838. This chapter argues that by the period in question, 1910-1937, this new way of shopping fed the growing desires of women of all classes; desires roused by the cinema, prescriptive literature and their changing gender roles.

In this chapter, fashion will be discussed in terms of clothing for the home interior and personal style in the period 1910-1937. Copies of *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* from the period in question will be utilised to examine ideas about the home and its construction with due reference to the Irish class system

### **Issues of Class and the Emergence of the Catholic Middle Classes**

To borrow Tony Farmar's understanding of class, 'Class refers to the way individuals and their families get and preserve their means of living'.<sup>283</sup> Ireland in the early twentieth century had a society very conscious of class distinctions. Farmar quotes militant Irish-Ireland journalist D.P. Moran as saying that class distinctions were 'ridiculously minute and acute in Ireland'.<sup>284</sup>

The lowest class of society lived in complete destitution. To take Dublin as an example, in 1911 Dublin's population was 477,196. The religious breakdown of this was 83% Catholic, 13% Church of Ireland, 2% Presbyterian and Methodist and 2% other<sup>285</sup>. In Dublin 33% of families lived in one-roomed accommodation indicating the extreme poverty a large section of the population lived in.<sup>286</sup> Suburbanisation of Dublin resulted in middle-class families leaving their inner-city beautiful Georgian homes on Mountjoy Square and Henrietta Street among others and moving out to areas like Rathmines, Monkstown and Blackrock. The previously elegant and luxury homes of the north inner city soon became dilapidated as entire families moved into the individual rooms. They became known as the infamous Dublin tenements. One example of such overcrowding was number 5 Henrietta Street which contained six rooms and housed twelve families totalling eighty people.<sup>287</sup> Below is an example of the one room accommodation that families were squeezed into:

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<sup>283</sup> Farmar, *Ordinary Lives*, p1.

<sup>284</sup> Farmar, *Ordinary Lives*, p12.

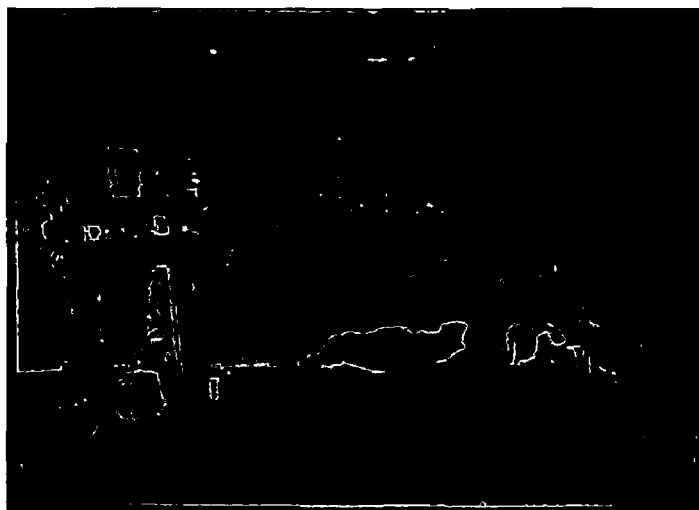
<sup>285</sup> 'Religion', (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/religion.html>) (2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012).

<sup>286</sup> 'What was Dublin like in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century?',

(<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/main.html>) (2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012).

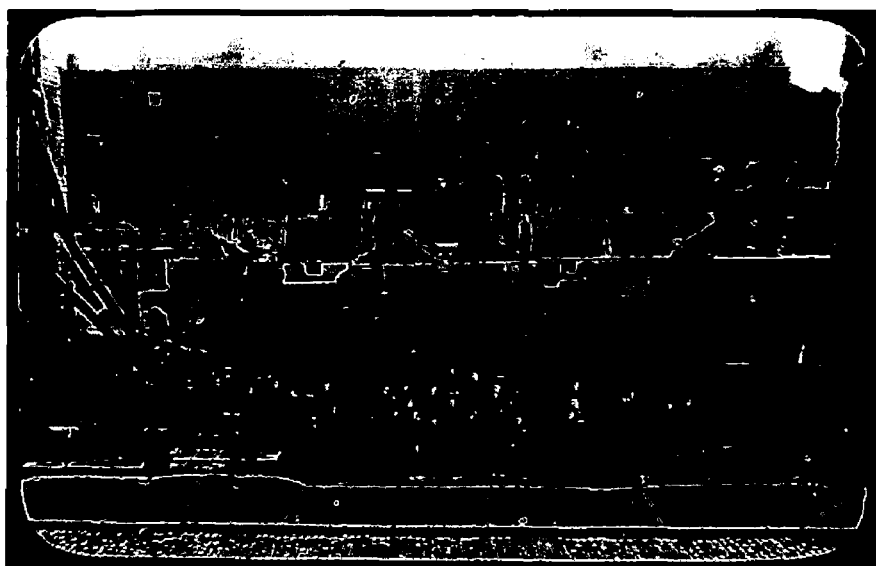
<sup>287</sup> Census of Ireland 1911,

([http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Inns\\_Quay/Henrietta\\_St\\_/33589/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Inns_Quay/Henrietta_St_/33589/)) (4<sup>th</sup> July 2012).



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There was widespread poverty in the Dublin tenements. Fashionable clothing or furnishings would not have entered their minds as they struggled day-to-day to feed and warm themselves. James Stephen's 1912 novel on tenement life, *The Charwoman's Daughter*, describes the interior poverty witnessed in the scanty furnishings owned by the Mrs Makebelieve and her daughter. Mrs Makebelieve, indeed, dreams of inheriting a fortune and being able to indulge her desire for the furnishing and material goods available to the middle classes. She imagines a 'Turkey carpet', a mahogany chest of drawers and a rosewood piano.<sup>289</sup> The image below shows the destitution these families experienced with some children without shoes:



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<sup>288</sup> 8 Waterford Street, Dublin families would have lived in single rooms like this. ([http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty\\_health/MainPic\\_DarkDublin\\_7.078.html](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty_health/MainPic_DarkDublin_7.078.html)) (23/10/12).

<sup>289</sup> James Stephens, *The Charwoman's Daughter* (Dublin: 1912), p. 13.

<sup>290</sup> People, including some barefoot children, at North Cumberland Street., 1913 ([http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty\\_health/MainPic\\_Nth\\_CumberlandSt\\_7.038.html](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty_health/MainPic_Nth_CumberlandSt_7.038.html)) (23/10/2012).

The death rate in Dublin per thousand was 22.3 compared to 15.6 in London.<sup>291</sup> Conditions of employment were sub-standard due to low wages and over supply of workers. The south of Ireland had not experienced an industrial revolution, unlike Belfast, so there were not enough factories to supply work to the population. Strikes were common but often defeated due to the monopoly of business owners.<sup>292</sup> Ireland's economy had shifted by the latter half of the nineteenth century from manufacture and industry to the import-export business. While the poorer working classes lost out from this the Catholic middle-classes benefited from this.

The Anglo-Irish who previously sat in a position of social, economic and political power were replaced by a new Catholic middle-class. Ireland witnessed a steady growth in the numbers of Catholic middle-classes from 1829 when Catholic emancipation was achieved. By 1910, Protestant domination of the professions had been eroded by an educated<sup>293</sup> Catholic middle-class who benefited from the Land War, 1879-1882. A series of Land Acts passed from 1870-1903<sup>294</sup> meant the landlord class were disappearing. Since the Acts were passed 90,000 holdings had been bought and by 1907 there were less than 15,000 landlords left.<sup>295</sup> In the autobiography *Dublin Made Me* by Dubliner C.S. Andrews he distinguishes between the Catholic middle classes:

At the top of the Catholic heap- in terms of worldly goods and social status- were the medical specialists, fashionable dentists, barristers, solicitors, wholesale tea and wine merchants, owners of large drapery stores and a very few owners or directors of large business firms. These were the Catholic upper middle class; they were the Castle Catholics...

Below the Castle Catholics were the Catholic middle middle class. They were the general practioners, less successful solicitors, grocers, publicans, butchers, tobacconists who did not lie over the shop (when they moved from over their shops they ascended in the social scale), as well as corn merchants, civil servants, journalists, coal merchants and bank managers. In politics these people were national, and from them came the municipal politicians...

Lower down the scale were the shopkeepers and publicans who lived over the shop, as well as clerks, shop assistants, lower grade civil service, and skilled tradesmen...at

<sup>291</sup> 'Poverty and Health', The National Archives of Ireland, ([http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty\\_health.html](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty_health.html)) (23/10/12).

<sup>292</sup> See Dermot Keogh, *The Rise of the Irish Working Class*, (Belfast, 1982).

<sup>293</sup> See Senia Pasetta, *Before the Revolution: Nationalism, Social Change and Ireland's Catholic Elite, 1879-1922*, (Cork, 1999) pp80-99.

<sup>294</sup> The Land League, later renamed The United Irish League, agitated for Land reform throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Reforms began from 1870. William Gladstone's 1870 Landlord and Tenant Act entitled evicted tenants, who were evicted for reasons other than non-payment, to compensation. The Land Act of 1881 gave tenants legal right; fair rent, fixity of tenure and freedom of sale. The 1887 Land Act gave the courts authority to readjust rents in line with shifts in agricultural performance. The 1903 Wyndham Land Act ensured landlords received a good price for the sale of their land while the purchasing tenant took out a mortgage over a twenty year period. Mortgage repayments were lower than rent payments. Irish Catholic farmers became owner-occupiers and then land-owners. See 'Multitext Project in Irish History: Movments for Political and Social Reform, 1870-1914' ([http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Ireland\\_society\\_economy\\_1870-1914](http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Ireland_society_economy_1870-1914)) (02/02/13) and

Fergus Campbell, 'Irish Popular Politics and the Making of the Wyndham Land Act, 1901-1903', in *The Historical Journal*, xlv, No. 4 (Dec., 2002), pp755-773.

<sup>295</sup> Farman, *Ordinary Lives*, p9.

the bottom of the heap were the have-nots of the city, consisting of labourers, dockers, coal heavers, messenger boys and domestic servants.<sup>296</sup>

One can see that the many degrees of variation within the middle class were acute and minute. There were three levels of Catholic middle class which in turn gave various access levels to wealth and for the women, various access levels to fashion.

The Catholic Middle classes were a strong professional<sup>297</sup> grouping with organisations such as the Catholic Association<sup>298</sup> and the Catholic Defence Society<sup>299</sup> to protect their interests. There was a sense of right in the mind-sets of this upwardly mobile class. Their perception of their ancestors previously dispossessed of land during the Plantations manifested in their memories. Senia Peseta quotes the Catholic Association as saying in 1902, 'We must fight with all our might until we have laid our hands on as much of the power, place and position of this country as our numbers, our ability, and our unabated historical claims entitle us to demand.'<sup>300</sup> They were consciously working on improving their status. The Catholic middle-classes sought a lifestyle that reflected their new improved status and power in society.

Urban middle-class Catholics bought homes in the idyllic suburbs of Dublin to get away from the congested city. A literary example of the expression of class status and upward social mobility in Ireland through house-building amongst the growing Catholic middle classes can be seen in O'Brien's *Without my Cloak* (1931) when Anthony Considine, third generation, builds a house outside the town of Mellick, Co. Limerick, 'Mahogany, serge hangings, Turkey carpets, gilt-framed oil paintings; no opulent fitting of the 1860 convention was absent from this new dining-room.'<sup>301</sup> According to the 1911 Census of Ireland, Patrick William Tunney aged 39, a Catholic stock broker, lived at 41 Ailesbury Road with his young family and two servants. The House and Building Return form in the 1911 census showed their home had between ten and twelve rooms and seven windows in the front of the house making it a first class house.<sup>302</sup> This family would have had the capacity to display their new found wealth and power in their home through luxurious furnishings and extravagant decor. A middle class home on Ailesbury Road, as recorded in the auctions of the *Irish Times*, would have contained luxury items such as a brilliant toned boudoir grande pianoforte in walnut wood, Sheraton style drawing room suite upholstered in silk tapestry, chesterfield

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<sup>296</sup> C.S. Andrews, *Dublin Made Me*, (Dublin, 2002), pp4-6.

<sup>297</sup> See Paseta, *Before the Revolution*, p123. Paseta argues that education received by Catholic students led them to choose careers in commercial and professional occupations. It also led to the growth of a large Catholic mercantile middle-class. This was considered an obstacle for the economic growth of Ireland as industry was left neglected of an educated workforce.

<sup>298</sup> The Catholic Association was established in 1823 by Daniel O Connell. They were an organisation committed firmly to publicising and rectifying discrimination against Catholics. See (<http://www.irelandhistory.org/irish-history/ireland-irish-history/the-catholic-association.html>) (15th July 2012).

<sup>299</sup> The Catholic Defence Society was established in July 1904 after the demise of the Catholic Association. They were approved by the clergy unlike The Catholic Association. They campaigned against indecent literature and theatre, discrimination toward Catholic men and encouraged Catholic lawyers to organise themselves into professional groups. See Paseta, 'The Expansion of Catholic Organisation', *Before the Revolution*, pp111-116.

<sup>300</sup> As quoted by Paseta, *Before the Revolution*, p103.

<sup>301</sup> Kate O'Brien, *Without My Cloak* (London, 1984), p. 22, p. 34.

<sup>302</sup> Census of Ireland 1911 (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai000113271/>) (16<sup>th</sup> July 2012).



couch, fine Wilton and Axminster carpets, costly figured silk curtains, Sheraton music cabinet, Japanese and French bronzes, decorative china, richly embroidered 4-fold Japanese scree, highly finished oak dining-room suite, chairs upholstered in Moroccan leather, oil paintings, antique cut crystal chandelier, 500 volumes of miscellaneous books and old arms and armour<sup>303</sup>. Rooms may have included a drawing room, dining room, study, butler's pantry, bathrooms on one or both floors, numerous bedrooms, breakfast room, maid's room, kitchen, scullery and pantry<sup>304</sup>. A house on Ailesbury Road, in 1911 would cost £1350 to buy or £80 p/a to rent. A house on Ballsbridge Rock Road, another middle class area, would cost £900, also in 1911. This is in comparison to lower-middle class areas such as Cabra and Drumcondra seeking £300 and £400 respectively<sup>305</sup>. There were 224 people living on Ailesbury Road at the time the 1911 census was taken. Roman Catholic was the majority religion on the road followed by Church of Ireland<sup>306</sup>. Of the middle class Catholic families living on the road, occupations stated by male head of households were Stock Brokers, Civil Engineers, Mining Engineers, Medical Students, Justice of Peace, Bank Clerk and Solicitors. The home itself was a symbol of respectability and supremacy and played a significant part of 'necessary impression management', a notion which will be discussed. Evidently by 1911 the Catholic middle classes had achieved what their predecessors did not. They worked to showcase this to society. They indicated their achievement on their person and on their home not just with reference to their employment and religious affiliations but also with reference to their personal appearance and the appearance of their home.

It could be argued that the Catholic middle-classes were insecure with their recently acquired status and needed to prove their upward social mobility visually on their person and in their homes affirming their identity to both society and themselves. The problem was they did not have a style that was particularly their own. Senia Paseta states that the rising Catholic elite 'borrowed and incorporated parts of Anglo-Irish culture, notwithstanding their increasingly vocal assertion of Gaelic superiority'.<sup>307</sup> They were a class in transition. Previously, it was the Anglo-Irish middle and upper classes who defined what style and good taste was. Thus, what was perceived as tasteful and stylish had an Anglo resonance to it. The Catholic middle classes, new to style and high class goods imitated what the Anglo-Irish were wearing for clothes and the home. They lacked an innate sense of style. Again, this is clear in O'Brien's description of Anthony Considine in *Without my Cloak*. He had the money to build a big house in the country but it was not tasteful. It was not until the fourth generation with Denis that the Considines show any aesthetic sense.<sup>308</sup> They were also trying to differentiate themselves from their Protestant counterparts by emphasising their Gaelic heritage. Therefore what they would have presented was a mix of Anglo and Gaelic. They were still not comfortable in their own identity. As seen, fashion was a complex business. For

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<sup>303</sup> Auction listing for 10 Ailesbury Road, *The Irish Times*, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1911.

<sup>304</sup> Various auctions' descriptions of homes for sale. See *The Irish Times*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1911.

<sup>305</sup> *The Irish Times*, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1911.

<sup>306</sup> Figures show 106 Catholics, 94 Protestants, 7 Presbyterians, 7 other, 6 Quakers, 3 Jews and 1 Independent. Census of Ireland 1911 (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/>) (22<sup>nd</sup> July 2012).

<sup>307</sup> Paseta, *Before the Revolution*, p95.

<sup>308</sup> O'Brien, *Without my Cloak*, p22.

the middle and upper classes it was used as a tool to project one's stance politically and socially. For the lower classes it was less useful in that context.

### Maintaining 'the front' & Necessary Impression Management

Appearance was a significant concern of everyday-life for the middle and upper classes. How one or one's home appeared conveyed class, taste and economic aspirations. There is a strong connection between identity and one's choice of fashion, be it clothing or home interior. A person's values, mood and personality can be expressed through fashion and style. One could also manipulate one's appearance to convey a particular life-story. Appearance represented a multitude; social status, wealth, achievement and profession. Beverley Gordon suggests that 'a front' comprising of the home and the body represented what the individual wanted to channel to the outdoor world.<sup>309</sup> She also argues that middle and upper-class women bore the burden of maintaining 'the front'. In *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton* by Kathryn Hughes, Hughes reiterates a short story of a 'typical' lower-middle class English woman, Mrs. Mary Price, who in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century prepares a dinner for her family and guests. According to the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*<sup>310</sup>, a family like the Prices should entertain three times a year but the protagonist Mrs. Price had been neglecting this standard practice. The story goes into detail about the choice of food, cutlery and even chosen time for serving each course. There is a motive behind each choice Mrs. Price makes, for example, dinner will be served at 7.30pm to be fashionably late and the dinner party was served in the French rather than Russian style because the Russian style requires more hands to serve, 'The Prices have neither the staff nor the crockery to manage the more fashionable practice of having each person served their meal separately by a servant.'<sup>311</sup> Mrs. Price drafted in extra help for the day and evening to prepare and serve dinner. She spent half of Mr. Price's week's salary and the whole evening put such a strain on the household it was at the 'point of collapse'. Mrs. Price put on a show to her peers. She portrayed a lifestyle that she could never maintain on a daily basis never mind three times a year but for this occasion, in an act of theatre, she conjured up 'a front'. Although a fictional story, some insights can be gained into the expected performance of women and the extent to which women would go to portray a 'front'.

Victorian England went through an evolution in class change. The industrial revolution had facilitated the upward social mobility of those who had made money. They

<sup>309</sup> Beverley Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age', *Winterthur Portfolio*, xxxi, No. 4, Gendered Spaces and Aesthetics (Winter, 1996), pp. 281-301, p283.

<sup>310</sup> *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* was published from 1852 by Sam Beeton. It was an etiquette and instruction guide on all things domestic; French fashion plates, dressmaking patterns, recipes and serialised novels. His wife Mrs. Beeton (*The Short and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton*) contributed to the magazine by supplying the recipes. Their target audience was young middle class women and was an instant success. While being a domestic guide for women, like *The Lady of the House*, it also dealt with social and political issues. It also opened some pages of the magazine to the reading public for debate, opinion and discussion. See Maria Rye, 'The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine' in Marion Diamond, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, xxx, No.1 (Spring, 1977), pp5-7.

<sup>311</sup> Kathryn Hughes, *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton*, (London, 2005) p238.

had to learn the norms of behaviour of a new class in terms of presenting the right appearance in social settings. Instructive manuals like *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* were a necessity for a class climbing the social ladder and building a new lifestyle. Again, in *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton*, Hughes tells the true story of how Isabella Mayson and Samuel Beeton met. Hughes writes about what Isabella liked about Samuel: 'there was still a cockneyism about him that was thrilling, especially since she had been brought up by people keen to forget that sort of thing in their own backgrounds. He was that delicious thing, a familiar stranger, a buried subtext.'<sup>312</sup> Isabella's family were part of the rising middle class; a rising class intent on climbing social ladders while burying their past social status within the ranks of the lower classes. Isabella's step-father, Henry, did not like Samuel. Hughes argued both men were very alike and 'this meant they should have liked one another, were it not for the fact that the prime dynamic of the rising middle classes involved not looking back.'<sup>313</sup> Henry was once a 'cockney' who bettered his situation professionally and therefore financially. He brought the status of his family up and he was not prepared to accept that his daughter was marrying beneath them even though Samuel was doing exactly what Henry had done in the generation previous.<sup>314</sup> There was a social class re-shuffle in England due to the success of the industrial revolution. The re-ordering of classes was still in its infancy in the period of Mrs Beeton's early adulthood in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and therefore was causing confusion and tension as people tried to settle into new lifestyles. A social re-shuffle also happened in the post famine period in Ireland, a previously disenfranchised Catholic lower class came into new found power and wealth through the land acts and the growing democratisation of Irish society; the newly rising Catholic middle classes had to learn new norms of behaviour. Kate O' Brien's novel *Without my Cloak* tells the tale of a horse thief called Considine who arrived in Mellick in 1789. Nearly a century later the Considines were a powerful, affluent and influential family. A family business was founded and saw the name Considine rise up the social classes. The grandsons of the horse thief were professionals and the granddaughters carefully married to improve the family's social position. This transition was not an easy one and with the Irish Catholic middle classes' new social standing and economic power a new way and standard of living was required. This new lifestyle of luxury required appropriate etiquette which did not come naturally. Honest John, son of the horse thief makes a fortune as a forage dealer allowing him to move his family into an affluent town house in Mellick. He himself had discoloured nails and hands like a manual labourer but his daughters were richly dressed and jewelled. His son, Anthony, 'wore good clothes and wore them well'. This shows the manner in which merger into the ranks of the middle classes was a slow, awkward progression. It also shows the manner in which upward social mobility was expressed in material goods. Honest John's eyes 'smouldered proudly as he recalled the silky, jewelled beauty of the daughter lately departed from this room.'<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Hughes, *The Short Life*, p102.

<sup>313</sup> Hughes, *The Short Life*, p105.

<sup>314</sup> Hughes, *The Short life*, p105.

<sup>315</sup> O'Brien, *Without My Cloak*, pp12-17.

The new Catholic middle-classes had to learn how to live according to their new status in society. They had to adapt to their new means of living.

*The Irish Times* contained a section called 'Women's World' where women's issues were addressed. Readers could write in and correspondent Molly Bawn would publish a response in the paper. A reader called Carmen wrote in to ask of the etiquette for sending invitations for a party and what drinks she should serve. Carmen was advised that the style of refreshments would depend on the kind of party<sup>316</sup>. There was a standard expected in entertaining and a pressure to portray status. Magazines like *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* would have acted as the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* in Ireland; the latter regularly provided instructions on etiquettes, appropriate behaviour and dress. They were numerous amounts of etiquette and household management books available to aid maintenance of 'the front'.<sup>317</sup>

Gordon uses the phrase 'necessary impression management' when discussing appearance.<sup>318</sup> This phrase is very fitting as it highlights the business aspect of fashion be it the home interior or clothing. One's impression on society conveyed who one was and what lifestyle one maintained. The impression one conjured up could open doors to social and professional opportunities. If one carried out this 'necessary impression management' adequately one would be more approachable and acceptable into certain circles. Therefore, how one managed their appearance was a complex everyday task. The phrase also highlights the self-fashioning and self-construction involved in presenting a certain image in terms of dress and home. Fashion was a manipulative and systematic process. Fashion had a purpose other than to be visually appealing. It was a device used to construct and channel one's status to society. Post-famine there was a growing Catholic middle-class in Ireland anxious to affirm their new status. They needed to prove to themselves and to society who they were. They were differentiating themselves away from the ranks of their predecessors; Catholics dispossessed of land and struggling to pay harsh rents. They were a new breed of Irish Catholics who were constructing their acceptance through a 'front'. They were also emphasising their 'organic differences' to the Protestant middle-class with whom they had a hostile relationship.<sup>319</sup> They believed they were different on the basic levels of religious beliefs and social, political and cultural variances. Their necessity to appear powerful and respectable led to mass consumption of fashion items for personal clothing and décor for the home. Evidence of this can be construed from the growing shopping culture which began in the former half of the nineteenth century in unison of the time period when the Catholic middle classes acquired wealth. This will be discussed in detail later in the chapter. Journals

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<sup>316</sup> *The Irish Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1911, p23.

<sup>317</sup> Florence B. Jack (Ed.), *The Woman's Book of Household Management: Everything a Woman Ought to Know*; William Henry Wilkins (Ed.), *The Lady's Realm*; Pye H. Chavasse (Ed.), *Advice to a Wife on the Management of Herself*; Pye H. Chavasse (Ed.), *Advice to a Mother on the Management of her Children*; G. Henderson, *The Ladies Cabinet of Fashion, Music & Romance*; Joseph Robin, *The Ladies Pocket Magazine*; *The gentlewoman: the illustrated weekly journal for gentlewomen*; *Everyday Housekeeping*. Details of editors are difficult to obtain as most magazines did not name the editor. Articles were written anonymously or under an alias. Circulation is also difficult to establish. The only information available regarding circulation is the boasts of the magazines themselves.

<sup>318</sup> Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p284.

<sup>319</sup> Pasetta, *Before the Revolution*, p104.

like *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* were filled with pages of advertisements for furniture, baby foods, foodstuffs and cosmetics, proving there was a spending culture in Ireland in the early twentieth century.

For the lower classes, malnourished children, filthy water and living conditions made death an everyday concern. Therefore, any sense of 'necessary impression management' could not be sustained by these lower classes. One can ascertain that 'the front' and 'necessary impression management' were interests predominantly for the middle classes. The middle classes were concerned with finding an identity. They were adamant about affirming and showcasing their newly established status and power and fashion or what they perceived to be fashion helped them achieve this. The home was a channel with which to showcase their new identity embodying power, wealth and status.

### Women & the Home

Irish women have throughout history maintained a strong link to the home either as housewives or domestic servants. Joanna Bourke wrote, 'In the generation prior to 1914 Irish women transformed their position within society: bidding farewell to labour in the fields and in other men's homes, they enlisted for full-time work in the unpaid domestic sphere'.<sup>320</sup> If women did not have to work in the domestic service they went to education classes on housewifery and good housekeeping<sup>321</sup>. As Bourke outlines, single women performed housework for her male family members free of charge or emigrated. Married women reared their children and strove to maintain a perfect household. Widowed women produced domestic goods in competition with their son's wives.<sup>322</sup> Female labour was dominated by housework regardless of class. Good housekeeping led according to the dominant discourse of separate spheres to domestic bliss and bad housekeeping was often used as an excuse for men abandoning their families, alcoholism and even domestic abuse.<sup>323</sup>

The Catholic Church, the State and society put women in that relationship with the home and made it difficult for them to leave. The Catholic Church did so through doctrine and teachings. The State did so through legislation throughout the 1920s<sup>324</sup>. Church and State's efforts to strengthen women's role within the home will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Prescriptive literature provides an insight to how society viewed women and the home. The following image was taken from a section in *The Signpost*:

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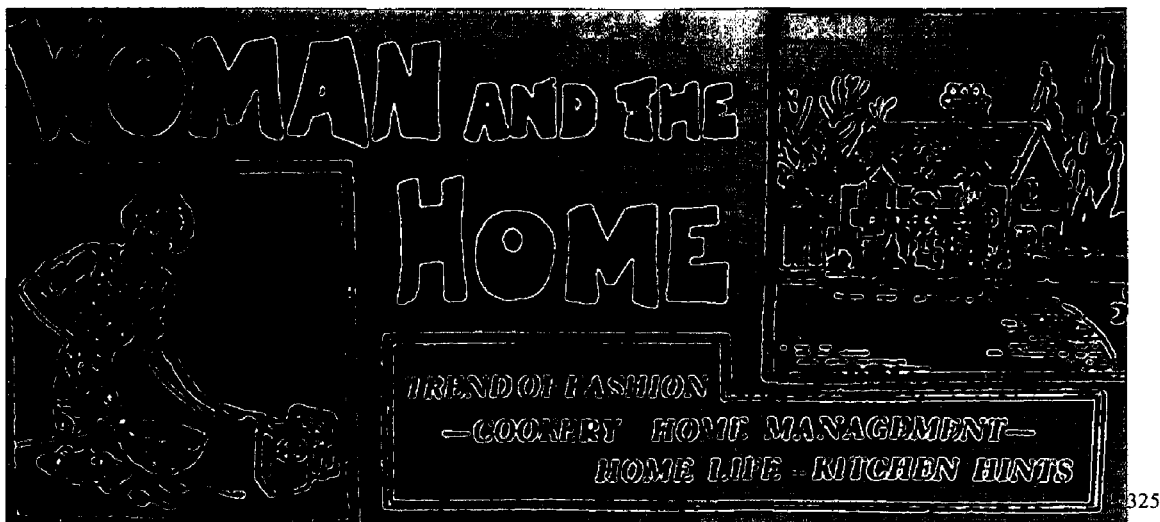
<sup>320</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change, and Housework in Ireland 1890-1914*, p1.

<sup>321</sup> The Women's National Health Association (WHNA), United Irishwomen (UI), the LAOS, the CDB, the DATI, and the Board of National Education were all organisations based in rural areas that provided domestic education. The Irish Co-operative Women's Guild provided domestic education to urban areas. See Bourke, *From Husbandry to Housewifery*, pp236-262.

<sup>322</sup> Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery*, p1.

<sup>323</sup> See Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery*, p267.

<sup>324</sup> Exclusions of women to the public service upon marriage, exclusions to jury service, Conditions of Employment Act 1936, Article 41.2 of the 1937 Constitution cemented women, motherhood and domesticity together.



It can be argued that it was women's strong relationship with the home that created a barrier for women when they attempted to enter the public sphere in the early twentieth century. Women's strong association with the home and management of the home made it difficult for women to separate themselves from the home while pursuing a life in the public sphere. Women's strong link to the home was apparent in *Our Girls*. 'Our Girls at Home' was another regular feature which provided a 'cosy little home-corner'<sup>326</sup> where hints and tips for the home were shared. The October 1932 issue advises:

Every girl takes, or should take, a lively interest in the indoor decoration of her home, particularly of her bedroom, which is her domain. Even though she may not be in a position to have many things on which she sets her heart, she can do to brighten those she has. Artistic paints and polishes will make shabby furniture most charmingly modern, and, instead of badgering your parents for expensive new pieces try renovate those you have.<sup>327</sup>

The interior of the home was as much a concern for girls and women as was their appearance. *The Signpost*, a continuation of *Our Girls* sets this notion in stone. The first page of the April 1936 edition is a letter to the readers from the editor. The following is an extract taken from the letter:

We wish to say at the outset that 'THE SIGNPOST' is a Monthly Magazine for the Home Circle, and it is our aim to inspire our readers to look forward monthly to a Magazine which will not only help to make the home more homely than ever, but point out the way to making ourselves more fond of the home, too, in every way that presents itself. The Home Circle is a very beautiful thing in the eyes of God and men... 'THE SIGNPOST' is a Family Circle for the father, mother, sister, brother and we do not intend to leave out the baby. The way is pointed out to all, and to make all happy and more interested in the home is what we want...Home makes the man. Home makes the

<sup>325</sup> *The Signpost*, May 1936.

<sup>326</sup> *Our Girls*, November 1930.

<sup>327</sup> *Our Girls*, October 1932.

woman, and a very great deal depends on the training and the correct reading matter that is allowed into it.<sup>328</sup>

There is a strong emphasis on the home in this magazine. According to *The Signpost*, happiness stems from the home. There is an attempt to link the home to the entire family but the responsibility to maintain the home belongs to the woman. See the image below which encapsulates the home and the woman together. They are seen as one in the image:



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Traditionally, women managed the home financially and hygienically. Women provided care and nourishment in the home to her husband, children and sometimes extended family. The woman was expected to sacrifice her identity, personal freedom and any notion of self-betterment. She was seen as part of the home. They were symbolic of the other and were generally spoken of within the same context.

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<sup>328</sup> *The Signpost*, April 1936.

<sup>329</sup> *The Signpost*, June 1936.



Typically in Irish women's history the discussion of the ideology of separate spheres has revolved around the manner in which it restricted women. There is little discussion how it was constructed or how the domestic imagery was transmitted to women. Beverley Gordon, however, takes that alternative approach in the context of America. In the early twentieth century, women's bodies and the interior space of the home were often seen and viewed as the same thing. According to Beverly Gordon:

...between about 1875 and 1925, the connection between women and their houses in Western middle-class culture was so strong that it helped shape the perception of both. In this period it seemed that a simile- women and interiors were like one another- was transformed into a synonym. The woman was seen as the embodiment of the home, and in turn the home was seen as an extension of her- an extension of both her corporeal and spiritual self.<sup>330</sup>

A woman's home both complimented and completed her and vice-versa. If her home was a disgrace then so was she. On the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1906, *Sinn Fein* published a column aimed at women, entitled 'Letters to Nora'. It stated 'No Irishwoman can afford to claim a part in the public duties of patriotism until she has fully satisfied the claims her "home" makes on her.'<sup>331</sup> Gordon suggests that the relationship between women and their homes evolved and the two almost amalgamate in the period 1875-1925. They were used as symbols for one another. Gordon argues that the home was seen as an extension of the woman's corporeal and spiritual self, similar to personal clothing, therefore, any flaws in the home were reflected in the woman. Pressure to maintain the appearance of both the home and her person were crucial to her pride and dignity and to the manner in which she presented herself and her family to the world in terms of status and notions of respectability. According to Bourke, retail sales of furniture boomed from the 1890s, between 1904 and 1911, the value of imports of matting and carpets increased by 36% and sales of minor cooking equipment undoubtedly increased.<sup>332</sup> This would indicate that women became increasingly concerned with the appearance and running of the home in the early twentieth century.

The interior space was a concern primarily for women. Advertisements for cleaning products often contained illustrations of women as seen earlier in the advertisement for Lux washing powder. The pages of *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* gave significant coverage for all sorts of cleaning products. Grocery lists and prices were also published in women's magazines. Men's involvement in the economic domain meant increasing time spent outside the home. They had little or nothing to do with regards to the running or appearance of the domestic sphere. Gordon writes that this occurrence led women to undertake the role of domestic manager and this becoming solely their responsibility by the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', pp281-301.

<sup>331</sup> *Sinn Fein*, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1906: 6.

<sup>332</sup> Bourke, *From Husbandry to Housewifery*, pp218-219.

<sup>333</sup> Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p285.

By 1911, there was a decline in the numbers of women entering the domestic service<sup>334</sup>. The supply and reliability of domestic servants was poor but the standard of the home could not suffer according to the 'Woman's World' section of *The Irish Times* in 1911. The paper discussed the crisis in the domestic service and the increased cost of living. When talking of the crisis in the domestic service, 'The situation is serious, and will need both energy and skill to grapple with. It also shows the necessity of a thorough training in domestic economy for girls of every class.'<sup>335</sup> According to the article, domesticity was no longer a chore for the lower classes of women and every girl should receive a 'thorough training'. The piece went on to advise that if the woman of the house knew what the work entailed they could delegate more efficiently and be better 'managers'. The term management was also used by Gordon. The running of the home was a business with aims and objectives; to create a façade. As mentioned earlier in *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton*, The story describes the stress placed on Mary as the woman of the house is entertaining guests for the evening. It also reveals the extent of detail and effort that goes into organising such an event. The husband simply turns up for dinner having contributed nothing but the financial funds.<sup>336</sup> Mary comes across as a manager of a business rather than a mother in her home. She was a domestic manager. The home was her responsibility but also her way of expressing herself.

Gordon strengthens the link between woman and the home by making the connection between women's natural body cycles and the home's natural cycle. Women like their homes have a daily, weekly, monthly routine. Gordon gives some examples by likening biological activities to household tasks; in the morning, the body awakens and curtains are pulled both in preparation for the day; in the evening, a woman puts on her evening dress, curtains are pulled and lamps are lit in preparation for the night. On a wider scale, spring cleaning, taking down heavy wall rugs, closing off fireplaces is likened to a change to summer wardrobe. Equally, men carried out their daily bodily functions and wore seasonally appropriate clothing. Although, men's cycles were more personal. They did not relate to the home or any other factor. Men's cycles surrounded their own job or personal social life. Women's personal routine incorporated the home and wardrobe management was a woman's task<sup>337</sup>. The following is an extract taken from the December 1930 volume of *Our Girls*. It is taken from a section called 'Our Girls at Home' written by Merry Lee. It ratifies Gordon's argument that women and the home acted as a symbol for each other. Lee writes of the pre-Christmas clean-up and then goes on to write:

Years ago, however, I discovered that there is another kind of 'clean-up' which is even more important if we are to enjoy a full measure of Yule happiness. As a result of this discovery, my Christmases are always extra-specially happy and peaceful. Now, as I want Christmas to be the happiest *you* have ever known, I'm going to let you into my secret.

<sup>334</sup>This was due to emigration and better employment opportunities. In 1901 the census states 172,224 females stated to be employed as domestic servants. In 1911 this figure fell to 128,918. This is a massive decrease of 43,306 (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/>) (20<sup>th</sup> July 2012).

<sup>335</sup> *The Irish Times*, Dec 30 1911, p23.

<sup>336</sup> Hughes, *The Short Life*, pp234-239.

<sup>337</sup>Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p288.

Before starting on my house-cleaning each November I first of all give my *mental house* a real, honest-to-goodness clean up. I commence by getting rid of all the junk that has collected during the year- junk, such as useless longings, false impressions and vain hopes. Then, with one of those self-examination brushes, I scrub my 'house' from cellar to attic, using plenty of warm, cleansing thought.

After this I polish up all the old, tried friendships that I have allowed to grow rusty from neglect during the year; and, if any of them has become broken since last Christmas I do my best to stick them with a tube of Forgive-and-Forget.

My beautiful old coverlet of simple faith (a priceless heritage left by St. Patrick himself) I renovate by dipping in a solution of remembered blessings, and if any rents have come in it during the year I neatly draw them together with the good, strong thread of unbreakable trust.

I next hang gay curtains of tolerance in all my windows, so as to keep out the harsh light of catty criticism; and when that task is done I fashion a new shade of rosy optimism for my 'lamps,' for the old one was torn to shreds during the past twelve months by the rough, relentless fingers of stern old Hard Times.

If you girls will follow my schedule, and then complete your Christmas cleaning by placing here and there great colourful bowls of delicate thought, glowing contentment and fragrant charity, I know that you yourselves will be as delighted with the result as those around you.<sup>338</sup>

The conceptual conflation of women and the interior is epitomised in this piece of advice. Women's mental state can be improved or made-over by a simple few steps. To make the advice comprehensible for the female readers Lee puts the advice in terms of cleaning activities. Women under the ideology of separate spheres were seen as emotional creatures. There is the assumption that women were unhappy with their lives and any fantasies beyond the domestic sphere were to be dispelled. She should have also had a strong religious faith. Her character was expected to be tolerant, optimistic and resilient. 'I next hang my curtains of tolerance in all my windows, so as to keep out the harsh light of catty criticism', this could be interpreted as a defence mechanism from the modern women or suffrage movement. It could also be a defence mechanism from criticism from peers on the appearance of their home and personal appearance. Arguably it was very much how Catholic women were supposed to behave. By hanging the curtains in all windows she was not allowing any ulterior motives taint her domestic sphere and her role and character within that sphere. Lee ends the piece with further instruction for recommended women's behaviour; she was to be delicate in her thought, glow with contentment and expel charity. Not only was she to behave this way, she was expected to portray it all through her home. The home and the woman were unison under the ideology of separate spheres.

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<sup>338</sup> *Our Girls*, December 1930.

## Fashion in the Home

The home could be decorated like a woman would accessorize; delicately, elegantly or prettily. Gordon observed the commonalities between women's dress and home furniture. For example, legs of tables were covered with 'skirts' like women covered their own legs, 'dust ruffles' were attached to beds, chairs and women's skirts, 'bolsters' were attached to women's derrieres in the 1880s like they were attached to sofas. Items such as scarves, veils and shawls were commonly used around the home as used for clothing<sup>339</sup>.



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The above photographs, obtained from the National Library of Ireland, portray the femininity of interior design and fashion. Although the home was part of the De La Poer dynasty<sup>342</sup> and home to the Earl of Tyrone<sup>343</sup>, an elitist family, one can see the detail and similarities as argued by Gordon. In the drawing-room on the left the windows were decorated with curtains. The pelmet above the window resembles a skirt. There is a panel with an overtly feminine floral design. On the sofa sits a cushion that resembles a 'bolster'. In the living-room 'dust ruffles' were attached to the chairs and sofa and appear like skirts. Fine china plates were dotted on the walls like accessories. Women were dressing the home as if they would dress themselves. This supports the notion that the home was seen as an extension of the woman's corporeal self. How women dressed the home represented her personally and if her home was decorated inappropriately it was a reflection on her.

Gordon wrote: 'Significantly, much of the rhetoric about what was appropriate included biological imagery and references. "Good taste," which was consistently presented as an issue of particular concern to women rather than men, is itself a biological survival; if a substance tastes good it is usually nourishing and safe to eat. If a woman *had* good taste, then,

<sup>339</sup> Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p289.

<sup>340</sup> Photograph of the drawing-room in Curraghmore House, Portlaw, Co. Waterford. Taken between 1900 and 1910. Photographs obtained from the NLI.

(<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Search/Results?lookfor=Interior+decoration&type=AllFields&filter%5B%5D=format%3A%22Photo%22&filter%5B%5D=digitised%3A%22Digitised%22&view=grid>) (21/10/12).

<sup>341</sup> Photograph of the living-room again in Curraghmore House, Portlaw, Co. Waterford. Taken between 1900 and 1910. Also taken from the NLI as above.

<sup>342</sup> See 'Curraghmore House' (<http://www.curraghmorehouse.ie/history.html>) (21/10/12).

<sup>343</sup> See 'The Census of Ireland 1911'

(<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Waterford/Portlaw/Curraghmore/1768292/>) (21/10/12).

she effectively provided a kind of nourishment and sustenance.’<sup>344</sup> Depending on women’s sense of ‘taste’, ‘taste’ being class specific, she provided much more than aesthetic value. According to Gordon she provided ‘nourishment and sustenance’ which are essential to survival. This may have been problematic for the Catholic middle class women who were only learning the ways. They were not preconditioned to apply good taste. Women’s ability to apply fashion, the norms of behaviour in terms of dress and furnishings, was perceived as an intrinsic biological function. If fashion was adopted correctly it served immensely. If she got it right she had ‘good taste’ and if she was got it wrong she had ‘bad taste’. To concur with Gordon’s observation of biological imagery and references, one often hears phrases used in Irish society such as ‘tired furniture’, ‘weak linen’ or ‘stubborn stains’. These are all examples of biological references used to describe inanimate objects. Vice versa, the body could be referred to as a machine or a temple<sup>345</sup>. Interiors like women could get makeovers. All these phrases infused the woman’s body and home together.

A woman’s taste also reflected her class as taste is perspective driven. For what the Catholic middle class may describe as good taste may be described as vulgar by the Anglo-Irish. During the period of the cultural revival Yeats and George Russell, for example, denounced the Catholic middle classes as devoid of culture and taste unlike the Anglo-Irish. In reality the issue was that the cultural values of the Catholic middle classes were different to those of the Anglo-Irish. No matter how much money you spent on something it does not make you fashionable according to an article in *The Freeman’s Journal* in 1900, ‘innate good teaching’ overcomes ‘teaching’, ‘Clothes are just the same as people- money does not make a smart garment. How often do we see an expensive dress, literally smelling of money, and yet “all wrong”’.<sup>346</sup> The article began questioning whether 1900 would bring different styles of clothing to them and not just copies of what their ancestors wore. While the writer acknowledged that the advertising of new fashions was imperative, she believed knowing how to wear them was more imperative<sup>347</sup>. This may relate to the Catholic middle classes who found themselves rising up the social scale with money but with no intrinsic know-how of how to behave with money. Educator Grace Starbird wrote in 1910, ‘Every woman is a living example of good or bad taste as is shown by her dress and her immediate surroundings’<sup>348</sup>. The intrinsic sense of taste was evident in her appearance and her home’s appearance.

Gordon notes the change in fashion which occurred by the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>349</sup> This change was evident in both women’s clothing and the interior of the home. The change was a sense of relaxing or softness as evident in the photographs below:

<sup>344</sup> Gordon, ‘Woman’s Domestic Body’, p287.

<sup>345</sup> Gordon, ‘Woman’s Domestic Body’, p287.

<sup>346</sup> *The Freeman’s Journal*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1900.

<sup>347</sup> ‘Latest Fashions’, *The Freeman’s Journal*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1900.

<sup>348</sup> Gordon, ‘Woman’s Domestic Body’, p287.

<sup>349</sup> Gordon, ‘Woman’s Domestic Body’, p297-298.

**P. & S. CORONA CORSETS.**

**DESIGNED FOR IRISH NEEDS.**



The difficulty of wearing clothes aright is solved in a moment by the P. & S. Corona Corset. This Corset has been designed and chosen to meet the needs of the Irish figure—indeed Irish ladies have been provided with an article which is at once anatomically perfect and perfectly fashionable. It adds greatly to one's natural elegance, it comes down all imperfections of contour, it gives ease and gentle repression; every lady who wears a P. & S. Corona Model will be charmed and delighted with the wonderful sense of true fitting and elastic support which it ensures. The P. & S. Corona Corset is rustless, for the simple reason that it is supported with that wonderful stiffening material, Rustless Zairoid, which can only be obtained in P. & S. productions. It is made at prices which will render it purchasable by the slenderest of purses. P. & S. Corona, in all shapes, is pleasing in appearance and very durable in wear.

NOTE FOR THE RETAIL TRADE:  
THREE GOODS HAVE BEEN

**SPECIALLY MADE FOR THE IRISH MARKET,**  
AND ARE OBTAINABLE ONLY FROM

**Messrs. DWYER & CO., CORK.**

350

**"OKTIS."**

Some articles have to be pushed into favour, others steal into a position of public approval because of their merit.

The Oktis has won its present proud position in Ireland (as in the rest of the British Empire, and indeed, all over the civilised world), because once a woman has worn it she finds it impossible to be without it.

Why?

Simply because "it doubles the life of your Corsets, solves all Corset difficulties, does away with the breaking of Corset steels, gives you additional support, added elegance and greater comfort."

And it is quite inexpensive.

These are not little things to any of the Oktis. They are very important indeed. To a woman they are all-essential.

Well, then, buy the Oktis. You will enjoy the New Year better if your greatest dress difficulty is done away with.

**EVERY DRAPER SELLS  
THE "OKTIS."**



In fashion this change was seen in women's underwear. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the 'health corset' emerged. It was less tight and relieved pressure on the internal organs and abdomen. This change is linked with the change in silhouette discussed in the previous chapter. This was at a time when women were more active in the public sphere in the workforce and between the various political organisations. The adverts above were regulars in *The Lady of the House* and promised to meet the needs of the Irish woman insinuating practicality and functionality. Some women wore separate bust and hip corsets instead of the one piece.<sup>352</sup> Corset reform was a topical subject in Ireland in the early twentieth century. *The Lady of the House* magazine asks the question 'Are Corsets Injurious?' in its 15<sup>th</sup> April 1910 edition. 'Yes. Corsets are indeed injurious, and their wearers have no right to expect sympathy if they suffer in health and constitution from the effects of such an abominably barbaric form of fashionable torture', was one answer. The article goes on to say 'But since those days a revolution has taken place in the way we women corset ourselves. The fond eye of the modern male no longer needs the wasp waist to attract him'. The article also writes that 'fashion no longer requires artificial aid to create body contour. However, corsets have also revolutionised and are less restrictive while still supporting the organs, spine and creating contour'.<sup>353</sup> In synchronisation with women's undergarments, in terms of the interior of the home, upholstery became softer and excess cushions became a trend. In essence, there was a sense of relaxation, comfort and relief among fashion. Colour patterns became more adventurous with the emergence of whites and pastels and the decline of burgundies, blacks and browns. Lace was used in its abundance in women's clothing and in the home as the following advertisements show:

<sup>350</sup> *The Lady of the House*, January 1911.

<sup>351</sup> *The Lady of the House*, January 1911.

<sup>352</sup> Anne Haverty, *Elegant Times: a Dublin Story*, (Dublin, 1995) p52.

<sup>353</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1910.

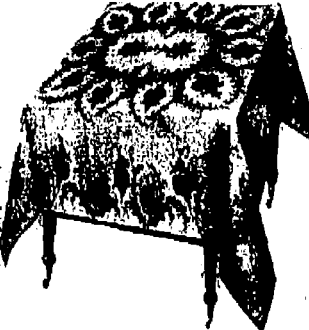


BY SPECIAL APPOINTMENT TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN


# MURPHY & ORR,

## IRISH LINEN, DAMASK, and LACE HOUSE.

OUR CELEBRATED DAMASK TABLE LINEN HAS HELD AN UNRIVALLED POSITION FOR ALMOST A CENTURY, AND TO-DAY IS IN GREATER DEMAND THAN EVER. May we send you our Price List and Sample Book for comparison.



OUR LINEN, DAMASK, AND LACE ARE KNOWN AND PRIZED ALL OVER THE WORLD FOR THEIR STEERING QUALITY.



No. 100. Five Double Damask. Lovely Rose and Shamrock Design. Chain, 12 x 12 yds. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5. For other sizes in stock (including designs as made, see our Price List No. 1, which also shows many other designs. Write for a free copy.

No. 101. Irish Linen. 12 x 12 yds. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5. For other sizes in stock (including designs as made, see our Price List No. 1, which also shows many other designs. Write for a free copy.

**PURE LEXEN CAMBRIC RUFFS.**  
Linen. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5. For other sizes in stock (including designs as made, see our Price List No. 1, which also shows many other designs. Write for a free copy.

**WEDDING PRESENTS, etc.**  
Linen. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5. For other sizes in stock (including designs as made, see our Price List No. 1, which also shows many other designs. Write for a free copy.


**WEDDING LINEN OUTFITS OUR SPECIALITY.**  
Linen. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5; 12 yds. 184/5. For other sizes in stock (including designs as made, see our Price List No. 1, which also shows many other designs. Write for a free copy.

**PRICE LISTS AND SAMPLES SENT POST FREE ON APPLICATION.**

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The Oldest Establishment for LINEN in the North of Ireland.

Write today for Price List and Sample for comparison.




# OPALINE

In all the Newest Colors for Linings, Skirts, Blouses, Curtains, etc., etc.

Its radiant sheen surpasses Silk, yet at 1/2 the cost, so why use anything else?

To be obtained of all leading drapers.

Stamped "Opaline" B.D.A. on every two yards of Selvedge.



Lace was used for dresses, skirts, table-cloths, handkerchiefs, collars and curtains among others. The home was dressed similar to how the women would be. There was an emphasis on Irish lace making at the end of the nineteenth century. Philanthropists encouraged lace making as an industry amongst poorer women. Lady Aberdeen was one of these philanthropists and working in conjunction with the Congested Districts Board bought the Lace Depot, Grafton Street, Dublin:

<sup>354</sup> The Lady of the House, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1911.

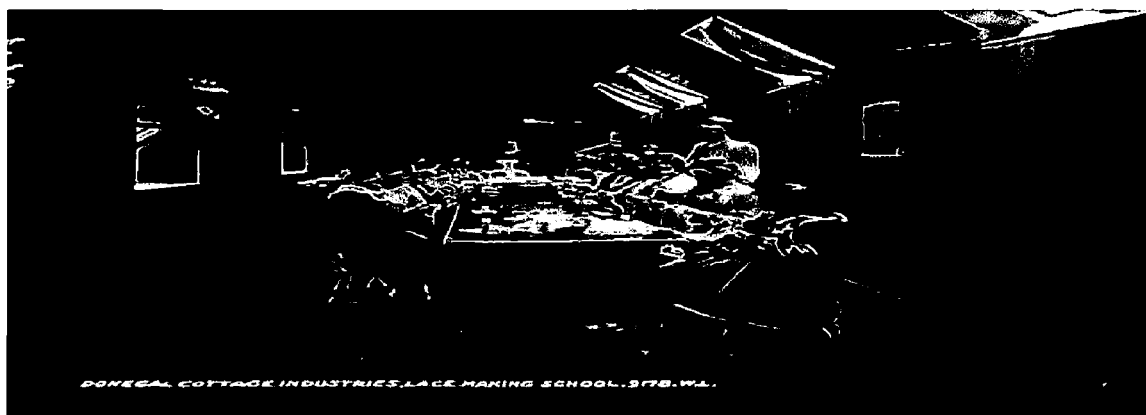
<sup>355</sup> The Lady of the House, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1911.





Interior of Irish Lace Depot, 76 Grafton Street, under the patronage of Lady Aberdeen, about 1900, from Lord and Lady Aberdeen, *We Two*, Glasgow, 1925.

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DONEGAL COTTAGE INDUSTRIES, LACE MAKING SCHOOL, 1978, W.L.

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Lace today and in early twentieth century Ireland is typically associated with women's lingerie. Gordon writes of lingerie, 'Because these were personal garments that were most closely in touch with the woman's body, it is also reasonable to assert that hanging lace curtains in the window signalled a subtle but symbolically important identification between the home and body'.<sup>358</sup> This could be viewed as women marking their territory on the home. Lingerie was the closest item to their bodies and items almost replicating lingerie also hung in their windows for all to admire. This showcases the closeness of the relationship between woman and her home. The fabric that women kept close to their bodies they used to decorate their home. Women shared their intimacy with lingerie with their homes and relayed this visually to the public sphere.

Gordon suggests the use of lace for window decoration and curtains '...reflected the greater permeability that existed between the "outside world" and the home at the turn of the century'.<sup>359</sup> In Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century, the boundary that existed between the public sphere and the domestic sphere was subsiding gradually as a result of greater

<sup>356</sup> Taken from Nellie O. Cléirigh, 'Limerick Lace', *The GPA Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, (1998), p110.

<sup>357</sup> 'Donegal Cottage Industries', ca. 1880-1900, (<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000044088>) (21/10/12).

<sup>358</sup> Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p298.

<sup>359</sup> Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p298.

opportunities available to women in the public sphere<sup>360</sup>. Curtains allowed the woman to look into the public sphere and allowed the public sphere to look in at the domestic sphere. Separation and isolation of spheres was becoming less severe and this would remain the case up until 1922 when legislation attempted to place women back in the private sphere. Women were loosening the reigns that attached them to the home. A letter from a curiously named 'Mrs. Saucer' in the *Irish Independent* describes what 'she' believes men want in a woman but cannot get anymore:

From my own experience and the noise I hear men make about women's outlay, I am coming to the conclusion that man wants a kind of woman who can confine herself to his house, keep it clean, comfortable, and cosey [sic] for his special benefit; keep his flannels and linens spotless, his suits well brushed, his hats and caps and studs to hand as wanted ; who can meet him with a glad smile when he comes home 'tight' occasionally who never scolds, never frowns, and never, never contradicts, who never annoys him with her worries, but who never sympathises with his. And along with all, who never torments him about the everlasting £.s.d. Such a woman would not bother about fashion. She would not have time, not taste, nor funds, poor thing. But alas! I fear that perfect creature, man, must wait until he crosses the border to meet with such as she. For her type die young. They are too good for this world.<sup>361</sup>

The tradition of this type of woman was still stuck in the mind-set of people; a woman with no property, identity or needs. It was not so long ago to forget those women who carried out the above duties and the majority of women still carried out that role. They were just getting smaller in numbers.

The twentieth century brought about a reform in the psyche of the person. Individuality was the focus in fashion, both clothing and interior design. Gordon states, 'In the first half of the twentieth century the phenomenon of women matching their houses took a somewhat different turn, one that was less moralistic but no less insidious. The theatricality of the bazaar was brought into the private domestic space, for, reflecting the psychological orientation of the modern age, the new decorating concern was not with inner character but with "personality"'.<sup>362</sup> Women were still conflated with the home but in a more individualistic way that reflected the modern age. Personality was the emphasis which was to be portrayed through the home to make it appealing and comfortable. The psychological trend and emphasis on the 'person' was universal and was the result of a calculated marketing restructure originated in the US. Desire replaced necessity and the consumer replaced the citizen. This shift was reflected in the new culture of shopping in Ireland in the early twentieth century which will be discussed shortly. The shift in mentality from citizen to consumer began in the USA. Edward Bernays, nephew to Sigmund Freud, brought psychological theory to appeal to the public. He examined the subconscious irrational

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<sup>360</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century women were engaging in public organisations such as the Dublin's Women's Suffrage Association, The Gaelic League and Inghinidhe na hÉireann. In the 1880s they displayed their competency in the Ladies Land League. Women were also engaging in political roles such as Poor Law Guardians. The Local Government Act of 1898 allowed women to be elected to urban and rural district councils and town commissions.

<sup>361</sup> *The Irish Independent*, 16 August 1905.

<sup>362</sup> Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p299.

emotions of the public and used his findings to alter their buying behaviour. In the early 1920s, New York banks funded the establishment of chains of department stores. The buying pattern among the people needed to change from necessity to desire. Bernays was brought in to change and direct the citizen to 'consumer'. He endorsed celebrities to promote the idea that people should buy to express their inner self and personality to others. Mrs. Stillman, celebrity aviator, was filmed in the 1920s saying: 'There's a psychology of dress, have you ever thought about it? How it can express your character. We all have interesting characters but some of them are all hidden...try and express yourself better in dress. Bring out certain things that you think are hidden.'<sup>363</sup> The citizen transformed to a consumer.

### **The Modernisation of Shopping**

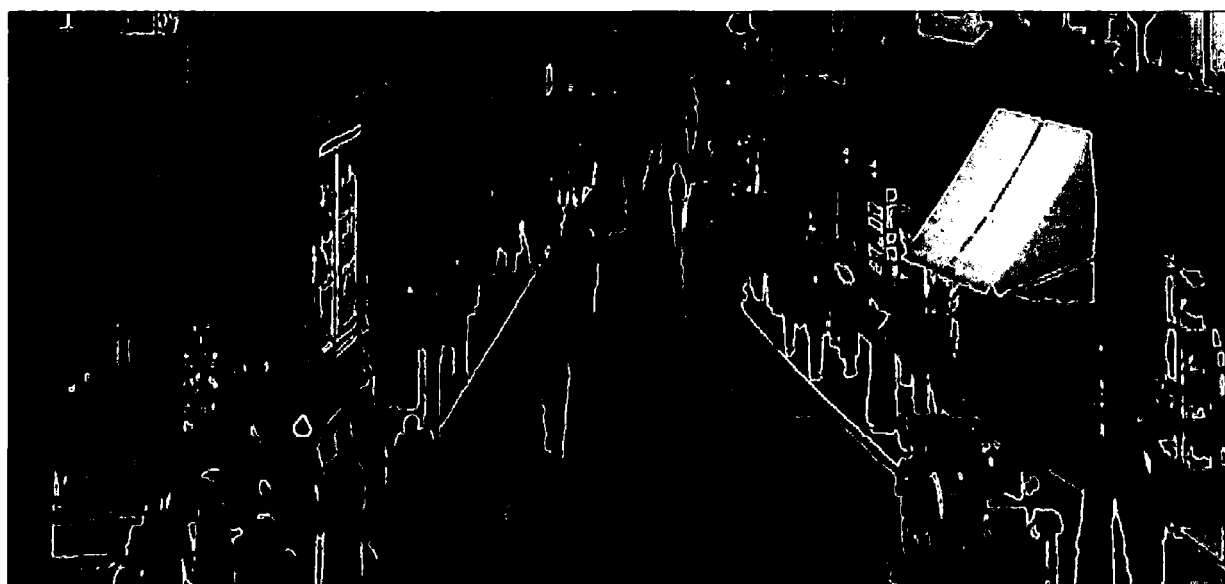
Grafton Street became Dublin's fashion hub in the early 1800s. Previously, it had been the Liberties, south inner-city Dublin, until the power weaving-loom was invented and mass production of fabric came about in 1815. The workers of the Liberties found themselves out of jobs and the area fell into poverty and desolation.<sup>364</sup> Grafton Street was central and easily accessible for the residents of Stephen's Green, Merrion Square, Leeson street and surrounding areas. Businesses and shops invaded this central affluent, previously residential, street. Grafton Street as a modern, fashion hub was born and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it would be known as the Bond Street of Dublin.<sup>365</sup> The construction and success of Grafton Street will now be discussed with particular attention given to Switzers, Brown Thomas and Woolworths. Modernisation was paramount in the success of a new way of shopping. This new way of shopping was instigated by the establishment of the contemporary department store. Below is an image of Grafton Street in the 1910s:

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<sup>363</sup> Adam Curtis, *The Century of the Self*, BBC Documentary (United Kingdom, 2002).

<sup>364</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p11.

<sup>365</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p11.



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In 1838, John Wright Switzer of German descent but hailing from Tipperary opened a Woollen Drapers store on no. 91 Grafton Street that sold men's clothes. He was previously, in his teenage years, a humble trader in the Liberties. The store was a major success and Switzer became a very wealthy man. A decade later in 1848, no. 16 Grafton Street was bought by Hugh Brown. No. 16 became a haberdashery store and was located almost straight across from the Woollen Drapers. The following year, 1849, Hugh Brown bought no. 17 but with a friend James Thomas. This store was to be a general draper and haberdasher. Brown and Thomas expanded their business a few years later and bought no. 15. Brown, Thomas and Co., now occupied 15-17 Grafton Street.<sup>367</sup> They immediately set about refurbishing the store and replaced the dated Georgian façade with a modern Victorian style. The store revised its service and upgraded its services to Silk Mercers, Linendrapers, Harberdashers and Milliners.<sup>368</sup> There were many stores on Grafton Street all specified to a particular ware. There were milliners, watch and clock makers, jewellers, bookshops, confectioners and cigar-divans but Brown, Thomas and Co., was expanding and modernising before the rest. It became a department store. In healthy competition, Switzers also refurbished and expanded its premises. The retail industry on Grafton Street was evidently thriving. In 1890, Switzer formed a public company and his establishments became known as Switzer & Co.<sup>369</sup> Hugh Brown died in 1882 and John Switzer in 1891. Switzer left a very handsome sum of over £20,000. Brown on the other hand, left an enormous amount of £116,000.<sup>370</sup> Brown Thomas had the reputation of being a prestigious store and its patronage included professional classes, mercantile and business classes and of course the rising catholic middle-class. The store sold the most elegant and quality goods. Brown Thomas was a department store that targeted the more affluent middle and upper classes, residents of areas like Clontarf or Rathmines and with heads of household holding jobs like engineers, solicitors or stock brokers. By the

<sup>366</sup> Woolworths Museum ( <http://www.woolworthsmuseum.co.uk/1910s-PioneerStores.html>) (18<sup>th</sup> August 2012).

<sup>367</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, pp14-19.

<sup>368</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, pp24-25.

<sup>369</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p27.

<sup>370</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p27.

1890s, as Haverty wrote 'the heyday of the department store was at hand'. What facilitated the 'consumer culture represented by the city centre department stores' was, as Stephanie Rains discusses, the consolidation of the transport network in Dublin with the establishment of the Dublin United Tramways Company in 1878. Moreover, as Rains notes James Fitzgerald Lombard, one of the owners of the new Company, was already a director of Arnott & Co, while the other own, his son-in-law, William Martin Murphy would become a department store owner in 1883. Rains notes how the establishment of the Dublin United Tramways Company 'completed a nexus essential to the ongoing development of commodity culture in the city: suburbanisation, transport links into the city centre and large-scale retailing formations selling goods aimed primarily at the residents of those suburban houses'.<sup>371</sup>

Department stores supplied the Irish consumer, of all classes, with the material goods to fulfil their desires. Irene Brin, writer and journalist, wrote from the 1930s of the department store: '...the department stores where at least in appearance you can find everything you need to live (and even to die, as the bigger stores also sold coffins, wreaths and any other funeral accessory) satisfied the noisy sudden and infantile tastes of a generation that believed in mass-produced products, in neurasthenia and in the idea of a fixed price.'<sup>372</sup> Brin appears sceptical of the department store. She believes only on appearance does the department store supply everything you need to live where in actual fact you need more that you are being offered. She believed you need the personal interaction with a salesperson and you need the individual experience of visiting a store rather than the isolation of browsing a store and helping yourself. The 'noisy and sudden infantile tastes of a generation that believed in mass-produced products' could, in the Irish context, describe the rising Catholic middle classes in Ireland. They were a group growing in numbers with inexperienced taste. Department stores brought fashion to the wider population. Department stores brought a sense of fantasy to women. They proved to them there was more to be had. They brought what women saw on cinema screens to hand. They provided up to date fashions of the latest trends. Department stores fed the desires of the growing consumer population.

As discussed earlier, the Catholic middle-classes were emerging and growing in numbers during this progressive time. Post-famine Ireland proved to be a prosperous time for Ireland. There was more money in the country and a demand for goods was manifesting a society of mass-consumption. Haverty wrote, 'Ostentation and appropriateness in dress for a whole new variety of purposes and social occasions were becoming imperative for the fashionable woman and man. The industrial revolution created a new type of consumer, the newly-rich manufacturer who revelled in his possessions and wealth and expected his wife and daughters to sumptuously display it in their dress and accoutrements.'<sup>373</sup> A man's wife reflected his success and status. In Mrs. Beeton's fictional story Mary describes a neighbour Mr. Jones, 'Mr Jones does very well as the London agent for a Sheffield cutlery company,

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<sup>371</sup> Stephanie Rains, *Commodity Culture and Social Class in Dublin 1850-1916* (Dublin, 2010), p88.

<sup>372</sup> As quoted by Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, p121.

<sup>373</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p20.

and Mrs. Jones signals this success wearing his fortune on her back'.<sup>374</sup> A man's wealth was also reflected through his home. Both a man's wife and his home reflected his life. He used his wife and home as an extension of himself. It could be suggested that allowing women such a role in the home empowered them within a certain sphere.

How people shopped for groceries, clothing and wares changed in Ireland in the early twentieth century. This change was a shift in buying behaviour. It went from a sense of need to a sense of desire. On Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1914 Woolworth's department store was opened in Dublin. With this the whole shopping experience was transformed and extended to all classes of Irish society. Department stores such as Brown Thomas and Switzers, as mentioned, previously existed in Ireland. There was also Arnotts founded in 1845 and Clerys founded in 1853, but they were the conservative, traditional style of shop where all shops had a similar arrangement and presentation.<sup>375</sup>



In a traditional shop, a long counter would meet a customer when they entered; all the goods were kept discreetly behind the counter or in drawers and the customer asked for what they needed. Each store was customised to a particular ware. There would have been different stores for home-ware, cosmetics, women's dress, men's dress and so forth. Lower class people would not enter the big fashion houses or high-end stores. This may have been due to the necessary interaction with a sales assistant and feelings of inadequacy.

<sup>374</sup> Hughes, *The Short Life*, p234.

<sup>375</sup> Barbara Walsh, *When the Shopping was Good: Woolworths and the Irish Main Street*, (Dublin, 2011) p1.

<sup>376</sup> 'Tempest's shop interior, Co. Louth, ca.1900-1910, (<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Search/Results?lookfor=%22+Glass+negatives%22&type=Subject&page=2&view=grid>) (21/10/12).

In 1914, a new way of shopping came to Ireland in the form of the accessible and affordable department store, Woolworths. The founder of Woolworths was an American called Frank Winfield Woolworth and his concept for the store was 'an everyday store for everyone'.<sup>377</sup> The success of Woolworths was obvious in its expansion. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1914 it opened its doors on 66-68 Grafton Street with a thirty year lease. Two years later Woolworths acquired a lease on 65 Grafton Street. On the 6 November a second Irish store was opened in Belfast. Two more Dublin stores were to open and on the 17 August 1918 Woolworth's third store opened on Henry Street. Some decades later a fourth store was opened on Thomas Street.<sup>378</sup> Woolworth's methods of attracting all classes of society worked and evidently, Woolworth thrived. When speaking of Woolworths Barbara Walsh wrote, 'The image they aimed to present was one of serving an upwardly mobile clientele; shoppers who desired 'nice' things at reasonable prices, who were keen to better themselves, their homes and their lifestyles but had little or no surplus income to spend on "luxuries"'.<sup>379</sup> In Ireland there were a large number of upwardly mobile people, the Catholic middle classes. People were attracted to this image as presented by Woolworths as everyone would aspire for nicer and better things. It was a natural attraction. These little luxuries presented by Woolworths would make people feel better about themselves. Woolworth's aim was to create a store which appealed to everyone

Woolworths had large spaces where their large range of goods were displayed. This meant a number of things; people could browse and access items they could not afford, fashionable items of clothing were accessible to the lower classes, people could do their entire shopping under one roof and people could admire items they did not necessarily need and by doing so a desire for that item manifested. Impulse buying would also occur. They could also do all this without any interaction with a salesperson. People were free to browse and admire with no pressure to buy.

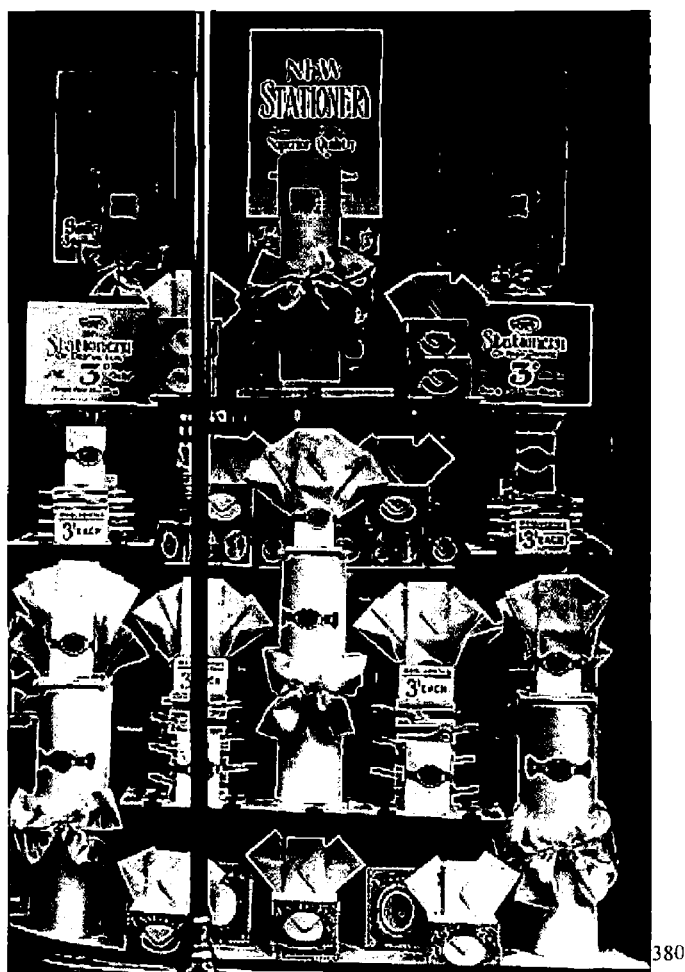
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<sup>377</sup> Walsh, *When the Shopping was Good*, p4.

<sup>378</sup> Walsh, *When the Shopping was Good*, pp6-8.

<sup>379</sup> Walsh, *When the Shopping was Good*, p4.





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Walsh describes the way in which Woolworths was successful in luring all classes of society into the store; from the eye-catching window displays and boasting ‘Nothing in these stores over 6d’ to the distinctive and legendary Woolworths smell.<sup>381</sup> If the upper classes did not shop in Woolworths their children at least would have been encapsulated by the window displays and temptation of toys and sweets which were so accessible. See the cartoon image below taken from ‘The Woolworths Museum’ website:

<sup>380</sup> This is an example of a window display of luxury writing stationery which appeared in Woolworths stores across the British stores in the 1930s. Irish stores would have displayed similar displays. Woolworths Museum (<http://www.woolworthsmuseum.co.uk/stat-openers.html>) (8<sup>th</sup> August 2012).

<sup>381</sup> Walsh, *When the Shopping was Good*, pp4-6.



One can imagine any group of children huddling up outside the windows of Woolworths. Upper-class children accompanying their parents on a day out on Grafton Street would have been no different. The upper middle classes with more spending power would have been more interested in imitating the example provided by aristocracy than engaging in the popular culture of mass-produced products.<sup>383</sup>

The establishment of a simple department store brought with it many social ramifications. Woolworths provided a space for different classes to intermingle. It also provided a space for lower-classes to try some luxury. Woolworths also brought many job opportunities for men and women. These new roles allowed for women to get involved in the public sphere. Woolworths in England was appointing women to roles such as ‘manageress’. This was a result of World War I and England’s depleted male workforce. Ten posts for ‘manageresses’ were created between 1916 and 1924. It was to take another forty years before an Irish woman was to be officially promoted ‘manageress’ although when required Irish women did carry out manager duties. Woolworths did however provide jobs for many Irish young women as sales assistants at a time when women were traditionally associated with home-based work or farming. The conditions of work were attractive to women as it provided ‘security, companionship, promotion prospects at branch level, if marriage did not end employment, and the unspoken “perk” of being able to meet and exchange pleasantries with local young men across the safety of counters while purchases were being made’.<sup>384</sup>

Woolworths set in motion the wheels of a changing buying behaviour which was to be strengthened by activities in the USA. This new way of shopping fed into women’s desires at a time when they could better themselves through education and work in the public sphere. At a time when cinema, literature and certain aspects of society was telling women there was more to life outside the home. From the 1920s, the European market witnessed the expanding US ready-to-wear industry<sup>385</sup>. This enabled fashions stores to stock up on numerous copies of the same pieces. They bought in bulk and therefore sold to the public for a reasonable price. Lower classes could purchase that special dress for that special occasion. Shopping became a cross-class interest and activity. Brown Thomas began modernising also in the 1920s.

<sup>382</sup> Woolworths Museum (<http://www.woolworthsmuseum.co.uk/1920sgalleryhome.htm>) (18<sup>th</sup> August 2012).

<sup>383</sup> Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, p124.

<sup>384</sup> Walsh, *When the Shopping was Good*, pp82-83.

<sup>385</sup> Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism*, p26.

In the 1920s and 1930s Brown Thomas stores invited consumers to come and spend the day in their store. All their requirements were met there. Women could pass time in the 'Writing room'. Here they could write letters, read or meet friends and chat. A writing room was also a feature of the department store in Zola's novel, *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883). The Ladies Paradise was modelled on the Bon Marché, the first Parisian department store.<sup>386</sup> In Brown Thomas women could attend beauty lectures where they learned how to make the most of their features using the appropriate cosmetics. Children were also entertained with shows and films. Photo shoots were provided for families or individuals wanting to capture a special moment.<sup>387</sup> There was a buzz and a feel good atmosphere which played on the 'desire' feelings of the customer. Brian Nelson in his introduction to Zola's *The Ladies Paradise* writes of the manner in which the founders of the Bon Marché,

realized that, whereas they could make a living from supplying a conscious need on the part of their customers, they could make an infinitely better living by supplying a desire the customer did not know she had until she entered the shop. In this way, the Boucicauts pioneered the idea of the department store as a building purposely designed for fashionable public assembly and which, by the use of display techniques, eye-catching design, and other ploys, replaced the commercial principle of supply with that of consumer seduction.<sup>388</sup>

Haverty writes about how shopping in Ireland in the early twentieth century became a pastime and enjoyable day out. She writes how women were getting out and about more, nobility were joining the rising middle-classes in parading down Grafton Street 'window shopping'. Nelson, indeed, states:

One of the significant features of the department store is that it shows women emerging more and more into the public spaces of the city. It functioned in the same way that the Church had previously done, by providing women with a haven outside the home, in which to sit, think, and find solace. Shopping in the late nineteenth century became a woman's natural way of entering into and occupying the public domain. In that sense the department store represents a transitional social space.<sup>389</sup>

Store windows displayed stock simply for functionality; the display of their goods. It would not be until the twentieth century that store window art would become a trend. Both men and women frequented Grafton Street<sup>390</sup>. Evidence of this is shown in the photographs below obtained from the National Library of Ireland:

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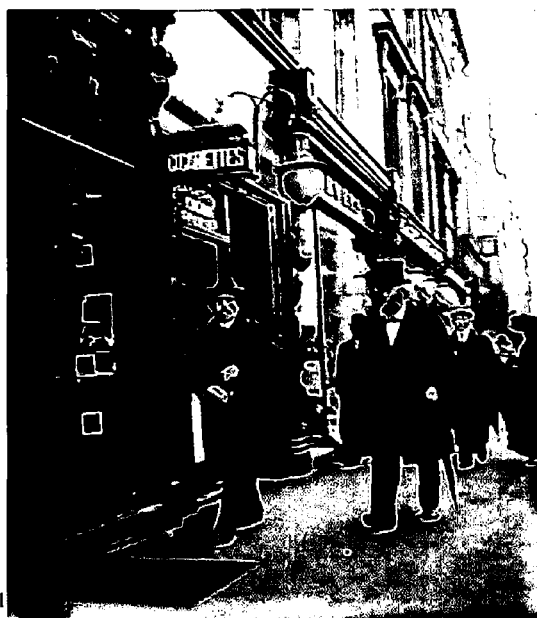
<sup>386</sup> Émile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, (Oxford, 1995), p246.

<sup>387</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p74.

<sup>388</sup> Brian Nelson, 'Introduction' to Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, p. xi.

<sup>389</sup> Nelson, 'Introduction', p. xvii.

<sup>390</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p22.



Shopping became a social activity for the middle and upper classes. Shopping became a big industry and some attempts were made to keep all aspects of shopping Irish.

Irish people in the early twentieth century were encouraged to buy Irish to strengthen the Irish economy, to stimulate trade and to prove self-sufficiency. The cultural revival would have encouraged this policy although it should be noted that the department stores would not have been able to promote this policy exclusively given that they held a vast range of goods for sale. A lengthy letter sent to the *Irish Independent* in 1905 criticises the anti-nationalism of women who didn't buy Irish fabrics:

Sir- I notice with deep regret that nobody in approaching the question of women's dress seems to have looked at it from a national point of view, or considered the loss our land sustains through the foolish following of every fashion which reaches us from across the Channel. Perhaps it is hopeless and useless in a cosmopolitan era to urge a return to native costume; but surely if foreign fashions must be followed there is no reason why, at least, native fabrics should not be adapted to the purpose, instead of English imitations of French materials. Money, which is so badly needed in Ireland, is sent out of the country in tens of thousands of pounds by thoughtless, de-nationalised Irishwomen for linen and woollen goods which are quite easily obtainable of Irish make if Irishwomen but insisted on being supplied with them.<sup>393</sup>

The letter goes on to suggest that the remedy is the publication of a woman's newspaper that would educate women on Irish made goods and to inform them where to get them, both clothing and home furnishings. Brown Thomas, according to Haverty, was commended for its practice of using Irish linen and lace to construct gowns in the latest Parisian trends.

<sup>391</sup> 'Two women walking past jewellers, Grafton Street. Full length view of two women, both wearing hats, one wearing fur collar, walking outside Nos. 94 & 95 Grafton Street, Edmond Johnson Limited Jewellers ([http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/CLAR\\_009](http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/CLAR_009)) (21/10/12).

<sup>392</sup> 'Men walking outside cigar shop on Grafton Street'. ([http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/CLAR\\_008](http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/CLAR_008)) (21/10/12).

<sup>393</sup> *Irish Independent*, 31 July 1905, p6.

Brown Thomas was keen to promote Irish goods.<sup>394</sup> This was a running theme throughout early twentieth century Ireland. 'In these days of stress, when economy in domestic as well in national affairs is carefully scrutinised, the article of native manufactured dress should receive extensive patronage',<sup>395</sup> recommended *The Lady of the House* in 1917.

While the links have been shown between changing women's gender roles and changing fashions in both the home and women's clothing it becomes apparent that these changes really only affected classes within society, the middle and upper classes. As Nelson writes:

The pleasures of shopping, though half-illusory, were not available to all women – largely for reasons of class. Whereas for bourgeois women (in Ireland the growing Catholic middle classes) the department store was the equivalent of the arcades, a protected half-way between the home and the street, for working-class women the store was hardly different from the street; whether in the street or in the store.<sup>396</sup>

1910-1937 was a tremendous period of change and modernisation. This modernisation created a lot of debate and discussion in Ireland. This will be the focus of chapter four.

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<sup>394</sup> Haverty, *Elegant Times*, p33.

<sup>395</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1917.

<sup>396</sup> Nelson, 'Introduction', p. xviii.

## Chapter Four

### Changing female roles: the response of the Establishment

This chapter will examine Irish society's response to fashion change, foreign influence, shifting female roles and modernisation in 1910-1937. What becomes apparent is that these factors were, according to the Churches and the government, affecting public morality and public order. The image of the domesticated woman within the home became central to the Free State's desire to establish stability after the revolutionary period. Both establishments followed rigid routines and were slow to change dramatically without public influence. However with such a transitional period for the country and its citizens, these establishments needed to respond quickly and effectively. Public morality was a major concern in Ireland in the early twentieth century. Ireland had a conservative and patriarchal society and fashion change, foreign influence, shifting female roles and modernisation seemed to challenge that. The pillars of the Establishment recorded and broadcasted its concerns through national newspapers and magazines or prescriptive literature. Magazines and prescriptive literature promoting the value of separate spheres were aimed at women and sometimes at the entire family. They conveyed notions of both society's ideal woman within the home and the woman who stood counter to this image. The latter could range from the prostitute to the politically female and even encompassed women who desired to enter the field of employment to the detriment of her family commitments. Women were often divided into categories of good and bad. This prescriptive literature will be examined later in the chapter. Changing modes of dress and societal concerns at such can be captured in their rawest form through prescriptive literature. Society's response to change can be gauged through Church and State response.

### Church Response

Irish society in early twentieth century Ireland was heavily influenced by the Catholic Church. Therefore an examination of the Church's response will indicate what was passed on to society. Sources utilised to gauge these responses were *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*<sup>397</sup> and *The Irish Monthly*.<sup>398</sup>

Public morality, as previously mentioned was a main concern of society. The monthly journal, *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, May 1926, records the bishop's concerns of public morality. It conveys the belief that the source of danger in the context of women was fashion change:

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<sup>397</sup> *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* was founded in 1864 by Cardinal Paul Cullen. Topics included were theology, Church affairs, philosophy, liturgy, international issues and social and economic issues in Ireland.

<sup>398</sup> *The Irish Monthly* was a Catholic magazine founded in 1873 by Rev. Matthew Russell. Topics included literature, social and economic issues in Ireland and religion. It ceased publishing in 1954. It was in print for eighty one years at a time when the average Irish magazine had a life span of only five years.

It is appropriate that in the month of May, when the hearts of all Catholics are turned to their Blessed Mother, we should be asked to pray for a widespread revival among women and girls of that Christian modesty of which Mary is the model. It is only too evident that such a revival is badly needed. There has been in recent years a deplorable lowering of the standard of morality all over the world, and with it has come a laxity in that maidenly decorum in dress and in conduct which is the greatest safeguard of female virtue.<sup>399</sup>

The editorial argued that morality was declining in standard all over the world. They called for women to model themselves once again on the modesty of the Blessed Virgin Mary. According to this article the decline in female morality was only a recent occurrence. This editorial suggests that with that decline in female morality came inferior standards of dress and behaviour. It suggests a vicious circle was created. According to the bishops, with the appalling lower moral standard came bad fashion and behaviour which in turn led to a further decline in standards of morality. Female virtue was also made vulnerable by changing fashion and lowered standards of morality. The editorial continues to proclaim their moral concerns:

It cannot be denied that, bowing before the tyranny of modern day fashions, women and girls in our towns and cities frequently dress in a way that is calculated to arouse the basest passions, and it is against this that we wish to protest. The prevailing scantiness of attire, which barely conforms to the laws of decency, is a moral danger to the wearer, whose self-respect must necessarily be weakened by it, and to the beholder, and a very grave responsibility rests on those who put themselves and others into such dangerous occasions of sin... A halt must be called if moral ruin is not to become widespread in the land.<sup>400</sup>

The belief was that women were weak in choosing to dress in a modern fashion. There is also the suggestion that women and girls dressed that way purposely to 'arouse the basest passions'; those of a sexual nature. The article affirms that their concerns for women's fashions are solely moral concerns. Their concern is for the individual and society. They believed modern women's fashion threatened the self-respect of the individual who chose to wear it. It also promoted and encouraged the sins of others. Wearing such daring fashion was deemed irresponsible and selfish. There was the notion of women as Eve acting as a temptress to men. This was an old argument. The burden of sexual propriety was placed on women as the new State defined its identity as Catholic and moral after 1922.<sup>401</sup>

The most obvious remedy is that parents should awake to a sense of their duty. They are bound to safeguard the virtue of their children. In their early years they must dress their children in a way that is decent and becoming, and when their daughters have reached the age of choosing their own dresses, they must- mothers having first given the good example- exercise their authority and resolutely forbid anything that is

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<sup>399</sup> 'Editorial', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record: a Monthly Journal under Episcopal Sanction*, Ser.5, xxvii, May 1926.

<sup>400</sup> 'Editorial', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, May 1926.

<sup>401</sup> See Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940*, (Cambridge, 2007) and James Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, (Indiana, 2007).



unbecoming. Let them take their standard: 'Could such a dress be worn with respect at the altar-rails? - and if it could not, then it is their duty to forbid... They cannot allow the young to seek enjoyment that is dangerous, and no matter what weakness they have shown in the past, their responsibility continues and they must awaken to a sense of it before it is too late. On no account should they ever allow their children to frequent dances that are not under reliable supervision.'<sup>402</sup>

The responsibility ultimately lay with the parents according to this article. They were to train and groom their children while they were young to wear decent clothing. Parents were to lead by example. This method would enable the children when of age to make independent decisions to choose the right clothing and by connection to make the correct moral choices. The editorial warns of the dangerous dances. The only accepted ones were those under reliable supervision, that being the clergy.

The following extracts taken from *The Irish Monthly* in 1915 portray the disdain shown to modern women. *The Irish Monthly*, a magazine dedicated to Catholic social and educational thought, was extremely successful in Ireland. Nora Tynan O'Mahony, a Catholic author and story-writer from Dublin who regularly wrote for *The Irish Monthly*, wrote an article called 'The Mother' for *The Irish Monthly* which was printed in May 1913. The article shows little or no hope for the new generation of modern women emerging at that time:

One does not, however, need to be very old nowadays in order to remember a time when men regarded women of all ages and all classes with greater respect, and indeed homage, than is accorded even to the highest and most venerable amongst them to day [sic]. Thoughtful men of old fashioned school will shake their heads sorrowfully and tell you, 'Ah, these foolish creatures are lowering the respect due to women, they are trailing her honour and dignity in the dust.' And the regrettable lack of femininity, of sweet, gracious, dignified womanliness, not only in modern woman's manners but in her dress, all tend to bring her down to a lower level in masculine eyes than she ever sank to before. The mannish cut of the modern woman's scanty garments, the short skirts, the liberal display of the ankle, the often bared throat and neck (even in the street), the jaunty set of her hat jammed down to one side, and completely covering her hair and eyes- it may be convenient and comfortable, but it certainly is not womanly or dignified or nice. Looking at the portraits of present-day fashionable ladies attending race meetings and other outdoor functions as portrayed in the daily illustrated papers, one is struck not only by the mannish style of dress they wear, but by the entirely masculine and (in a woman) ugly stride and attitude adopted by them. One can hardly imagine a lady of this *genre* bending over the bed of sickness, or soothing a fretful child to sleep on her bosom; instead of being a 'ministering angel' of the house, her place, judging from her 'sporting' looks, at least, would seem rather out on the moors with the men and the guns...<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> 'Editorial', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, May 1926.

<sup>403</sup> Nora Tynan O'Mahony, 'The Mother' in *The Irish Monthly*, xliii, no.503 (May 1915), pp329-334.

This article reiterates the notion that the problematic new woman was only a recent manifestation. The article states that you would not have to be very old to remember the respectable woman. Therefore, one can assume this problematic woman, the suffragist, emerged around the turn of the century. 'Masculine eyes' saw the 'new woman' as sinking to an all-time low according to O'Mahony. 'These foolish creatures' refers to the suffrage activists. The article lists the unacceptable fashion displays using words like mannish, scanty, short, liberal and bare. O'Mahony complained of the lack of femininity in how the modern woman conceals her hair and eyes. It may have been convenient and comfortable but womanliness, dignity and niceness should come before that in O'Mahony's opinion. The author, Nora Tynan O' Mahony, seems disgusted with women in society. She viewed them as masculine in manner and appearance and couldn't imagine them capable of tending to their domestic, private sphere duties as nurse, carer and mother. Women were to be the 'ministering angel of the house', that was 'her place'. O'Mahony was of the opinion that those women did not want to be associated with the domestic sphere anymore. She made that judgement by the modern fashion and 'sporting looks' increasingly prevalent in Irish society.

To see women, mothers in particular, making such effort on their own appearance for vanity or fashion reasons was deemed selfish. The woman's personal sense of identity was confused and therefore she was lost in herself, 'The true mother has no thought of self: all her life, all her love, are given to her husband and children, and after them, and because of them, to all and everything that have next most need of her.'<sup>404</sup> She was to devote herself completely to her children and husband. She would act only according to their needs. That was the expectation of women and the new modern woman was not upholding such ideology but rather seeking independence and personal freedom on the contrary. This seemed to anger and frustrate society.

Will 'the vote,' and the privilege of working and fighting side by side, and on equal terms, with their brothers in the great industrial and commercial or political marts of the world, ever make up to women for the loss to them of the love and reverence of men, the affection and the clinging trustful confidence of little children, who regard them as (what indeed God has made them in this world) a tender, loving, unfailing providence in every childish want and trouble?<sup>405</sup>

O'Mahony argued that women were the losers in this situation and were at loss to themselves but there was a loss to the family and consequently society. Women had sacrificed the love and respect of men and the affection and high opinion of their children for equality and 'the vote'. O'Mahony targeted women involved in nationalism, unionism, trade-unionism, the women's movement and suffrage in her question.

Conservative members of society, including politicians and churchmen and women, in in early twentieth century Ireland were very concerned at the influence fashion held over society; its behaviour and morality but Ireland was not alone in its concern. The International Federation of Catholic Women's League held a Congress in Vienna in 1912 which addressed

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<sup>404</sup> O'Mahony, 'The Mother', p531.

<sup>405</sup> O'Mahony, 'The Mother', p531.

the issue of women's dress. A report was prepared for the congress outlining the influence and impact of fashion. 'One cannot read it without realising what an important role fashion plays in our lives, and how many sided is its influence. Unhappily this influence is often an evil one'<sup>406</sup>, wrote Mary Butler writing for *The Irish Monthly* in April 1917. There was an acknowledgement that fashion played an important role in society and influenced many areas. The report deemed this influence to be evil for the most part. The report came to three conclusions about modern fashions: they were often indecent, often injurious to health and almost always extravagant. The challenge to good Christian women was how to combat said fashion. The Congress believed that changing fashion was a conspiracy and a deliberate attack on Christianity:

Among the striking items of information brought to light at the International Congress was the fact that the leading fashion houses in Paris and other great continental cities are almost all in the hands of Jews and Freemasons (Masons, of course, of the Grand Orient-that is to say, of an anti-Christian type). The Delegates did not hesitate to affirm the originators of objectionable modes were trying deliberately to de-christianise [sic] society.<sup>407</sup>

This comment carries strong sectarian connotations. The Congress concluded that the influence of fashion was an attack on their religious institution. Another point raised at the Congress was that for the most part the feminine fashion-makers were men and perhaps this was the reasoning behind such unsuitable attires.

One can imagine what weird masculine fashions would be evolved if women were responsible for them. But men would scarcely bow so abjectly to Fashion's decrees in that case. The meekest of mere men seems to have more independence than the most emancipated of new women when it is a case of Fashion's sway.<sup>408</sup>

There is an air of condescension and belittlement in the above statement. Women in 1917 looked to have a bright future on equal terms with men as promised in the 1916 Proclamation. Yet here they were being described as being inferior to the weakest man over something as trivial as clothing. The view is that women were easily led and weak-willed. This overtone is carried on further in the article. After listing several writers from across Europe who publically appealed to women on economic and ethical grounds to stop reckless spending, the article states:

The political views of those writers range from Conservatism to Socialism, and different schools of religious thought as well as different races are represented by them: but on one point are all agreed – Society is confronted by a serious menace in the fashions of to-day. How strange that intelligent beings should pay so little heed to the

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<sup>406</sup> Mary Butler, 'The Ethics of Dress', *The Irish Monthly*, xlv, no. 526 (April 1917), p220.

<sup>407</sup> Butler, 'The Ethics of Dress', p221.

<sup>408</sup> Butler, 'The Ethics of Dress', p222.

entreaties of great thinkers in Church and State, while they follow blindly some obscure fashion-maker.<sup>409</sup>

There is a sense of 'us and them'. On one side were the erratic women who foolishly endanger society while spending all their money. On the other side were the rational-everyone else. Everyone else was united in opinion crossing racial, religious and political boundaries.

A delegate to the Congress of the International Federation of Catholic Women's Leagues stated, 'Sometimes one sees in the Church pious (!) [sic] young girls who cannot genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament on account of the tightness of their skirts'<sup>410</sup>. This statement would have been made in relation to the 'hobble-skirt' which was a trend in early twentieth century Ireland as discussed in chapter two. The suffragist and political activist Rosamund Jacob recorded in her diary on 19 May 1912 her shock upon visiting her friend Lasairfhiona in Dublin. Jacob, from Waterford, often frequented Dublin but was still shocked at what she witnessed in 1912:

I went to visit Lasairfhiona in the afternoon and spent a good while there, watching people in their best clothes in the street and particularly the hobble skirts getting on the tram. Indeed Lasairfhiona's skirt was as tight as any of them, there didn't look to be more than 2 yards of stuff in it.<sup>411</sup>

The fashion of women in Dublin clearly perplexed Jacob. Jacob could be considered a prude on such matters. This could suggest different standards of fashion or modesty between urban and rural areas. 'Look at a shawled *Cailin* in the Gaeltacht, and compare her to her returned emigrant sister dressed á l'américaine. Which of the two looks the comelier?'<sup>412</sup>, foreign influence is highlighted here. Leeann Lane writes about the influence of emigration in her article 'Female Emigration and the Cooperative Movement in the Writings of George Russell'. Russell recognised that parcels being sent to Ireland by emigrants were influencing the 'fashion' of Irish women. This meant that some women were moving away from locally produced clothing made from local material and of local custom. Russell believed this meant the extension of vulgar bourgeois notions.<sup>413</sup> As Lane quotes Russell, 'the wild picture hat with its abundance of gorgeous blossoms...an atrocity which we wonder Heaven ever permitted to be placed on the head of a farmer's daughter.'<sup>414</sup> A week later Russell asserts, 'The dress of the Irish country girl is getting more and more foolishly unsuitable for her position and work.'<sup>415</sup> Russell referred only to rural women but urban women were also influenced by foreign fashions. This sense of different standards in urban and rural areas is

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<sup>409</sup> Butler, 'The Ethics of Dress', p225.

<sup>410</sup> Butler, 'The Ethics of Dress', p224.

<sup>411</sup> As quoted by Lane in *Rosamond Jacob*, p35.

<sup>412</sup> Butler, 'The Ethics of Dress', pp222-223.

<sup>413</sup> Leeann Lane, 'Female Emigration and the Cooperative Movement in the Writings of George Russell', in *New Hibernia Review*, viii, no.4, (Winter, 2004), p89.

<sup>414</sup> George Russell, 'The Irish Country Girl' in the *Irish Homestead*, 3 March 1906, pp161-2.

<sup>415</sup> Russell, 'The Irish Country Girl', p185.

reiterated in a much later article printed in September 1937 in *The Irish Monthly* written by Brigid Redmond:

A wrong sense of values, derived from highly urbanised, industrialised communities, further tends to the degeneracy of rural life. The possession of fine clothes or of a car to ride to and from cheap cinemas and dances is considered of greater worth than a well-kept garden or dairy. Country girls copy the false standards of their urban sisters, spend the little they have on tawdry, town-made clothes, and, lacking the training which would fit them for their special work and a sense of respect for it and pride in it, are restless and discontented until they find a 'job' in the city, where their labour is usually exploited and underpaid, and where their living conditions are far below those of country life.<sup>416</sup>

According to Redmond, urban values were corrupting those values of rural communities. Dances and cinemas are described as 'cheap' indicating disapproval of such events. Redmond believed that rural girls were working their ruin and destroying their future standard of life by imitating urban girls.

Mary Butler and Mrs O'Nolan writing in *The Irish Monthly* blame egotistical nature and competition between classes on the fashion tendencies appearing. This competition, according to the article, results in misery among families who harbour high debts for such luxuries. They called it 'the curse of extravagance'.<sup>417</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, 'a front' needed to be maintained by the Catholic middle classes for 'necessary impression management'. A philosopher of dress is also mentioned, a man by the name M. Blanc. The article speaks highly of him and gives an outline of his theory:

(1) The epochs in which women dress themselves in wide flowing garments and prefer horizontal lines. (2) The epochs in which the figure of woman presents an excessive predominance of the vertical line. (In other words, clinging garments á la hobble skirt).

He maintains that the first system indicates reasonable tranquil and home-keeping customs; that the horizontal line is the sign of the happy ages when women know how to remain quiet and dignified. On the other hand, he asserts that the vertical line is the characteristic trait of those epochs in which women can no longer remain quietly in one place, in which she must rush feverishly from one distraction to another, and get rid of everything which impedes her restless movements. We are in full swing, nowadays, of the reign of the vertical line, and the general upheaval in the feminine world which accompanied its introduction gives some colour to M. Blanc's theory.<sup>418</sup>

This theory would coincide with the horizontal lines of the Gibson Girl style dress which was voluptuous in silhouette and generous in material. This dress, commonly associated with the Victorian era, is symbolic of when the house was run smoothly by women and they kept quiet in doing so. M. Blanc refers to it as the 'happy age' insinuating that when women maintained

<sup>416</sup> Brigid Redmond, 'Rural Homemakers' in *The Irish Monthly*, lxxv, no.771, (September 1937), p603.

<sup>417</sup> Butler, 'The Ethics of Dress', p224.

<sup>418</sup> Butler, 'The Ethics of Dress', p225.

their traditional role there was universal happiness. Women were dignified in that dress and mode of behaviour. The vertical line theory would coincide with Hobble skirts and the more tailored and masculine style of women's dress. According to Blanc, this is symbolic of the chaotic era that was concerning the majority of society. Women were not remaining 'quietly in one place' referring to the private sphere. They were using their voice and entering the public sphere. Feverishly rushing 'from one distraction to another' may represent the many different movements women were involved in.

The next section quoted shows how the authors attacked and used the psyche of Catholicism, nationality and independence as a means to get their message across. The people of Ireland were very vulnerable to the words 'independence' and 'nationality' only a year after the Easter Rising:

When will Irishwomen show a little independence in their dress, not the independence which aims at eccentricity, but rather the independence which chooses what is seemly and suitable, and boldly rejects what is not...Of late years there has been nothing to distinguish Irishwomen, including devout Catholics, from women of other countries and of no religion, in the extreme bad taste displayed in their dress...in Ireland, demoralisation goes hand in hand with denationalisation.<sup>419</sup>

At a time when a country was fighting for its own nation, identity and independence this was a strong accusation. In other words, the women who donned themselves in such immoral fashions risked the nation.

In respect to women's changing roles in society, the Catholic Church appeared to support their increased visibility in public life consequent of the Local Authorities (Ireland) Act 1898 and the 1911 Act giving Irish women the right to sit on and vote for county councils. The following extract is taken from *The Irish Monthly*, June 1917. It was written by Fr. Lambert McKenna who was editor at the time:

For the past twenty years a fair number of women have been engaged in the public administration of the country, and the results of their influence can, therefore, be judged. Not merely is there a good impression that this influence has been for good, but some officials, Local Government Inspectors and others, who are forced by the nature of their functions to form an opinion on the subject, have given emphatic testimony to their desire to see women taking a still larger part in public administration. They justify this desire by the following reasons:-

(1) Much of the subject matter dealt with by many officials and administrative bodies is more familiar to women than to men. On all subjects connected with housekeeping, domestic hygiene, the relief of the poor, the care of children, the treatment of youthful culprits and vagrants, etc...

(2) Though in dealing with financial matters women have generally less skill than men (whether from want of experience or want of natural aptitude), it has been noted that

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<sup>419</sup> Butler, 'The Ethics of Dress', p227.

they are much more economical in the administration of public money, more anxious that it be spent to the best advantage...

(3) It is said also that women in positions of public responsibility are less addicted to the misuse of those positions for the purposes of jobbery... Welcome, then, is the hope that if women participate more largely in public affairs, their personal integrity, their good example, the nervousness which their 'inside' knowledge will cause, may do much to purify public life, and may enable the advantages of good institutions to reach the mass of the people...

(4) It is also noted that the proceedings of public bodies in which women are present are more orderly and more businesslike...

(5) Finally, it is hoped that the women who occupy public positions will train their children to be more conscientious and useful citizens...

Greater still, however, than the above are the advantages we may expect from a more general activity of women in private organisations for the alleviation and prevention of sin and suffering.<sup>420</sup>

The Church did appear to support women in their move into the public sphere although done so in a way that would not disturb their primary role as wife, homemaker and mother. The extract still promoted the notion that men and women have different characteristics. Women while working contributed significantly. The article made a fair judgement after a twenty year female contribution to public services. They were a benefit to their individual departments and the article commends them for that. It lists the reasons for their commendable contribution. They were naturally accustomed to certain areas such as domestic duties, nursing and childcare and therefore worked better than men who could not make such informed decisions or work with such proficiency. There was the argument that women, rather than seek the parliamentary vote, should continue themselves to the area of local government as they could utilize their specific nurturing and caring characteristics to good effect in this context. They spent public funds more conscientiously and beneficially. There was the belief that women as moral guardians were less likely to be deceitful in their positions of power and would behave more professionally. While women worked in the public sphere with such efficiency they set a good example to their children, an example to be good dutiful citizens and in essence providing the future with a generation of responsible citizens and investing in a tranquil society. The final lines reveal the ultimate advantage to women's participation in the public sphere; the moral uplifting of that sphere. Again, this notion of women's moral superiority and role as moral guardians comes to the fore. Where women were involved, the private or public sphere, they alleviated and prevented sin and suffering. All these reasons play on the natural and traditional attributes of women.

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<sup>420</sup> Fr. Lambert McKenna, 'An Irish Catholic Women's League' in *The Irish Monthly*, xlv, no. 528, (Jun 1917), pp356-357.



## State Response

A country's government plays a huge role in how society runs and behaves. It sets standards and laws that are followed appropriately by citizens. It controls society through legislation. Legislation was used to regulate and restrict behaviour in society. Legislation passed by government in the early twentieth century show what was considered acceptable or unacceptable, in most cases, modes of behaviour. In early twentieth century Ireland, the Church significantly influenced the government. Through an examination of legislation passed one will see a backbone of Catholic principles. The State and the Church were individually strong influential institutions in twentieth century Ireland. Together they were a force. Since the establishment of the Irish Free State, Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil, when in government, had a good relationship with the Church. The State and the Church worked in close harmony in constructing and passing legislation, under both Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil. The Church needed the State for passing legislation in their favour and the state needed the Church's support, considering the majority of the population were practicing Catholics and majorly influenced by the Church. The 1911 census shows that 73.9% of the Irish population were Roman Catholics<sup>421</sup>. Legislation was the Church and the States most powerful tool in tackling foreign influence. They used it as a means to control the people. This will be discussed in more specific detail later in the chapter. Public morality was a consistent public concern in early twentieth century Ireland. Any threat to this was quickly addressed by either the Church or the State and sometimes both.

During the period 1922-1932, the Church had a hostile stance to republicans so their support remained with Cumann na nGaedheal. However, this hostility softened slightly throughout the twenties<sup>422</sup>. Patrick Murray writes in *Oracles of God* that Cumann na nGaedheal, '...headed by Cosgrave showed themselves willing, even eager, to seek Church advice on "Catholic" issues and to enforce Catholic moral and social teaching by means of legislation'<sup>423</sup>. Examples of such legislation include the Censorship of Films Act 1923 and the Censorship of Publications Act 1929. The former made it possible to cut or ban films which were deemed harmful to public morality. The latter, which originated from the Committee on Evil Literature, fulfilled a similar censoring role<sup>424</sup>. Foreign influence was the target in each of these legislations.

Murray writes of the level of Catholicism among government members. There was only one Protestant, Ernest Blythe and the remaining were Catholics. Several were described as 'fervent Catholics'; including Cosgrave<sup>425</sup>. This high level of Catholicism in government ensured Catholic morals and principles were threaded into the State fabric. Catholic gender roles were included in the State fabric. The Catholic stereotypical role of women was as wife, mother and homemaker and any threat to this was countered through legislation such as the

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<sup>421</sup> Census, Preliminary Report, Ireland, 1911, p. 6. [www.histpop.org](http://www.histpop.org) [accessed 14/06/2013].

<sup>422</sup> Patrick Murray, *Oracles of God: The Roman Catholic Church and Irish Politics, 1922-1937*, (Dublin, 2000), p108.

<sup>423</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p108.

<sup>424</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p108.

<sup>425</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p109.

Juries (Amendment) Act 1924 and 1927 and the Civil Service Amendment Act as discussed in previous chapters.

Fianna Fáil's relationship with the Church changed gradually over the 1920s. There were some clergymen, for example Daniel Mannix, who emerged as supporters of the Republicans. A major event which united Fianna Fáil and the Church was The Eucharistic Congress which was held in Dublin in 1932. Murray writes of de Valera:

His ceremonial appearances in the company of Irish bishops and senior churchmen from all over the world in the presence of hundreds of thousands of people marked the end to the loss of official Church approval from which he and his associates had suffered so badly since 1922, both politically and personally, and his emergence as a Catholic statesmen of unexampled orthodoxy.<sup>426</sup>

One month previous to the Congress, Fianna Fáil members voted for the erection of a crucifix in the chambers<sup>427</sup>. Catholicism was evidently a major source of inspiration and influence for Fianna Fáil. Murray writes, 'From the time of its foundation, Fianna Fáil had manifested a distinctly clerical complexion'<sup>428</sup>. He writes of clergy activity in the Ard Fheis, local Fianna Fáil units and Dáil Ceanntair. The clergy also addressed public meetings and unofficially directed elections. Archbishop Daniel Mannix set up a 'Fund to Assist de Valera in Early Election' and donated a thousand pounds towards the 1927 general election<sup>429</sup>. Murray quotes de Valera's speech for the opening of the Athlone Radio Station in February 1933, recounting when Ireland led the way in 'christianising [sic] and civilising the barbarian hordes that had overrun Britain and the west of Europe'<sup>430</sup>. Sean T.O'Kelly, vice-president of Fianna Fáil, also defended the Catholic principles of Ireland. At the Assembly of the League of Nations in September 1933, a document was addressed which encouraged the use of contraception. O'Kelly retorted that the document was 'susceptible of an interpretation which was entirely contrary to the doctrine of the Catholic Church...the practice of contraception for any purpose was abhorrent to the people of many countries, including Ireland...would bring health centres into disrepute in the minds of the faithful'<sup>431</sup>. In September 1934, de Valera told the Assembly of the League of Nations, 'To deprive a man of his religion, is to deprive life of its meaning...to exclude religion from the domain of human conduct is to deprive morals and ethics of all the sanctions which support them against the stress of individual and national greed'<sup>432</sup>. Evidently, religion was core to Fianna Fáil's manifesto. Murray writes, 'De Valera and his ministers continued to offer many indications, both to the Irish Church and to the Vatican, that Fianna Fáil Republicanism was essentially a Catholic thing, and that they were building a state on Catholic foundations'<sup>433</sup>. There was a strong relationship between the Church and State and legislation introduced portrayed this. The Censorship Act

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<sup>426</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p262.

<sup>427</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p263.

<sup>428</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p283.

<sup>429</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, pp283-284.

<sup>430</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p287.

<sup>431</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p287.

<sup>432</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p288.

<sup>433</sup> Murray, *Oracles of God*, p289.

of 1929 made promoting contraception a criminal offence. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1935 prohibited their sale and importation. Legislation passed concurred with the Catholic Church's view of women and the home, the home being her primary concern. After a long engagement, the 1937 Bunreacht na hÉireann could be seen as the marriage between Church and State in the area particularly of gender roles.

### Responses in Prescriptive Literature

Prescriptive literature provides a holistic view of society's issues of concern and interest at that time. It can also be used to gauge society's response to social issues. After an examination of prescriptive literature the same topics emerged consistently albeit changing in tone and opinion. Shifting female roles, fashion and public morality were issues covered in most editions of *The Lady of the House* and *Our Girls* (*The Signpost*). In most cases, they described how shifting female roles affected public morality. The 1910s produced prescriptive literature such as *The Lady of the House* which recognised shifting female roles and portrayed an accepting view of shifting female roles. This is in stark contrast to the 1930s when any discussion of women in the public sphere came with enormous negativity. Magazines such as *Our Girls* encouraged a society of separate spheres.

*The Lady of the House*, published in Dublin, was a magazine circulated throughout the UK on a monthly basis. Throughout World War One, *The Lady of the House* ran a feature called 'The Women of Ireland's Part in the War'. The articles carried the same theme throughout; women as nurse and support system. In the January 1915 edition, the article begins, 'Although the war has reached its sixth month, the women of Ireland show no signs of "wearying in well-doing"'.<sup>434</sup> The article commends The Women's Suffrage Emergency Council on their decision to start toy-making in Dublin employing some of the girls and women who lost their work in the principal shops. Toys were generally made in Germany so women took the initiative and began making children's toys, creating jobs in their efforts. The article praises them for this. Woman's role as nurse and supplier of goods such as cigarettes and sweets to 'our gallant soldiers' was also commended<sup>435</sup>. The February edition of the same year again commends the nursing role of women and women's efforts in collecting funds to support the soldiers<sup>436</sup>. Women's active role was supported and commended by the Unionist magazine. However, their role was one of support and they were reminded of that. They were reminded who was doing the important work. The front page of the May 1915 edition is entitled, 'Women as Milk-Maids' and goes on to say:

The war is finding women all sorts of work to do, and is sending her back to several spheres which are peculiarly her own. Indeed, never were the fair sex in more demand. Here, there and everywhere they are being called for: to cheer and work for our brave soldiers as they go marching away, to cheer them, and to nurse them back to health on

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<sup>434</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1915.

<sup>435</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1915.

<sup>436</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 February 1915.

their return, to work in banks and other institutions and in some cases to act as special constables, booking clerks, tramway conductors and what not.

Reinforcement of duties seems to be a reoccurring theme for the journal and it does so in applauding the work being done by some women. This may be an attempt to tell women what they should be doing if not already doing so.

Another regular article was 'An Irishwoman's Post-bag: Purposeful Work and Careers for Women'. The January 1915 edition, deals with the problem of a childless home, among others. A letter printed from a married lady, Mrs. S. B., who was unable to conceive, sought suggestions for profitable work to fill her days, 'What I crave is work which would justify my existence'. She stated that she has a comprehensive education and likes literature and music. The job she sought 'could not interfere with my home duties... What everyone, consciously or unconsciously, craves is self-expression, and I suppose that really is my problem'<sup>437</sup>. The article title, 'The Problem with Childless Homes', suggests that if she had children this problem would not exist. Mrs. S. B., as previously discussed, accepts her primary role as home-maker and wife but seeks further opportunities. She wants to express herself but does not know how. Mrs. S.B is uncertain in her role and duty as she cannot carry out the natural woman's role of being a mother. She cannot justify her existence as a woman being exempt from motherhood. The next page prints three suggestions from readers. The first reply suggests she sets up a kindergarten and with the money earned pay for the bills and, 'possibly buy a bit of steak or a lamb chop for the dear man's 6.30 dinner'<sup>438</sup>. The second reply suggests free-lance photography work and the third suggests letter writing as a vocation. All responses offer suggestions which are gender specific. Another letter is printed from a woman called Elizabeth writing from Pittsburg, USA. She pleads with the journal to print her letter. She writes that they are in dire need of 'respectable women' to work in the homes of her community as there is a major shortage of girls for housemaids. The next letter printed was another appeal from Viscountess Wolseley. She wants to attract Irish women to train and work in England as gardeners. Again, there is a huge demand for these women. Viscountess Wolseley added that her plea is due to the depleting population in the war efforts but the work would remain once peace was restored<sup>439</sup>. All three letters printed suggest and encourage domestic or creative roles for women. There is no encouragement to engage in politics or current events. Although, earlier in the same issue, as discussed, the women of The Women's Suffrage Emergency Council were applauded in their efforts. There was, therefore, some encouragement and commendation for the women in the public sphere but nurturing the women in the private sphere was the primary focus of the prescriptive message.

The journal does make an attempt to discuss intellectual topics. There is a section called, 'The Women's Parliament: for the discussion of Debatable Subjects'. Readers of both sexes were given the opportunity to write in with their opinions. Topics debated were, 'What Should be our "War-Economies"?', 'Shall War-Friendliness Continue?', 'Are War Marriages Wise?'. This was a forum in which various strands of society could air and record their

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<sup>437</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1915.

<sup>438</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1915.

<sup>439</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 January 1915.

opinions and views. One particular debate in June 1915 asked the question 'Will Victorian Ways Return?'. From the aspect of the evolving women, some positive responses were published. Mrs. Lucie M. Beere from Mullingar wrote:

Early Victorian! Why! Archaic, antediluvian or prehistoric ways...Even in a very quiet country place we have lady friends who drive their own motor cars and understand them. One lady friend has gone as a fully equipped medical woman to Serbia; another to be head of a hospital in Marseilles...Every age has its own problems, its own difficulties to be faced and conquered. We cannot go back-we must press forward, onward, upward...<sup>440</sup>

Advances in women's social, educational and professional life are acknowledged and welcomed by this reader. In her opinion they have come a huge way and made major advances for the good of all kind. There is also a suggestion however that there were problems relating to women's progress. Mrs. Lucie M. Beere believed that every age faced challenges but women could not be complacent and must continue to overcome any problems or difficulties. Another response from Mrs. Lorna from Middlesex states:

The woman of today, with her freedom and boundless opportunities, is in a direct line of development with woman as she was before the dawn of history, and each generation was equally necessary for the evolution of her many-sided personality...It is her response to varying social conditions and to an enlarged environment which has produced the splendid woman of today.<sup>441</sup>

This reader takes a similar stance as the previous one and believed it to be a generational move with the times according to changes in society. She too understood it to be a positive advance. Another question debated was 'Should Beauty go Beautifully?'. One Miss Alice Elgee from Wexford wrote, "England expects every woman to look her best", should be the feminine motto in this war-time...A well-dressed woman inspires a sense of comfort to the mind, and rest to the eye'. An overall opinion and stance exudes from the journal that it was acceptable for women to partake in greater opportunities as long as they maintain standards in their personal appearance. Domestic standards were also to be maintained. This is evident in the regular article entitled 'Our Household Corner'/ 'Hard Times Hints'. This was series of recipes and cleaning tips and hints.

If one looks at the prescriptive literature at the further end of the time scale one will notice a change of tone. The ideal girl of *Our Girls* was constructed as the polar opposite to the 'modern girl'. Of course, *Our Girls* was a very different magazine from *The Lady of the House* but its tone does reflect the manner in which Ireland in the 1930s witnessed legislation aimed at restricting women's rights in the public sphere. This 'ideal' is a much debated issue from the offset. In *Our Girls* the notion of an ideal female is there from the outset of the magazine's publishing history. The following letter was received by the Editor of *Our Girls* after the first magazine was published. The Editor chose to publish the letter instead of

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<sup>440</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 June 1915.

<sup>441</sup> *The Lady of the House*, 15 June 1915.

responding privately. The Editor introduced the letter and believed that it should not go unchallenged.

Dear Editor,- May I, a young Clareman, avail of this opportunity to express my great surprise that you should go to the trouble of getting out a thoroughly Irish magazine like *Our Girls* for-whom? The Shoneen girls of Ireland! Do you think for one moment that your magazine is going to have the slightest effect on these imitators of foreign manners and fashions? No, they are too busily engaged with their lip-stick, powder-puffs, mirrors and permanent waves. Powder-puffs, did I say? Why, at their present rate of going on they will soon be using trowels to slap on the horrible stuff.

Daughters of Ireland, how are ye! And why, dear Editor, do you have a Home Hints page when it is well known that these colleens (beg pardon-young ladies? Can no more cook than an elephant can say 'Thank you!') Ask some of them the difference between a pudding and a Mills bomb and I'm blessed if they could tell you. There may be a few of them who can cook properly, but they are like the women who don't gossip-they're dead!

As for fashions: the less said the better. Outside of the Hawaiian Islands, did you ever see such a collection of Hula-Hula maids? If I were ever seeking a wife I certainly wouldn't go amongst them, the poor dear, sweet little things! I'm afraid I'll have to remain single for the sake of my peace of mind. Oh! For the days of 'Kitty of Coleraine', 'Nora the Pride of Kildare', 'The Little Irish Colleen in the Ould Plaid Shawl' and 'The Maid of Slievenamon!'

'Paddy Sullivan'<sup>442</sup>

Responses to Paddy Sullivan were printed in the January 1931 edition. The first response published was from a Mr. Louis E. O'Carroll, Principal Executive Officer, Bolton Street Technical Schools, Dublin. O'Carroll states that the two statements made in some English newspapers that Irish girls show little or no interest in the domestic economy and that cookery is a subject about which there is widespread ignorance holds no truth. He goes on to write:

We have not sufficient room for all the students who desire to be enrolled in this subject...and our teachers are complaining that intending students have to be refused admission to the classes for this reason. Owing to the difficulty of providing accommodation for all the students who wish to learn domestic economy, we have opened classes in some of the leading Dublin factories where there are canteens.<sup>443</sup>

O'Carroll also wrote that cookery was the most popular subject in the domestic area. Many girls also learned the art of making pouffes, butter boxes, lamp-shades and upholstery work. Most of the girls who undertook those classes were typists and shop assistants. There were over twenty readers responses published. *Our Girls* state that they received a substantial

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<sup>442</sup> *Our Girls*, November 1930.

<sup>443</sup> *Our Girls*, January 1931.

amount more but could not publish them all. The Middle Grade, Presentation Convent Tralee responded with:

We do not waste our time, as the men do, in plastering on powder and lip-stick. We recently read that men powder after shaving, and that they were also waving their hair. What vanity! If ever you want to see a dinner cooked, Paddy, then come to the Presentation Convent, Tralee. There you will see a dinner cooked from beginning to end by the Middle Grade girls. Well, dear Paddy, you may be quite sure that at the present rate you will never get a wife in Ireland; she wouldn't have you, as you belong in the 18<sup>th</sup> century-unless some Clare Shoneen or Victorian lassie came to pick you up. We will now leave you to the bliss of single life and to dream of the days of 'Kathleen Mavourneen' and 'O'Donnell Abu'. <sup>444</sup>

Jean M. Murphy from Waterford wrote 'Who blames the modern girl for making the best of her appearance when most of them are doing men's jobs? What employer wants a shoddy-looking girl?'. 'A Modern Girl' from Terenure wrote 'I am a modern girl, yet I do not use lipstick; my hair is neither shingled nor bobbed, and (marvellous to relate!) I can cook a very good meal. I am not the only modern girl who can claim these virtues. I know a number of girls who are just like myself'. Women in the 1930s were, therefore, forced to give evidence that despite the slow entry of females into the public domain their innate domestic qualities had not been compromised. 'Nora the Pride of Kildare' went so far as to write a poem;

If every Irish colleen of OUR GIRLS a copy takes,  
You will need a large and bigger staff that the Hospitals Sweepstakes  
'Tis a most delightful magazine, but you should have a page  
With beauty hints for Paddies, with whom style is all the rage.  
Bell-bottomed, flapping trousers-they will make their feet look small,  
While imitating negroes when they're dancing at a ball.  
The proper length of tassels for their 'plus fours' they should prize,  
And the latest brilliantine to keep the hair out of their eyes.  
Kind Editor, don't think that our intentions are to grumble,  
But if Kitty of Coleraine saw them she could not help but stumble.  
So poor Paddy must stay single-now I don't think that is fair,  
We'll seek him through Galway and we'll seek him through Clare;  
And just to prove to Paddy that we're worth paeanic song,  
That elephant we'll cook tender as the Maid of Slievenamon. <sup>445</sup>

The remaining responses had similar light-hearted, witty, good-humoured, funny responses that were sure to humour Paddy Sullivan. Most argued that men were as vain with their 'plus fours' and 'Oxford bags'.

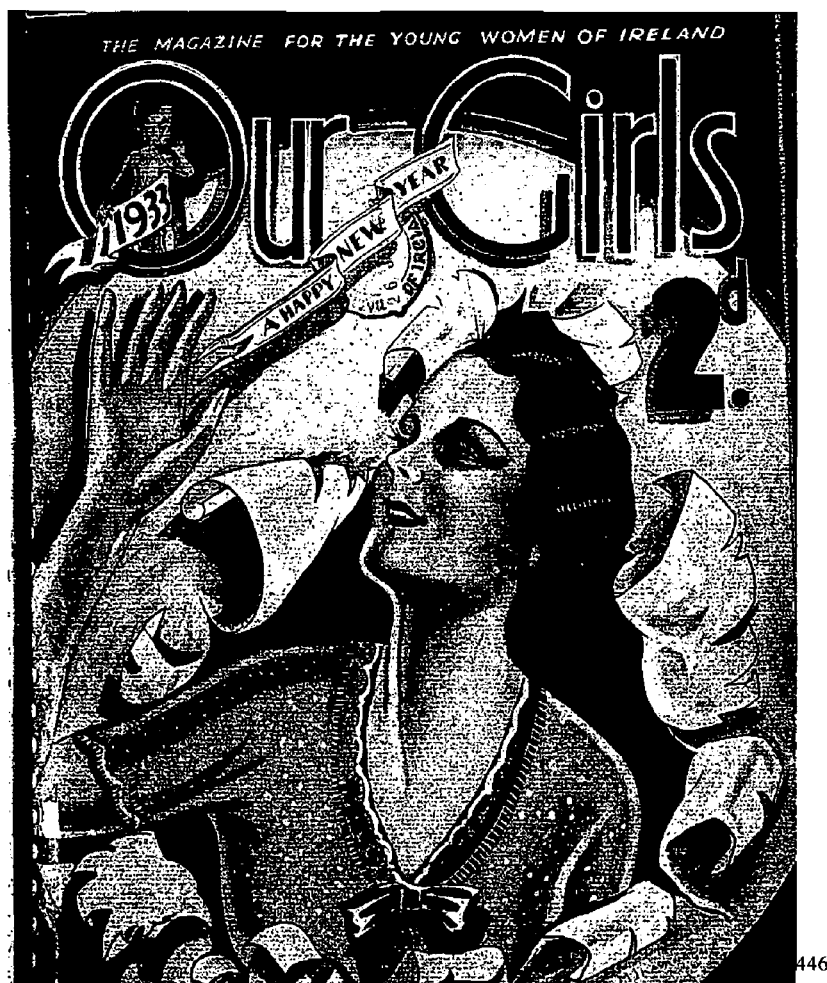
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<sup>444</sup> *Our Girls*, January 1931.

<sup>445</sup> *Our Girls*, January 1931.



There was a more narrow and strict definition of women's role by the 1930s. Take the *Our Girls* 1933 edition for example. The front cover of the January issue of *Our Girls* is dominated by a fresh faced, red-hair and blue-eyed girl waving and smiling. She is wearing a pink V-neck jumper with a bow and 'Miss 1933' written on the collar. Her hair is wavy and kept very neat. The theme of femininity is very strong and is apparent in the colour scheme and physical attributes of the girl. The fact that she is 'Miss 1933' portrays what perfection was considered to be by the conservative elements of society in 1933. There was an emphasis, it might be argued, on homely femininity:



The first page of the magazine is titled 'The Home Beautiful - The Essence of Cosiness' and is accompanied by a picture of a sitting woman sewing a curtain on her lap. Again, her hair was wavy and kept neat. The woman is wearing a dress which is neat, simple in style with a small frill around the neck. It is nipped in at the waste and accentuates her slim waist. She is beautiful like her home. This page is dedicated to instructions on how to keep a draught out of the home. It promotes Irish tweed as fabric for curtains. The article encourages Celtic scroll designs for needlework. If people don't like embroidery they are encouraged to get their curtains in the Gaeltacht where they will have no difficulty finding them, 'Among the "hills of Donegal", or by the brown bogs of Connemara, are many Irish girls and women whose sole

<sup>446</sup> *Our Girls*, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1933.

livelihood is made by the deft use of the needle'<sup>447</sup>. According to cultural revivalists, the Gaeltacht was where true Irishness can be found and where women benefit from their traditional role. This is the first article of the magazine and sets the theme and mode for the rest of the magazine. This is a synopsis of what Irish society expected from women by the 1930s. Women were to be perfect in appearance with her home reflecting the same standard of appearance.

Page ten is titled 'Our Manual of Etiquette'. This was a regular fixture in the magazine and the topic in January 1933 was 'When to Apologize'. This reflects society's fears and concerns of women's behaviour. There was obviously conflict in society regarding women's behaviour if *Our Girls* felt the need to instruct women how to behave. Women's behaviour needed addressing and was being addressed according to society's expectations and standards. According to 'Leila' the author of this article, one should apologise when one is late, 'this is a most annoying habit of some girls'<sup>448</sup>. The article continues to instruct how to give a sincere apology and even supplies a script. The article concludes with the following advice:

Keep in mind these remarks next time you are invited anywhere and then you will not be criticized for the lack of manners exhibited by "those modern girls"...If you adhere to these simple little rules for apologies, sincere and simple, on any occasion that demands them, you will find yourself a social success and, what is more important...

<sup>449</sup>

There is a negative view of the modern girl in this article. With a tone of disdain, the article encourages girls away from that type of girl and respectively toward a more traditional, mannerly and submissive type. The topics of concern for girls were how they should look and behave and how their homes should look.

On one of the concluding pages there is an advertisement six centimeters by six centimeters in the bottom right hand corner of the page. It is easily overlooked and maybe the intention. The title is 'Your Future' and is by The Irish Correspondence College. It advertises tuition for 'Civil Service, Bank Matriculation etc. exams.'<sup>450</sup> This gives an insight into the work women were taking up outside the home, albeit, by some sections of society not approvingly; for example, women were working in administration, civil service and sales. There is a sense of superiority, prestige and inclusiveness in the title 'Our Girls'. Anything other than this type of girl was not acceptable and was criticized. This form of prescriptive literature encouraged the traditional gender role of women and created a pedestal for its readers.

The April 1936 edition of *The Signpost*, the continuation of *Our Girls*, continues the theme of home. It is also a strongly religious magazine. The front cover of *The Signpost* is mostly taken over by an advertisement. There is a small picture of a house with a garden path carrying the theme of home life. The first page is a letter to the readers from the editor, the following is an extract taken from the letter:

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<sup>447</sup> *Our Girls*, 26 January 1933.

<sup>448</sup> *Our Girls*, 26 January 1933.

<sup>449</sup> *Our Girls*, 26 January 1933.

<sup>450</sup> *Our Girls*, 26 January 1933.

We wish to say at the outset that 'THE SIGNPOST' is a Monthly Magazine for the Home Circle, and it is our aim to inspire our readers to look forward monthly to a Magazine which will not only help to make the home more homely than ever, but point out the way to making ourselves more fond of the home, too, in every way that presents itself. The Home Circle is a very beautiful thing in the eyes of God and men... 'THE SIGNPOST' is a Family Circle for the father, mother, sister, brother and we do not intend to leave out the baby. The way is pointed out to all, and to make all happy and more interested in the home is what we want...Home makes the man. Home makes the woman, and a very great deal depends on the training and the correct reading matter that is allowed into it.<sup>451</sup>

This letter is a basic summary of the magazine. Happiness, according to *The Signpost*, stems from the home. This is interesting as this is the year before the passing of the 1937 Constitution which enshrines the family as the fundamental unit of Irish society. The editor makes the link between the home and religion. Ireland, historically, was a religious nation. To make this link gives the home spiritual importance. The magazine in claiming to point 'out the way' nominated themselves to be guardians of the home. If 'the way' is adhered to, happiness will follow. The magazine is targeted at the whole family. This suggests that everyone in the family should feel the same way about the home while having different roles within it and be of the same opinion of its importance. The magazine also suggests censorship of reading matter that enters the home. This suggests that there was a fear of other reading materials available and their influence. By doing this, the magazine puts itself on a pedestal as the right reading material for everyone in the home.

In the same edition there is an article entitled 'The Catholic Girl' and gives thirteen pieces of advice to girls on how to behave. The first paragraph advises girls to tell their mothers everything:

Prudent is the young girl in her 'teens' who makes a confidante of her mother and tells her everything. Harm shall not reach her. Evil will not even dare to tempt her. She has a guardian and a guide in her mother and wisdom shall direct her inexperience to safeguard her innocence. The depraved, themselves, will take quick notice of her security. Science, darkness and ignorance are their aids in their nefarious amusements. Frankness, sunshine and instruction they detest. The girl who tells her mother they shall not go wrong...It is for mothers to accustom their daughters from the age of ten or twelve to the day of marriage, to disclose to them all that happens in their sight and hearing that seems either right or wrong, so that the maternal judgement may be passed on these words or actions and they thus learn how to separate the good from the bad.<sup>452</sup>

*The Signpost* really sells the advantages of confiding in mothers, almost scaremongers young girls into telling them everything. This was an obvious attempt by *The Signpost* to ensure girls were not being influenced by science or modernity as they claimed the 'depraved' ones,

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<sup>451</sup> *The Signpost*, April 1936.

<sup>452</sup> *The Signpost*, April 1936.

referring to modern girls, were. The wisdom they write of is the traditional mind-set of that generation that includes domestic and patriarchal values. Also, again we see certain pre-ordained roles for women.

On another page, again in the same magazine, the religious theme continues, 'the most blessed among women', 'she wrote no books, she painted no pictures, she thrilled no audience with her eloquence, she inaugurated no great reform. She spent her life in none of the brilliant spheres for which many of our girls sigh to-day'.<sup>453</sup> They used The Blessed Mary as an icon for their female readers. While doing this they also rebuke the new woman who wrote books, painted pictures, initiated reform and tested the waters of all spheres. Their girls 'sigh', a negative twist on aspire, on those spheres unsuitable for women. They look on those women with disdain. Following on from this religious comparison of women and The Blessed Mary is a page devoted to biblical references and quotes. This, in its seriousness, reinforces the previous article and thus reiterating the point that this is 'the way' God would have intended. The next page carries on the theme of religious importance. It is a fictional love story with the main storyline being the importance and strength of Catholicism. A brief move away from the religious theme makes room for a joke page. Then there was an appeal to support 'Young Men for the Foreign Mission'. The following article takes up nearly two pages, showing its importance, and is titled 'Making a Success of Marriage'. It gives a series of suggestions and advice. At the end of this article is another titled 'The Clean Film Movement'. It is an application for membership and includes a pledge:

I hereby join 'The Clean Film Movement' which condemns all unwholesome film and I unite myself with all who protest against them as a grave menace to religion and to the country. I shall do all in my power to arouse public opinion against all films which tend to corrupt public morals and which attempt to undermine that standard of morality shared by so many of our countrymen of different creeds.<sup>454</sup>

Public concern over protecting public morality led to the Censorship of Film Act, 1923. Groups established themselves in order to further protect the morals of their society. European and American cinema was seen as a 'menace to religion and to the country'. An Irish exile wrote to the *Dublin Press* after being abroad for nine years. His remarks were then published in the girl's magazine *Our Girls* in January 1931:

I am shocked at the spirit of paganism prevailing, especially among young girls. I attribute this to the films which are shown here in Dublin. It seems to me that young women in Dublin copy assiduously the heroines of the 'talkies'. There is a spirit of laxity and craving for excitement, which is certainly not to be admired. What have our Dublin girls to say?<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> *The Signpost*, April 1936.

<sup>454</sup> *The Signpost*, April 1936.

<sup>455</sup> *The Signpost*, April 1936.

Cinema was the source of corruption that was turning young girls away from Catholicism according to the writer. The next section of *The Signpost* acts as an education centre for Catholicism. A page titled 'Questions and Answers that Every Catholic Should Know', gives statistics and information on Catholicism. This article is again aimed at the entire family and enforces the importance of Catholicism. Moving on from the religion chapter of the magazine is a section titled 'Woman and the Home; Trend of fashion, Cookery, Home Management, Home Life, Kitchen Hints'. This title, in itself, gives a summary of the role of women according to society. Each month a topic from the title is discussed.

After examining *The Lady of the House*, *Our Girls* and the early editions of *The Signpost* thoroughly one can note a reoccurring theme, the home. Although, in the early twentieth century in the pages of *The Lady of the House* there seemed to be a balance between encouragement for women in the home and in the public sphere. There was room for women in the public sphere as long as the home and personal appearance was maintained. As long as she carried her duties characteristic of her natural attributes the morals of society were protected. By the 1930s, the balance was uneven and there was no room or tolerance for women in the public sphere. They were publically condemned in the pages of *Our Girls* and *The Signpost*. They encouraged the traditional role of women in the home while condescendingly rejecting the new woman. Their ideal was a conservative, good mannered, Catholic housewife.

### Responses in Newspapers

Newspapers are also a resource rich in information of how society was reacting to fashion change and women's changing gender role in the period 1910-1937. In *The Freeman's Journal* in 1912, on the 'All Ireland' page where miscellaneous pieces were printed, there was a 'Plea for Fashion':

Fashion is nothing more than the pursuit of beauty, say the "Denver Post." It changes frequently, but in doing so it merely follows the immutable law of Nature and of creation, which is for ever and for ever changing. Its primary effort is to make human beings – and especially human beings of the feminine gender- good to look upon, to please the eye of men, and more especially the eyes of other women.<sup>456</sup>

According to the anonymous writer, fashion simply follows the law of nature and creation. Ireland in the period 1910-1937 was host to countless changes that could be described as the law of nature and creation. Women, naturally, sought to better themselves and create equal ground to live upon. Fashion changed in synchronisation. The writer believes fashion is primarily the concern of women to make themselves attractive to men and women, society as a whole. In women's attempts to look more attractive they offended some sections of society. As discussed in chapter two, cosmetics became increasingly popular in the 1930s. WM. O' Malley, Ex M.P., wrote in *The Kildare Observer* in 1931:

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<sup>456</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 20 November 1912.

There were two or three “up-to-date” girls in Athlone who painted their lips- pretty girls they were-before they took to lipstick. But when I came to London what was my surprise to find that at least nine girls out of ten used lipstick!... How any man could admire a lipstick girl I cannot understand, and how any man could relish to k\*\*\* one of them is a mystery to me. If the fashion were set going of painting the ears or sticking a bone through the nose, as is the tribes in New Zealand and Africa, I believe the modern girls would adopt it. Such is the power of fashion!<sup>457</sup>

O'Malley believed lipstick would ruin girl's appearance and took away prettiness. He portrays the stark difference between Ireland and England. Ireland was less keen to partake in fashion trends as argued earlier in chapter two. Again, it came down to women's attractiveness to men. By using lipstick she has lost all attractiveness and became repulsive as O'Malley could not even understand wanting to kiss one. He believed modern girls were weak to the influence of fashion and would adopt any trend. Fashion was a powerful instrument in society according to O'Malley. Influence was a cause of concern for society as it was perceived to threaten public morality.

The *Irish Independent* comments on foreign influence in January 1920:

The slavish imitation of foreign fashions by Irish women and girls merits all the condemnation it has received. Apart from mere vulgarity, many of the dresses seen in our streets and churches might truthfully be described as in-decent. The extent to which the evil has spread calls for some united effort to combat it.<sup>458</sup>

This would indicate that Irish women and girls were receiving a lot of bad criticism regarding their choice of clothing. They were seen by some as mindlessly becoming slaves of foreign influence. The threat to public morality was a concern as these ‘vulgar’ fashions were seen as the spread of evil. The Archbishop of Tuam criticised foreign influence in *The Freeman's Journal* in December 1919, ‘Why then had they not distinctive fashions instead of the lewd, abominable importations from foreign countries.’<sup>459</sup> While most of society criticised and condemned foreign influence there was a minority who welcomed it.

May 1935, *The Irish Press* wrote of the opening of ‘The American Shop’ on Wicklow Street, Dublin. There was great excitement in the piece entitled ‘Irishwomen Can Now Rival Others in Dress’:

The Chic Fashions which adorn American women- the envy of the feminine world- are soon to be within the reach of our own womenfolk...Fashionable women have hitherto had to be content with fashion journals, the screen and paper patterns to enable them to partially enjoy what is almost a past number with their American sisters.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> *The Kildare Observer*, 26 December 1931, p7.

<sup>458</sup> *Irish Independent*, 7 January 1920.

<sup>459</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 9 December 1919.

<sup>460</sup> *The Irish Press*, 4 May 1935.

Foreign influence is welcomed in this piece. In the 1930s, American women seemed to be the most fashionable and that is where Irish women looked for inspiration. Before the opening of this store women could only admire American women's fashion through magazines and the cinema, both sources discussed earlier in the research. Another 'Fashion Salon' opened in Galway in 1937. *The Connacht Tribune* and *The Connacht Sentinel* ran numerous large daily advertisements for the opening boasting 'new Fashion ideas' and 'New Advance Fashions'.<sup>461</sup>

How anybody presents themselves in a job interview is paramount to the success of the interview. 15 August 1927, the *Irish Independent* published a lengthy article entitled 'Shingle Banned: Protests Against Modern Fashions'. It describes how a young woman from Co. Cavan was unsuccessful in an interview due to her modern attire and shingled hair.<sup>462</sup> Shingled hair was synonymous with the bobbed hairstyle as discussed in chapter two and a symbol of modernity. On the 4 February, 1928, *The Kerryman* discussed women in the workplace:

The golden-haired girl is commonly regarded as being less serious in her outlook in life than the brunette, and in some business establishments which employ a feminine staff employers have a way of judging a girl's competence by whether she wears her hair long or short. That usually means a preference for the long-haired girl as she is deemed to have character and will power in refusing to be one of the "sheepish" followers of fashion.<sup>463</sup>

There was a stigma attached to women with short hair be it bobbed or shingled. This was perceived as a modern hairstyle and it appears from these two articles that employers did not want modern girls working for them.

The newspapers quoted above cover a broad spectrum of society's views and show that fashion, women's personal appearance and women's gender role was a regular topic of interest and concern. The majority of press was negative but there was also some optimism.

This chapter has examined society's response to fashion change, foreign influence, modernisation and shifting female gender roles. This examination was done through an analysis of Church propaganda, state legislation and government practices. Prescriptive literature and newspapers were also utilised. These showed that fashion change, foreign influence, women's gender role and modernisation were a constant topic to the fore of public debate and discussion. What became apparent is that the primary concern was the threat to public morality. Women abandoning the private sphere for the public sphere were believed to be the cause of lowered moral standards. There was the belief that society was falling into disrepute and the source of corruption was foreign influence through cinema and fashion. Foreign influence promoted modernisation and the women who were 'weak' to this influence were detrimental to Irish society and shunned.

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<sup>461</sup> *The Connacht Tribune*, 6, 20, 23, 27, 30 November 1937. *The Connacht Sentinel*, 7 December 1937.

<sup>462</sup> *The Irish Independent*, 15 August 1927.

<sup>463</sup> *The Kerryman*, 4 February 1928.



## Conclusion

This research opened with a quote from Coco Chanel, 'Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.' Fashion in terms of dress and the manner in which the home is constructed and presented visibly evolves with societal and class change. Fashion reflects and challenges society's ideas and views; conservative, progressive or liberal. Ireland in the early twentieth century was a perfect breeding ground for fashion change and fashion evolution as women's roles shifted and personality deepened, society adapted to political activity, nationally and internationally, and a new social class emerged facilitating a growing fashion industry. Fashion as a popular interest in Ireland gained much momentum by the early twentieth century. This can be extrapolated from the extensive coverage of fashion in Irish magazines and newspapers.

Within the period 1910-1937, women's gender roles shifted significantly. Traditionally women were seen as mother and wife only. As chapter one showed, events leading to and throughout the early twentieth century extended some women's roles to activist, politician and worker. Women also became more significant as citizens. Women gained rights that extended their duties as citizens. Women could vote, sit on juries, be financially independent and protected legally. Chapter one argued that women became more active as citizens and examined how this occurred. From this examination it came apparent that the idea of femininity changed over the period. For instance, in the early twentieth century it was frowned on for women, particularly those of the middle and upper classes, to work outside the home. Yet middle class women increasingly entered the ranks of the civil service and the teaching profession as the twentieth century progressed while there was an attempt to protect lower class women in the work force. By 1911 the Irish Women Workers' Union was formed to protect women workers, most members belonging to the lower classes. Women found their voice and wanted to be heard. They also found their personalities and wanted to be seen.

Fashion in terms of changes in female dress allowed women to channel new found confidence and personality while it also adapted in a functional way to allow their new roles to be carried out comfortably. Irish women in the early twentieth century while adjusting to their new found identities were adjusting their style of clothing. Chapter two showed women's fashion allowed for experimentation; skirt lengths varied from ankle length to knee length with various hem cuts, some dress styles were evidently oriental in style and novelty hats became very expressive. Women could carry out active roles comfortably due to dress reform. Corsets, petticoats, hoops and bustles became a thing of the nineteenth century. Paul Poiret introduced the no-waist silhouette in Paris in 1906. Dress structure became more relaxed and therefore restricting underwear was no longer necessary. Chapter two argued that Ireland was slow to take up European fashion change. For example, the no-waist silhouette was a new topic to be discussed in *The Lady of the House* in 1917, over a decade after it was introduced in Paris. However, proof was provided to show that Ireland was influenced by

foreign influence; the cinema and the big fashion houses of Paris and London being the major contributors. Chapter two discussed the links between fashion change in Ireland and the corresponding social or political change. For instance the changing silhouette and dropped waist of women's dresses concurring with the jazz age of the 1920s.

Chapter three explored the rise of the new Catholic middle classes and their need to establish and affirm new identities. They participated in a consumer culture and purchased goods to portray their wealth and status. The home became a symbol of status for the rising Catholic middle classes in the same way as the Big Houses of the eighteenth century indicated the status of the newly established Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Interior fashion of the home became an important feature of 'necessary impression management' and maintaining 'a front' was the sole responsibility of women. After women's centuries old traditional conceptual conflation with the home it would have been difficult for it to be completely eradicated from their realm of interest. Despite changes in women's roles, the dominant discourse in Ireland in this period was still that of separate spheres, particularly after 1922, with women viewed as belonging to the private or domestic sphere. Therefore, women's gender roles in the period cannot be discussed without an examination of representations of the home. Fashions and trends relating to home interior also changed as women's roles slowly changed and evolved. Changes in dress and home furnishings in Ireland saw influences from Paris, London and New York despite the anti-modernist discourse of the early Free State. This was discussed in chapter three. While some women left the private sphere totally, some remained and some chose to partake in both spheres; regardless, the woman's presence was to be seen in the furnishings and interior of the home. Chapter three examined how the 'department store' fed the Catholic middle classes need to construct their new identity and how a new way of shopping was established in Ireland by the end of the nineteenth century.

Chapter four examined Irish society's response to fashion change, foreign influence, shifting female roles and modernisation in 1910-1937. Public morality and public order were the primary concern for the churches and government. Fashion change, foreign influence, shifting female roles and modernisation were a threat to public morality according to the Churches and government. Both the Catholic Church and the state worked together in bringing forward legislation to tackle such threats. Chapter four depicted how after the revolutionary period, the Irish Free State wanted to reaffirm women's role exclusively in the private sphere. Church propaganda, state legislation and government practices all aimed at restoring traditional patriarchal values. Newspapers and periodicals were used to show the public debate which surrounded ideas of femininity.

This research examined women's changing gender roles and related changes in female dress in the period 1910-1937. This was done through an examination of prescriptive literature available in Ireland 1910-1937. Findings conclude that fashion and dress in 1910-1937 reflected the social, economic and political changes in Irish society. Fashion was used as a tool to express oneself. Fashion also adapted to changes in society.

1910-1937 witnessed Ireland's struggle for independence from Britain. Women had a role within that struggle. They were educators, politicians, activists, workers, soldiers and nurses. When Ireland gained its independence women in Ireland did not. After the establishment of the Free State, there was a concerted and often successful attempt to reassert the orthodoxy that women's role was purely maternal and domestic. 1910-1937 was a period of nation building and a period of class reformation. A Catholic middle-class emerged in great numbers, climbing the social ladder and redeploying power and wealth. In the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, movements such as the GAA (founded in 1884), the Gaelic League (founded in 1893) and the Irish Literary Revival all sought to re-establish Ireland as a true Celtic island. These manifestations of cultural nationalism promoted and encouraged an 'Irish Ireland'. After independence this often included the reconstruction of a traditional patriarchal society. This, however, conflicted with the evolution of women's gender roles. The introduction of the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, 1878, and the Royal University of Ireland Act, 1879, gave middle and upper class women the opportunity to be equal with men on grounds of education. From the establishment of the Ladies Land League in 1881 women's role extended into the public sphere and announced them as formal politicians. Women thrived in these new roles and continued to do so until the establishment of the Free State. Then, however, legislation was constructed as a means of returning society to one of separate spheres. The government, working in close proximity with the Catholic Church, wanted to ensure a morally correct society. They believed men should take the custodial role in protecting women's moral nature. This was part of the post Free State vision for the future and a premise for the 1937 Constitution. The role of women during the period in question would have been associated with modernity and consumption. In contrast, the role of men was associated with tradition and production. The qualities of each opposing gender were in conflict and constant topics of debate in the public domain. Whilst women's dress and gender roles changed and modernised, the dominant discourse that remained was one of a patriarchal society of separate spheres. This may have been due to a fear of change and modernisation. The prescriptive literature examined here provided, and the subject of fashion, offer a unique prism through which we can explore these issues.

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## Appendix

**Table A: Residents of Haddon Road 1911**

	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>Protestant Episcopalian (returning themselves as 'Church of Ireland' or 'Irish Church' or 'Episcopalian' )</b>	<b>Presbyterian</b>	<b>Methodist</b>
<b>Families</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Population</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>21</b>

**Table B: Occupations of Heads of Households on Haddon Road 1911**

<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>Protestant Episcopalian (returning themselves as 'Church of Ireland' or 'Irish Church' or '+Episcopalian' )</b>	<b>Presbyterian</b>	<b>Methodist</b>
<b>Retired Grocer</b>	<b>Agent (Manufacturer)</b>	<b>Commercial Traveller</b>	<b>None (Widow)</b>
<b>Commercial Traveller</b>	<b>Clerk under RLY board</b>	<b>Commercial Traveller</b>	<b>Manager Cycle Department</b>
<b>None (Widow)</b>	<b>Commercial Traveller</b>	<b>Veterinary Surgeon</b>	<b>Retired Minister</b>
<b>Master Mariner</b>	<b>Accountant &amp; Secretary</b>	<b>None (Widow)</b>	<b>General Practitioner</b>
<b>Retired Civil Service Barrister</b>	<b>China Merchant</b>	<b>Builders Merchant</b>	
<b>Solicitor</b>	<b>Civil Engineer Master, Mechanical Engineer</b>	<b>Minister</b>	
<b>Assistant Town Clerk Dublin</b>	<b>Land Agent</b>		
<b>Furniture Merchant</b>	<b>Commercial Representative</b>		
<b>Coach Builder &amp; Justice of Peace</b>	<b>Government Stock Broker</b>		
<b>None (Widow)</b>	<b>Manufacturers Agent</b>		
<b>Hardware Trader</b>	<b>District Inspector RIC</b>		
<b>Solicitor</b>	<b>Clerk Class 1 Civil Service GPO</b>		
<b>None (widow)</b>			
<b>Superintendent Dublin Potal District</b>			
<b>Tobacconist</b>			

**Table C: Servants on Haddon Road 1911**

	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>Protestant Episcopalian (returning themselves as 'Church of Ireland' or 'Irish Church' or 'Episcopalian' )</b>	<b>Presbyterian</b>	<b>Methodist</b>
<b>No. of Servants working for individual religious groupings</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>