Women and the ‘American Way’, 1900–60

Introduction

This chapter demonstrates that Ireland’s encounter with America was neither one-way nor static. Emigration illustrated the outward and inward nature of the contact. Another dimension to the twentieth-century American–Irish connection is the engagement that occurred through various cultural influences arising from reading, consuming, cinema-going and dancing. Each of the latter activities was complex and the encounter was negotiated and mediated by internal constraints relating to income, location and interest, and external constraints relating to societal and religious mores and the predominance of the British and Continental economic, political and cultural hinterland. Neither should it be forgotten that as with emigration, Irish cultural influences were exported to America. Nonetheless, unlike Ireland, America’s national wealth and natural resources underpinned its great power status and its cultural hegemony, which was pervasive. Throughout the twentieth century, print, audio and visual media carried messages and information about American society into rural and urban homes.

America was perceived to offer women a better life and autonomy. In the twentieth century the lived experiences of American women underwent important changes. American women did not get the vote until 1920 and faced official and unofficial marriage bars in some occupations such as clerical work and public school teaching until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The nuclear family, which centred on woman as homemaker and man as breadwinner, was the ideal and this mirrored the situation in Ireland. However, the expansion in the American economy meant that the

‘American way’ also brought equal access to education, increased female participation in the labour force, expanded economic opportunities, earnings and advancement. Furthermore, as the companionate marriage became the ideal, parents exerted less influence over the choice of partners. The availability of divorce and birth control offered married and single women greater independence in their lives and in the 1960s would begin to undermine traditional gender relations. This reading of American cultural history identifies the housewife and mother, the career woman and the female citizen during war time, as prominent models of American womanhood but not as defining figures. The single or married female shopper and the film star were other archetypes. Moreover, not all women experienced the ‘American way’, as it was white, middle-class women who benefitted most from educational and employment opportunities until the late twentieth century.

This chapter analyses material and popular culture which has been interpreted in various ways by cultural theorists who have perceived it in terms of dichotomies such as popular/low versus elite/high culture, masculine versus feminine, public versus private or production versus consumption. There is also the 1960s view that popular culture in the form of film, radio, recorded music and television was not simply a ‘top-down’ phenomenon but also a ‘bottom-up’ one and that the owners of the new media propagated ‘hegemonic’ beliefs and values including ideas about gender construction and female behaviour. Undoubtedly, Irish women learned about America and American women’s lives through the emigration process but there were other channels. Following from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century representation of women in the media, this chapter unravels how the American woman was constructed in books, magazines, newspapers, music and film available to Irish women and how Irish women negotiated these often complex and contradictory messages. While American cinema became

a dominant cultural and social activity in Ireland from the 1920s onwards, Irish, British and American newspapers, magazines and books were more accessible.

Cultural Encounters:
Newspapers, Magazines and Books

Availability of and access to reading materials
By 1900, just twelve per cent of the Irish population were illiterate and while few were educated to secondary level, most women were educated to primary level at least.\(^7\) Previous chapters have established links between literacy and emigration and with the demand for printed material in the English (but not the Irish language) and with the dissemination of new ideas about women. But literacy was not the sole requisite of a mass reading public; location was important, along with having leisure time, spare money and, for some, a passion for reading.\(^8\) Reading materials such as newspapers, magazines, comics and books could be bought from newsagents, stationers, railway bookstalls, chain-stores, independent newsagents, shops and post offices in towns and villages and, as was the case in earlier times, could be ordered directly from the publisher. For those with few resources material could be borrowed from the circulating libraries, the expanding free public library service and from friends and family.\(^9\) In other words, women and men of all classes and creeds could access some form of reading material. After 1918, sales of newspapers, periodicals and cheap novels from both urban and rural areas showed modest expansion. By 1955, Eason and Son Ltd carried 22 daily newspapers, 356 weekly newspapers and magazines including 321 British, 57 Irish and 12 American titles.\(^10\)

The magazine market, particularly for women, was another growth

market. Chapter one chronicled how eighteenth-century editors identified the commercial potential of the female reader. In the nineteenth century, wealthy middle-class women in Ireland subscribed to English women’s magazines, such as the Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine. In 1890 Lady of the House, a monthly publication of ‘feminine and general interest’ directed at urban middle-class women was launched by publisher Henry Crawford Hartnell in Dublin. By 1920, the British Woman’s Weekly, established in 1911 as a template for middle- and working-class women’s magazines, ranked fourth in sales of ten British weekly titles sold throughout Ireland. Irish-produced titles directed at women from a wide variety of social backgrounds included Model Housekeeping: The Magazine of Practical Ideas (1927) (formerly Everyday Housekeeping), the weekly Mother and Maid (1932), Irish Women’s Mirror (1932), the Modern Girl and Ladies Irish Home Journal (1935) and Woman’s Life: The Irish Home Weekly (1936). Among the monthlies were the Modern Girl and Ladies’ Home Journal (1935), Dublin Ladies’ Journal (1937) and Woman’s Digest (1947). Publishers and retailers offered magazines at a range of prices to suit most women’s pockets but borrowing also facilitated circulation. Eason’s sales of women’s weeklies more than any other category halted the post-World War Two decline in the firm’s profits. Other magazines available were the Messenger produced by the Society of Jesus Order, or the niche publications: The Irish Housewife published by the Irish Housewives’ Association and The Irish Countrywoman, organ of the Irish Countrywomen’s Association.

American magazines

By the late nineteenth century, American subscription magazines had gained a foothold in British markets; more copies of the genteel, ‘quality’ literary monthlies such as Harper’s Monthly, Century Magazine and Scribner’s

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13 PRONI, ESP, D398/19/1, ‘Eason and Son, Ltd Order Sheet, 1904’; Cullen, Eason and Son: A History, pp. 82, 179, 336.
15 See PRONI, ESP, D398/19/1, ‘Eason and Son, Ltd Order Sheets’ for various periods.
17 Clear, Woman of the House, p. 36.
Magazine were sold in Britain than similar-priced British monthlies. The Ladies' Home Journal and others had English editions. Similar developments took place in Ireland. By 1882, American periodical literature for a general audience included the Detroit Free Press and ‘high class’ Atlantic Monthly, The Century (later Scribner’s Monthly), St Nicholas (a ‘young people’s magazine’) and Harper’s Monthly were available in Ireland. Also circulating was the slightly cheaper but similarly ‘snobbish’ and literary The Smart Set. These few titles had a small circulation within educated, literary circles.

American publishers were associated with much of the ‘new’ magazine journalism. Harper’s was already known for its size, over 400 pages in length, and the number, quality and variety of illustrations, layout and content. The fiction consisted of ‘very readable novels running from month to month’, most of which were ‘characteristically American’ and, therefore ‘more interesting’. Harper’s was ‘distinctively American’.

Hartnell imported American publishing practices such as targeting the mass female audience, interactive content and having complex covers. American publishers and editors had also found ways to accommodate the dichotomy in femininity, between the mother and wife role and that of the ‘new’ remunerated working woman, which would be exported to Europe also.

In the inter-war period, the explosion in American publishing was experienced in Ireland. The ‘ideal’ Catholic journal was considered by Fr McInerney writing in the Irish Monthly in 1924 to be America, a weekly. But it was popular and ‘pulp’ fiction magazines such as Broadway and Hollywood Movies, Breezy Stories and Crime Busters, targeted at the mass audience and reliant on advertisements and cheaply priced, which were in demand. In addition to the Eason’s network, the Woolworth company sold ‘cheap’ American magazines in its shops. A market also existed for

25 Our Girls, 1, 1 (October 1930); National Archives Ireland (hereafter NAI), Department of Justice (hereafter D/J), H305/18/1483, C. Watt, F. W. Woolworth and company, Liverpool, 5 April 1933 to the Chief Superintendent, Civic Guards, Dundalk, Irish Free State.
out-of-date issues, cheaply priced at between two and three pence with multiple copies of single issues available.26

Following the supply disruptions during World War Two and the imposition of currency restrictions in Ireland and Britain in the late 1940s, it took some time for deliveries of American magazines to be restored.27 In 1945, Eason’s had a ‘considerable waiting list’ for extra supplies of American titles. In the same year, Eason’s notified its newsgagents that ‘we are now in a position to supply extra copies of imported popular comics, picture papers and women’s periodicals’ for all classes of women.28 American titles were available, such as *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Time*, *Look*, *Redbook*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *Collier’s Weekly* (‘America’s liveliest weekly’), *Better Homes and Garden* (a ‘high class’ American monthly), and the *New Yorker*. The American monthly romance magazine, *Modern Romances*, the *Modern Woman* and *Home Companion* were carried by Eason’s.29 America’s ‘most popular romance and screen magazines’ *Movie Spotlight*, *Western Movie* and *Intimate Romances* offered the ‘best value … in American magazines for a long time’.30 By the late 1950s other American titles, *Life*, *Golf Illustrated*, *Tarzan*, *Modern Romances* and *Woman and Beauty* also featured in the Eason’s’ order list and bulletin which were distributed to booksellers and newsgagents and were sold in its Limerick, Waterford, Galway, Dun Laoghaire and Dublin outlets.31 *Reader’s Digest*, the *New Haven Journal*, *Time*, *Life* and *National Geographic* were obtained through informal networks and libraries.32 These American titles, directed at all categories of buyer, were few in number compared to Irish and British titles until the post-war years.

How did the woman buyer of books obtain them? Most people had

26 NAI, D/J, H305/18/1483, Frank O’Reilly, Catholic Truth Society of Ireland to Secretary, D/J, 31 March 1930.
30 NLI, Irish Retail Newsgagents Gazette, Booksellers’ and Stationers’ Review, 12 (December 1950), p. 3.
31 See for example PRONI, ESP, D398/19/1, ‘Eason and Son, Ltd Order Sheet, Week Ending 26 February 1955; *Eason’s Bulletin*, 7, 2 (Autumnn, 1956); *Eason’s Bulletin*, 7, 3 (Christmas 1956); PRONI, ESP, D398/19/1, ‘Eason and Son, Ltd Order Sheet, Week Ending 26 February 1955’.
access to books through school and people purchased books through the expanding retail network of newsagents, booksellers and shopkeepers or acquired them directly from publishers. Thousands of cheap, paperback books were sold weekly by Woolworths and Eason’s and the circulating libraries and the local library met other peoples’ needs. Building on the Public Libraries Act (Ireland) 1855 and the Carnegie Library network (1903), the public library service developed countrywide during the twentieth century. By 1944, twenty-four of the twenty-six counties had a public library and a total stock of over one million volumes. Yet, library borrowing figures suggest that just seven to fifteen per cent of the population were active borrowers in the early 1950s, although this does not take into account that library books once read were also lent within and between families and friends before being returned to the library. Neither should the public’s enthusiastic response and welcome of the new service be under-estimated particularly when borrowers overcame great physical challenges to attend the library branch.

What types of books were available to the buyer or borrower? The attraction of fiction continued from the nineteenth century into the inter-war period. Crime, murder mystery, thriller and romance books were best-sellers for Eason’s and the ‘best-selling lines’ in Woolworths’ stores were cheap paperback novels and thrillers. Professor John F. W. Howley commented in 1931 that ‘the fiction department is the storm centre of the Irish public library’ because the books were easy to read and entertained. Regarding urban book buyers, in November and December 1934 a survey of seven

33 In the early 1920s, a circulating library run by the Dominican order in North Adelaide Street in Dublin allowed girls to borrow one book and one magazine. Switzers store operated a circulating library in the 1930s. McInerney, ‘Constructive Work for Catholic Irishwomen’, p. 265; Irish Times, 24 November 1934.
34 In 1952, fifty-two per cent of the population served by the county libraries lived in rural areas.
bookshops and two circulating libraries in Dublin city recorded that fiction was most popular followed by books on travel, Shakespeare’s plays, politics, science, botany, history, poetry and religion. 

During the war years, despite supply difficulties, one librarian claimed it was possible to get any book that you wanted, in a city or town at least. The County Dublin Libraries Committee in 1941 reported that more non-fiction was being borrowed. Outside Dublin a survey of six towns reported that the best-selling books were still in the fiction category. By 1945, people borrowed whatever they could get and fiction was more popular than non-fiction. Although library book stocks continued to decline, the murder story, the western and the ordinary romance were still widely borrowed in urban and rural libraries followed by ‘better class’ fiction, then books on the war, biography and travel.

Within the fiction category, as was the case with magazines and newspapers, British authors dominated in the inter-war period. For example, over 50 per cent of the titles purchased by the County Tipperary library service in 1928 were Irish and by 1931 this had declined to approximately 11 per cent, while British and Commonwealth writers increased from 40 to 67 per cent, US writers from 5 to 13 per cent and Continental writers comprised 8 per cent of the books bought. Two years later, all libraries received the Library Association of Ireland (LAI)’s ‘book list no. 1’ which could be obtained ‘without risk of rejection’. It contained 96 titles all of which were fiction of the crime, thriller, detective and romance variety and were written by 5 Irish authors, 16 US authors and 75 British/ Commonwealth authors. Book shops in Dublin in winter 1934, sold 30 British-penned works, 18 Irish, 3 Continental and 2 American.

40 Irish Times, 24 November 1934.
43 Irish Times, 19 February 1944.
46 TLS, Tipperary Joint Library Selection Committee (hereafter TJLSC), Minutes 28 November 1928, 15 April 1931.
47 TLS, LAI, Advisory Committee on Book Selection, ‘Book list no. 1 to obtain without risk of rejection’, 1933.
48 These figures are based on ‘What Dublin Is Reading’ in the Irish Times, 10 November to 29 December 1934.
years later, a breakdown of a sample of 56 titles reviewed in *Model Housekeeping* includes 37 written by British authors, 4 by Americans, 4 by Irish authors and 2 by European authors. As with newspapers and magazines, much of the book stock available to book buyers and borrowers in the inter-war period was fiction and British and Irish authors dominated. However, American authors attained popularity and many came to define ‘fiction’.

**American authors**

At the end of the nineteenth century, the work of Henry Longfellow, John Whittier, Bret Hart, Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Frances Hodgson Burnett and Henry James was ‘fully appreciated’ by *Hibernia*’s readers. Hawthorne and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was ‘famous’ and one of the ‘greatest lights of American fiction’. Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* was on many Irish women’s ‘must read’ list. In 1921, Catholic writers Katherine Bregy, Agnes Repplier, Louise Guiney and Susan Emergy were known about. Isabel Ostrander was the ‘cleverest writer of detective stories’. It is worth noting that references to American authors did not feature prominently in the debates on the passage of the Censorship of Ireland Act (1929) which was directed at banning indecent and obscene literature. The American fiction writers most borrowed in the 1930s were Lucille Papin Borden, Isabel C. Clarke and Mary Theresa Waggaman, Elizabeth Garver Jordan, Mary Johnson, Elizabeth Madox, May Stanley, Steward Edward White, Ruth Comfort Mitchell and Sophie Kerr. Other popular American writers were the prolific murder/thriller writers William Blair Morton Ferguson, Valentine Williams and Dorothy Rice. Librarians credited the 1939 film version of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind*, published in 1936, with creating new readers.

During the war years, librarians in urban and rural Dublin and Counties

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51 *Freeman's Journal*, 3 January 1879; *Times Pictorial*, 22 August 1942; *Connacht Tribune*, 13 December 1913.
56 *Irish Times*, 20 July 1940.
Wicklow and Waterford respectively reported that Mitchell’s book headed the list as borrowers’ and readers’ favourite along with All This and Heaven Too by American Rachel Field, which had been turned into a film in 1940. The 1943 survey of six provincial bookshops in smaller towns revealed that among the best-selling books in the fiction category was The Robe by the popular American religious writer Lloyd Douglas. It sold over two million copies worldwide. Among the American authors featured in the ‘American Scene’ column in the Irish Library Bulletin in late 1946 were Wendell L. Willkie, Eve Curie, Harry W. Flannery, James Thurlow and Francis Parkinson Keyes along with old favourites Kathleen Norris, E. S. Gardner, Booth Tarkington, Marguerite F. Bayliss and Rose Franken. Among ‘ Andrée’s’ recommendations in Model Housekeeping were Kay Boyle’s Generation without Farewell, Reed de Rouen’s Split Image, Robert Banning’s All Is Not Butter and Jonathan Latimer’s The Mink Lined Coffin. By the 1950s, the County Tipperary librarian insisted on dealing with a range of bookshops which stocked ‘American publications’. The prominence of women and ethnic writers in American fiction, and increasingly regional writers, did not go unnoticed in Ireland in the post-war period. American titles became more prominent in retail outlets, booksellers’ windows, booksellers’ recommended lists and on library shelves and, if banned, behind counters, and therefore increasingly available to urban and rural borrowers and buyers.

Cultural Exchange: Negotiation between the Reader and the Message

Ballaster et al. have identified that not all buyers were readers and, that, all readers negotiate with the text and bring different ‘interpretative and
critical practices’ to reading and indeed individuals may extract different meanings depending on time and place. In the Irish context, after 1922 Catholic figures believed that reading was popular among all classes and needed to be controlled through censorship. Almost thirty years later, Desmond Clarke, incoming president of the Library Association of Ireland, wanted the working-class female child to be weaned from the comic-strip, the ‘diet of Peg’s Paper … the News of the World and … the tabloids’. Similarly librarians confirmed that the working class and middle class were avid readers of newspapers. They could also see that female borrowers read books just as much as male borrowers. Men, women and children often overcame great physical challenges to attend the library branch. Increasingly librarians categorised female readers as ‘the factory girl’, ‘the lady of leisure’, the ‘housewife’ and the ‘juvenile’. This classification of female readers had evolved from the US publishing industry, which segregated the market. Bookshop owners in Dublin adopted a similar strategy and used attractive window displays and good bookbinding to catch the eye of the ‘housewife, the businessman or child’ reader. In late 1950s urban Cork, housewives, juveniles and clerical workers were the ‘best’ readers and merchants the ‘worst’.

Publishers and editors of newspapers also identified women as readers, with columns dedicated to their interests. Extending back to the eighteenth century, syndicated columns from English newspapers appeared in Irish

63 Ballaster et al., Women’s Worlds, p. 6.
69 Bloom, Bestsellers: Popular Fiction since 1900, p. 10.
newspapers. Between 1923 and 1925, ‘Our Ladies Column’ was carried often on the front page of the weekly *Leitrim Observer*. The daily *Cork Examiner*, ran a ‘Woman’s World’ column in the 1920s. ‘Of Interest to Lady Readers’ and ‘Woman’s World’ appeared in the ‘Ladies Page’ in the daily *Irish Independent* at this time. These imported columns from English newspapers were directed at the urban-based woman reader with money. By 1929, a series in the *Irish Independent* was re-titled to ‘Ladies Page’ from ‘Woman’s World’. On the other side of the political and religious divide was the *Irish Times*, which printed syndicated English columns directed at women readers. In the 1940s and 1950s ‘Especially for Women’ ran in the *Irish Independent* and Nuala Costello and ‘Marese’ offered health and beauty advice to the younger girl, the older woman, the convalescent, the outdoor woman, the career woman and the dieter. Barbara Dickson (Candida)’s column entitled ‘An Irishwoman’s Diary’ in the *Irish Times* featured encounters and conversations with women of all nationalities. The *Irish Press* did not carry a woman’s page on the basis that its news was of interest to ‘all readers’ but Máire Comerford was woman’s editor and wrote regular columns directed at women. An established provincial newspaper, the *Kerryman*, offered ‘The Feminine Angle’ in the 1950s which provided the usual mix of advice on clothes, shoes, cosmetics, cooking, diet and advertisements for food, medical and household goods. ‘It’s a Woman’s World’ written by an Irish journalist in the *Tipperary Star* in 1959 included information relating to personal appearance, home and family but also news about shop sales, fashion shows and the activities of the Irish

72 *Leitrim Observer*, 23 June 1923; 18 August 1923; 2 August 1924; 31 January 1925.
73 *Cork Examiner*, 29 January 1925; 21 May 1925.
74 *Irish Independent*, 14 October 1924; 16 December 1924; 9 December 1924; 24 November 1925; 20 November 1925; 27 April 1926; 28 September 1926; 7 June 1927; 10 October 1922.
75 *Irish Independent*, 22 October 1929; 15 April 1930; 22 April 1930; 29 April 1930; 30 May 1930; 4 July 1930; 2 August 1932; 17 April 1934; 4 February 1935; 12 March 1935; 2 April 1935; 28 May 1935; 2 July 1935.
76 *Irish Times*, 21 May 1923; 26 May 1930; 30 August 1930; 31 January 1931; 27 October 1933; 22 April 1932; 25 January 1937; 26 June 1937.
79 Clear, *Woman of the House*, p. 82.
Countrywomen’s Association. Increasingly Irish newspaper publishers, owners and editors, like their British and American counterparts, produced women’s magazines for ‘women readers as women’ and for women as ‘consumers’.

**Messages about America**

Different views of American society were conveyed to women depending on the context. Readers in the late nineteenth century encountered Longfellow and Cooper’s literature about westward expansion and frontier adventure, and Hawthorne’s romantic Gothic fiction with New England at its cultural centre. America’s radical strain relating to slavery and women’s rights emerged in Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* anti-slavery novel and contrasted with Twain’s classic *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Alcott championed similar radical ideas in her popular romantic literature. In the pre-World War One period, Henry James gave readers a contrasting view of American naïveté and European sophistication. There were many other subtexts to their work and that of other writers who presented images of American society. It was in the twentieth century that American literature came of age.

In the 1920s, there was the traditional, conservative Catholic part of American society represented in Bregy, Repplier, Guiney and Emergy and praised by Catholic reviewers for their ‘high spiritual tone’. During the 1930s, Irish library borrowers still read Catholic writers, such as Lucille Papin Borden, Isabel C. Clarke and Mary Theresa Waggaman, and learned about morals and faith among other Catholic themes. Lloyd Douglas’ *The Robe*, a strongly religious and moralistic book, was a best-seller in provincial bookshops in the 1940s. Frances Parkinson Keyes’s work, particularly *The River Road*, was popular in the 1940s and 1950s with librarians because of its portrayal of Catholic themes, conventional morality, intergenerational families and in the southern setting. For some Keyes presented ‘the American way of life’.

A second trend was the mass-produced American fiction set in urban,...
industrial contexts. The murder/thriller, unconventional crime tales of William Blair Morton Ferguson, Valentine Williams and Dorothy Rice opposed the ‘cosy’ British tradition of the amateur detective such as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers and Arthur Conan Doyle. The ‘hard-boiled’ work of Isabel Ostrander, the ‘cleverest writer of detective stories’, reflected the 1930s economic hardship and depression with bankruptcy featuring in some stories.\(^{87}\) This mass-produced popular fiction was directed at all classes of people. The romance category offered little that was distinctively American, save that the urban setting became more prominent and there were more women and ethnic writers. Sophie Kerr, who became managing editor of the *Woman’s Home Companion*, published twenty-six books from 1916 to 1953, many of which reflected changing attitudes towards working women. Similarly, fiction writer Kathleen Norris, who wrote best-sellers about wealthy elites in California, published up to the 1940s. Mystery writer E. S. Gardner, who wrote for pulp magazines, published into the 1970s. Rose Franken wrote sentimental dramas on middle-class sensibilities. The stereotyping of American society in *Nobody’s Fool* by Philadelphia-born Charles Vale presented ‘the disillusioned and sentimentally cynical executives, the capable sluts … [and the] common man’ who was ‘too virtuous to be credible’.\(^{88}\) In the mid-1950s this representation was more refined in the assortment of characters in Merle Miller’s *Reunion*: ‘a successful New York lawyer, a professional horse-backer, a Connecticut newspaper editor, a lieutenant in the regular army, a farmer from Iowa, a mechanic, a New York warehouse worker, and an escaped lunatic … [and] their womenfolk … though (and this seems to be typical of American fiction) two of the wives are planning to run away with someone.’ These characters represented a ‘microcosm’ of American life.\(^{89}\) Jonathan Latimer’s 1960 thriller *The Mink Lined Coffin* combined ‘Hollywood … a hated film star, script writers, directors, technicians, lots of drink, scandal and action together with sharply-pointed dialogue’.\(^{90}\)

Although popular with Irish library borrowers, the rural/historical setting in American writing was giving way to the urban. Nonetheless, wholesome romantic and adventure tales about the antebellum South, the declining wilderness and new territories such as California by Elizabeth Garver Jordan, Mary Johnson, Elizabeth Madox, May Stanley, Steward Edward White and Ruth Comfort Mitchell, were popular with library borrowers.

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\(^{87}\) *Irish Independent*, 29 May 1922; *Irish Times*, 14 June 2011.

\(^{88}\) *Irish Times*, 19 April 1950.

\(^{89}\) *Irish Times*, 22 October 1955.

Mitchell was politically conservative but regarded herself as a feminist and was heavily involved with professional women's organisations. Margaret Mitchell's story of Civil War America, *Gone With the Wind*, was in demand in libraries throughout the country from when it was published in 1936 right through to the end of World War Two. The historical novel *All This and Heaven Too* by Rachel Field was also popular. Booth Tarkington reflected on the American class system in a mid-west setting. John P. Marquand's *Sincerely Willis Wayde* provided a 'gallery of American types' set in an urban Massachusetts setting.

All readers could read the pre-eminent literary expositions on race, class, family, the Depression, materialism and modernism as well as romance, crime, detective and western stories, despite censorship and librarians' and some book reviewers' disapproval. Each reader, therefore, developed a certain view of American life. The American setting of some novels either in urban, city contexts or in rural and expansive territories might not have been quality literature but like US films, they provided an image of America where women and men worked, birth control and divorce were available, life could be dangerous and personal ambitions fulfilled or failed. All was possible in the increasingly consumer-driven society.

The struggle for meaning also applies to newspapers. Mass circulation newspapers such as the *News of the World*, located within the American ‘muck-racking’ journalist tradition, were aimed at the urban working classes. In the 1920s, the Catholic *New Statesman* maintained that the paper contained about fifteen columns devoted to news, fifteen to serials, ten to sport and forty to crime or divorce. It relied mainly on court cases for reports on crimes, prostitution and divorce proceedings, along with sports news to fill its columns and manipulate popular sentiment. Catholic crusaders in Ireland such as the National Vigilance Association, the Catholic Truth Society and particularly Reverend Richard Devane, SJ, wished to extirpate any type of publication that promoted divorce as well as birth control.

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Most of this hostility was directed at ‘English dirt’ although both British and American stories filled the newspaper columns. In the inter-war years one view suggested that British mass-produced newspapers portrayed the American people as a ‘nation of gun-toting boot-leggers, jazz-mad idlers, immoral divorcées and blood-thirsty lynchers’.96 Readers encountered a sensationalist view of America where women were characterised by their appearance and dissipated behaviour, although this could also imply evidence of female agency and independence. Such newspapers retained a mainly working-class market in Ireland into the 1960s.97

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mainstream Irish newspapers copied a large amount of information from English newspapers and by the early twentieth century relied on agency reports, such as Reuters and the Associated Press service, for foreign news.98 By the 1930s, approximately four per cent of total news coverage in the three Irish daily papers was American.99 News about events in American political, economic and financial life was augmented by articles about American and Irish-American opinion of and support for Irish political, diplomatic and economic affairs.100 Particular attention was devoted in national, regional and local papers to prominent Irish-Americans and evidence of their success and benevolence to Ireland. Unsurprisingly, any story to do with the premier US company in Ireland, Henry Ford’s factory in Cork, was widely reported along with news of returning Irish-American visitors and potential investors.101 The spectacular and dramatic aspects of life were covered including the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby, the divorces of Irish-American boxer Jack Doyle and, of course, the marriage of the American divorcée, Wallis Simpson, to Edward, Duke of Windsor. The arrival in Ireland of American aviators such as Amelia Earhart in 1932 and Douglas Corrigan in 1938 created many headlines and

96 Irish Times, 15 June 1922.
97 Matthew Engel, Tickle the Public: One Hundred Years of the Popular Press (London: Gollancz, 1996); Williams, Read All About It, p. xi; Cullen, Eason and Son: A History, p. 375; see also PRONI, ESP, D398/19/1, ‘Eason and Son, Ltd Order Sheet, Week Ending 26 February 1955’.
98 Irish Times, 15 June 1922.
99 NARA, S/D, RG 59, roll 1231.8, James Orr Denby, 12 August 1936.
100 For examples see coverage of events in 1922 in the Irish Independent and Irish Times.
much interest. Earhart personified the ‘modern woman’ in her appearance and achievement as the first female pilot to fly the Atlantic.102

During the ‘Emergency’, when the censor monitored output, perceptions of America focused on military and security issues with some believing that America ‘saved us from Hitler’.103 Afterwards America’s global dominance as a great power combating the evil of communism revived a 1922 view that the ‘American way’ equated with opposition to communists.104 A more widespread view of the American ‘way of life’ after 1945 was as a place where ‘every citizen should have a fair chance to attain a decent standard of living and that that standard because of the country’s wealth and fertility is and should be higher than standards obtaining anywhere else in the world’.105 Such opinions confirmed for some readers who had generations of relations and friends in the USA that it was a place of opportunity and prosperity. Local papers emphasised Irish successes in the USA, characterised by the ‘Hollywood invasion of Maam Valley’ in 1951 for the filming of The Quiet Man.106 This reinforcement of Irish-American success simultaneously reinforced the differences in living standards between the two countries, as noted in chapter three. Against this context, women readers read little about American women in politics but learnt about others in the public eye such as Wallis Simpson who ‘Americanised’ the future King Edward VIII, film stars and those involved in charitable, humanitarian or social activism such as Eleanor Roosevelt. This Irish media representation of America as a gender-segregated society, where men mostly occupied the political world and women’s public roles were an extension of their domestic roles, largely ignored the reality that American women were more prominent in the paid workplace, in political life and in the literary world than ever before, but supported the national agenda for a particular social order which persisted into the 1960s.107

102 NARA, S/D, RG 59, roll 1231.8, James Orr Denby, 12 August 1936. See Munster Express, 28 June 1935; 26 June 1936; 28 June 1935; 8 November 1935; 30 May 1947; Connacht Tribune, 7 November 1936; Irish Independent, 8 August 1936; 2 September 1936. Doyle’s relationship with Movita was covered in the Connacht Tribune, 13 November 1943.
104 Irish Times, 25 August 1922.
105 Irish Independent, 24, 26, 27, 31 August; 7, 14 September 1946.
107 Irish Independent, 14 October 1924; 16 December 1924; 9 December 1924; 24 November 1925; 20 November 1925; 27 April 1926; 28 September 1926; 7 June 1927; 10 October 1922.
Cultural Encounters:  
The Consumer

American consumer ways
Chapter two revealed that the Irish female consumer was an important figure in the late eighteenth century. By the twentieth century, she encountered different representations of American womanhood in her every day life. At the turn of the century, as American mass production gathered pace, requiring mass sales, American advertising agencies concentrated in Madison Avenue, New York, spearheaded the professionalisation of the industry which in turn influenced their counterparts in Britain and then Ireland. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the Irish public were already consumers of American bacon and Heinz sauces. The General Motors-produced Buick, Chevrolet, ‘Oldsmobile’ and the Ford Touring Car were also advertised. The US advertising industry in the twentieth century adopted the public/private or work/home separation of the nineteenth century. American advertisers developed four themes: appearance rather than character was the key to success; consumption was democratising; products could realise nature’s intentions; and products could strengthen parental bonds with children. In other words, the home was presented as a sanctuary. The housewife preserved the softer, more cultured qualities of sentiment, beauty and repose, housework was a dignified activity, and labour-saving products and services promised leisure time, though this did not mean decadence. Instead women were to become gardeners or golfers, to read more and become better mothers and wives. On the other side, progress continued in the real world outside the home; thus men could dress conservatively and epitomise control. Grandparents and children featured as supporting actors – healthy, groomed, attired, impeccable in behaviour. Advertisements dealt with class by showing differences between rich and fashionable, while manual classes appeared in supporting roles as servants, although they could occasionally break into the higher echelons of society.

In the twentieth century, the American single female as a consumer with her own income and her married counterpart as a consumer with control, if

not over the family budget, then over household expenditure, were placed at the heart of this multifaceted strategy which was copied in Ireland. One Dublin businessman, like his American counterpart, was convinced that ‘It is the woman in the home, the shop, the factory and office who really matters, because the spending of two-thirds of the nation’s income is left to her.’

By the late 1920s American women were already ‘envied’ because of the labour-saving equipment in their homes. American ‘houses and flats’ were ‘thoroughly equipped with electrical appliances’ which ‘reduced ‘work to a minimum’ while the ‘highest standard of efficiency and comfort’ was reached. Although Model Housekeeping embodied the principle of homemaking as full-time work involving its own standard of professionalism, the adoption of labour-saving equipment was uneven.

Income, location and supplies of electricity and indoor water no less than personal interest and ambition dictated acquisition of such goods. Additionally the 1932 Housing Act instigated the building of approximately 70,000 new houses to replace city slums and tenements. Regarded as the ‘latest in modernity’, these schemes offered extensive opportunities to editors, manufacturers and advertisers to promote their respective agendas.

The Electricity Supply Board (ESB) adapted American approaches to selling electrical goods and directed their sales pitches at ‘Mrs Consumer’ who was categorised as the ‘wise’ woman, the new bride, the overworked mother, the woman with servants or the working woman living in rented accommodation.

During the war years, fewer imported and native-manufactured labour-saving products were available due to restrictions on currency and transportation, which posed a ‘challenge to the housewifely instincts of our nation’.

After World War Two, the link between domestic roles and consumption was even stronger with advertisers informing the housewife that her home would be cleaner and run more effectively if she purchased new domestic appliances and household goods. The focus on the home-building agenda in publications was given a fillip by the resumption of private and public house-building with 57,232 houses built in the late 1940s and 101,688

112 Model Housekeeping, 1 (October 1929), pp. 407–8; Ballaster et al., Women’s Worlds, p. 121.
115 Model Housekeeping, 13 (December 1941), p. 3.
in the 1950s. Unsurprisingly, the ESB launched its Rural Electrification Scheme in 1946 and deployed an extensive advertising campaign in newspaper, magazines and on radio and film. It firmly linked the acquisition of electricity to modern lifestyles and improved quality of life. Some journalists believed that Ireland had ‘succumbed’ to American influences, particularly labour-saving technologies. Other commentators praised American technological advancements such as the delivery of piped hot water to US public housing because it improved the everyday life of American women.

By the late 1920s Irish readers of Model Housekeeping were informed about new dining habits of America working women. There was the ‘sandwich lunch’ for the ‘girl who wants to do a little shopping in her luncheon hour’; the availability of sandwiches and hot coffee in ‘drug stores’; the ‘automatic restaurant’; the ‘cafeteria system’ and finally the ‘masculine’ luncheon clubs which had rooms for women members. In general, New York was seen to ‘cater well for its business women at lunch time’, unlike the situation in Britain and Ireland. One American purchasing-practice that did take hold was that of self-service shopping. The act of self-selection, as an alternative to counter service, was pioneered by Frank Woolworth in the USA from 1879 onwards as a cost-cutting device. Self-service represented progress and modernity with the ‘housewife’ at the heart of the process. It was slow to develop in Europe. It was more complex than seemed at first. Women had to change their shopping habits and relinquish the availability of credit, deliveries and sustained contact with the shop owner for speed, cleanliness and convenience and lower prices. On 8 April 1961, Jack Ormston opened the first self-service shop in Limerick, Ireland’s third city, and offered a free hair-do to female customers. Ormston had linked the female consumer with consumption while emphasising female beauty and femininity.

116 See Clear, Woman of the House, pp. 82–85 for a review of content in women’s pages and magazines in the period; see also Model Housekeeping, 11 (1938–39); 13 (1940–41); 18 (1945–46); 22 (1949–50); 32 (1959–60).
117 Clear, Woman of the House, p. 86.
119 Woman’s News, April 1957; July 1957; August 1957; September 1957.
120 The Irish Housewife, 1 (1946), pp. 9–10; The Irish Housewife, 2 (1948–49), p. 15.
121 Model Housekeeping, 3 (February 1929), pp. 118, 128.
The Hollywood star

For some Irish women, American womanhood came to define standards in personal appearance, glamour and beauty. By the early 1920s, American women were identified by their ‘silk stockings, thin shoes, showy blouses and thin shawls’[123] Another noticeable pattern was that ideas about ‘beauty’, ‘glamour’ and ‘luxury’ were derived from the booming American film industry. It created a new persona, the glamorous Hollywood star. Dyhouse has traced how Hollywood’s use of ‘light, glitter, sheen … furs and feathers … slinky shapes and figures … cosmetics … flowers and perfume … [and] attitude’ influenced standards in beauty and behaviour. Hollywood designers dressed the glamorous heroine or anti-heroine ‘in a fashion heavy with sexual imagery … glitter, thick, lustrous furs, slinky dresses over curvaceous but slim figures, exotic flowers and stark red lips’[124] Moreover, cinemas offered a major advertising platform not least because these products fed into advertisers’ marketing ideas about ‘self-transformation … ideas of personal liberty and autonomy’ and notions of modernity. People could now see images of flawless female complexions and attendant sexual attractiveness. Dyhouse has gone further to suggest that associating ‘glamour’ with Hollywood stars allowed women to indulge ‘in dreams of escape’ from everyday life and to express interest in ‘sexual power, the exotic, presence and influence’. One of the earliest marketing strategies revived by the pioneering J. Walter Thompson (JWT) advertising agency in New York brought the use of endorsements by famous people including Hollywood stars to a more profitable level. In 1927 a new JWT advertisement announced that ‘Nine out of ten screen stars care for their skin with Lux toilet soap.’[126] The most glamorous film stars advertised Lux and while they might never have stated the words or even used the product, the strategy was set and continued into the 1950s. Woolworths’ stores in Ireland, with specialist cosmetic counters, sold a huge range of profitable and popular, ‘Hollywood-style’ lipstick, mascara and face powder.[127] The ‘Hollywood’ strategy had become particularly noticeable in the marketing of ‘Max Factor’, ‘Miners’, ‘Dawn’, ‘Outdoor Girl’ and ‘Tangee’ and ‘Stardust’ brands in Irish newspapers and

[123] Leitrim Observer, 10 January 1925; Irish Independent, 23 September 1950; 1 May 1953.
One example of the Irish slant on the endorsement strategy showed Mrs Desmond Leslie, daughter-in-law of Sir Shane Leslie and the Honourable Judith Browne, daughter of Lord Oranmore and Browne as users of Pond’s face cream. Such campaigns easily transferred to the regional newspapers.

Not only did the Hollywood star epitomise the perfect appearance, but from the late 1920s onwards photographs of Hollywood film stars were also used to illustrate the latest clothes in all sorts of public and private luxurious settings. Much of the advice on fashion accepted that Paris and London set the standards in fashion and taste. But the high status gained by American designers during World War One was not relinquished when the war ended. ‘Ideas from Hollywood’ in *Model Housekeeping* in November 1932 detailed the colour, cut and appearance of clothes worn by Gloria Stuart, Hedy Lamarr and Una Merkel among others. The linking of sex appeal, appearance and emancipation seemed to have worked with journalist Eric Boden, who wrote for *Woman’s Life* in the 1930s and wanted to see Irish ‘sports girls copy their American sisters’ and wear ‘shorts for tennis … one of the most striking signs of their emancipation’. Whether Irish women readers made the same connections is unclear, but they were discerning. Edward H. Symonds, chairman and managing director of the fashion company, House of Reville in London, confirmed to Irish readers in 1933 that his company now designed clothes ‘as worn by film stars’. But he believed that women were not only ‘intensely interested’ in film stars’ clothes they were ‘critical’ of them, and their attitude towards a picture or a star was definitely influenced by ‘dress’.

Four years later, readers learnt from the young actor, Maureen O’Sullivan who was in the most desirable profession, that she was ‘horrified’ by what she saw of the girls and women on America’s streets because they wore too much cosmetics, ‘shockingly’ short skirts, bare legs, mascaraed eyes and bleached hair. But, she admitted she would have to ‘get accustomed to many things’.

Nevertheless, the Hollywood star remained the source of advice. Film fashion was a recurrent theme in columns in *Model Housekeeping* during

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133 *Woman’s Life*, 16 April 1938; 7 May 1938.


135 *Woman’s Life*, 2 January 1937.
the 1930s. In 1945, Trudy Marshall, a ‘newcomer’ to the Fox Studios believed ‘in having just the right clothes to suit the occasion’. Joan Fontaine offered ‘Dress Chat’ and other articles advised that summer holidays required a ‘holiday kit’ which had to include ‘Lesley Brooke’s low cut summer floral, Dusty Anderson’s three-piece playsuit, Lana Turner’s smart serge slacks’. In addition the wedding dresses worn by Anne Millar and Frances Langford should offer ideas to prospective brides. In May 1947, Alexis Smith suggested to readers that ‘the stars inspire your kit for sports’ and Dianna Lynn heard that ‘over in America two types of bathing suits are going out and the new sarong is becoming very fashionable’. In the late 1950s, Delia Dixon in an article in Woman’s Life entitled ‘Fashions from the Films’ advised readers to look closely at Vera Miles’ dresses from her Paramount Studio-made films. By 1955, ‘Hollywood’ and ‘Florida’ dress styles were ‘fashion-fresh’. At the end of the 1950s, Nuala Costello acknowledged that the 1950s ‘styles came from the [film] stars’. Moreover, there was also a sense of freedom of choice and independence associated with fashions; ‘she can have a straight bob by day and transform herself into Nefertiti in the evening … she can be a clear-eyed business woman for twelve hours and flutter enormous (false) eyelashes from six p.m. … the style will be within the reach of every woman who wishes to avail of it. The association of glamour with American film stars was a prominent feature in advertisements in magazines and newspapers available to Irish women from the 1920s onwards even though it belies the exploitative Hollywood star system and the fact that the rich lifestyle was illusory for most people. But simplifying complex messages was part of the craft of advertising.

Over time the terms ‘Hollywood’ and ‘American’ were utilised to sell other consumer goods: mattresses, men’s footwear, shirts, ties, motoring gloves, women’s dresses, sugar, glasses and generally to promote retail business.

137 Woman’s Mirror, January 1945.
138 Woman’s Mirror, November 1945; March 1945; July 1945; June 1946; June 1945.
139 Woman’s Mirror, April 1945; May 1945; February 1945; January 1947; May 1947.
140 Woman’s Life, 9 November 1957.
141 Irish Independent, 31 May 1955.
142 Irish Independent, 12 January 1960. See also a newcomer to the market, Irish Farmers Journal, 31 August 1957; 7 March 1959.
143 Dhoyouse, Glamour, pp. 58–59.
Daune’s Pharmacy in Ballinasloe, County Galway, used the Max Factor image to advertise its existence, as did T. R. Lester in Cork.\textsuperscript{145} Mrs James Duignan, formerly Nancy Armstrong, who had worked at Best and Company’s Beauty Salon, 5th Avenue, New York announced the opening of the ‘Hollywood Beauty Salon’ at Menlough, County Galway, on 8 November 1957.\textsuperscript{146} Even the traditional knitting pattern from the American firms McCall and Simplicity, which were constantly featured in Irish newspapers and magazines, used accompanying images of smiling, smart-looking women, men and children which conveyed the message that knitting was not just useful and money-saving for a family but resulted in happiness and prosperity.\textsuperscript{147} The link between advertisements, consumption and lifestyle refined by American advertising companies gradually proliferated in Irish advertisements. The American ‘way’ in advertisements found its place alongside existing associations such as the ‘Italian look’ and ‘Paris style’ and exemplified the modern and the modish.\textsuperscript{148} By 1960, American fashions in clothes, cosmetics, food, health and diet products, domestic furniture and appliances had been added to the list of products available to the Irish public.\textsuperscript{149} This evidence offers some sign of the public’s interest in US-made products but does not confirm whether or not Irish women believed they were buying the perfect appearance for themselves, their families and home. Other commentators believed they could see a direct link.

\textit{Campaigns against foreign consumerism}

Previous chapters illustrated that women consumers were urged to protect Ireland’s commercial interests and to demonstrate their virtue as well as their patriotism by buying Irish-made goods. In the twentieth century there were various campaigns against foreign influences on Ireland. Although not specifically directed at America, much of it centred on women as buyers and consumers.\textsuperscript{150} Self-sufficiency and protectionism were central tenets of

\textsuperscript{145} Connacht Tribune, 30 September 1950; Cork Examiner, 8 November 1950.

\textsuperscript{146} Connacht Tribune, 9 November 1957.


\textsuperscript{148} Irish Independent, 16 April 1958. The description ‘American wonder drug’ was another feature in Irish advertising to sell all sorts of products. Cork Examiner, 28 June 1951.

\textsuperscript{149} Oram, The Advertising Book: The History of Advertising in Ireland, pp. 143, 177, 350; Cork Examiner, April 1957.

\textsuperscript{150} In the 1880s, women often led the campaigns for ‘native manufactures’. The Irish Industrial Development Association, established in 1903, campaigned in favour of Irish-produced goods over imports. American-owned Woolworths was never targeted by campaigners. See also Rains, Commodity Culture and Social Class in Dublin 1850–1916, p. 95; Walsh, When the Shopping Was Good, pp. 20–22, 40–41.
Sinn Féin and later Fianna Fáil economic policy. Beginning in 1908, Sinn Féin organised Aonach na Nodlag, an annual Christmas fair held at the Mansion House in Dublin to establish and promote Irish industries.\textsuperscript{151} In the 1920s newspaper advertisements appealed to the ‘Women of Ireland’ to buy Irish-made commodities. The \textit{Irish Independent} reminded the married woman to buy Irish products and not to spend on ‘such scanty drapery as could only be exceeded in the slave markets of pagan countries’. After coming to power in 1932, Taoiseach Éamon de Valera echoed eighteenth-century rhetoric by suggesting that an Irish woman should be dressed ‘from head to foot’ in Irish manufactured goods and that she should boast about it. Against the background of the Anglo-Irish Economic War (1932–38), and then the 1939–45 ‘Emergency’, ‘Buy Irish Goods’ headlines featured classified advertisements for Irish-made goods and ‘women shoppers’ were the principal targets. The Women’s Industrial Development Association (WIDA) took over organising the Aonach and in 1940 Linda Kearns MacWhinney, parliamentary senator and WIDA president, criticised the amount of money spent by women on imports as a ‘sad commentary on their patriotism’.\textsuperscript{152} In 1943, the Gaelic Athletic Association, the governing body for native Irish sports, described Irish fashion as a ‘second-rate imitation of Hollywood’.\textsuperscript{153}

During the short boom from 1946 to 1950, another ‘buy Irish campaign’ in March 1950 urged consumers to buy Irish goods and shopkeepers to display them in their windows, and there was an ‘all Irish fashion parade’ in the Gresham Hotel in Dublin.\textsuperscript{154} Despite these campaigns, American imports increased and in the immediate post-war years precious dollars were used to import electrical equipment for the home and workplace. However, Department of Finance officials disputed the use of dollars to import ‘non-essential’ or ‘luxury’ items and one official queried whether ‘nylons are still obnoxious … what about … artificial jewellery, ladies’ apparel, furs? And cigars and US cigarettes?’ The demand for cigarettes, a hallmark of sophistication in Hollywood films, was insatiable and almost twenty-five per cent of all Irish Marshall Aid funded tobacco imports. Seán MacEntee, the Fianna Fáil Minister for Finance (1951–54), described the demand for consumer goods as an ‘orgy of spending’ and taunted his predecessors in the 1948–51 inter-party government with accusations about their sanctioning

\textsuperscript{151} http://www.nli.ie/1916/pdf/3.3.1.pdf.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Leitrim Observer}, 11 October 1930; \textit{Irish Independent}, 14 January 1931; 9 December 1935; http://www.corkarchives.ie/media.pdf; \textit{Irish Independent}, 4 April 1940; 10 December 1940.
of dollars for the ‘purchase of things like ‘permanent-waving pads, combs, imitation jewellery’. Profits in Woolworth stores in post-war Ireland still came from sales of cheap jewellery, ‘Hollywood-style’ cosmetics along with ‘American-style’ soft ice cream and fancy goods. Accepting that Britain still provided most Irish imports, 78 per cent in 1929 and 53 per cent in 1950, direct American imports increased from 8 per cent in 1929 to 13 per cent in 1950. Many women now considered American goods, particularly relating to appearance, as part of their everyday lives. American women had presented a physical image which had found a currency with Irish women.

Other representations of American consumerist society provoked similar complex reactions. In the 1920s and 1930s, Catholic commentators believed that American women’s clothes offended against ‘common decency’, America was a place where girls with ‘abbreviated costumes … ostentatiously puffed at their cigarettes’ and partook of other ‘unhealthy amusement[s]’ such as ‘jazz’ and cinema-going. Yet alongside this, the reader of the Messenger learnt from numerous letters of thanksgiving and published petitions that single and married women in America attended high school and college, passed examinations, obtained employment, got increases in salary and were promoted. Letters printed indicated that Irish women continued to send money home, particularly in time of great need. Despite the Roman Catholic church’s criticism of emigration and the modern woman, Irish-American ‘working girls’ in America were applauded because their ‘hard earned dollars’ paid for the building of churches in the USA and both lay and religious women spearheaded the campaigns to increase the Catholic population and to restrict indecent films, non-Catholic wireless stations


156 Walsh, When the Shopping Was Good, pp. 77, 145, 111.


and reading matter. This apparent contradiction emerges in popular magazines also. Others cautioned that the American working woman made ‘sacrifices’, which was interpreted by one young Waterford woman in 1939 as the ‘American girl’ while ‘always pert, pretty and smartly dressed’ was ‘hard as nails’. In 1945 the ‘young [Irish] woman of business’ was warned to ‘Be yourself. Remember there is only one Hedy Lamarr.’ But the ‘American girl’ was defended by Eric Boden in Woman’s Life; she was ‘delightful … frank … friendly and amazingly cheerful even in the most trying circumstances … she wears better stockings and shoes which are ornamental as well as useful … the American girl knows all there is to know about cosmetics … she is essentially a great pal.’ The example of this fashionable, clever, independent American woman recurs in Boden’s columns for his Irish readers.

Similarly, newspapers and magazines defined the ‘modern woman’ by her bobbed hair, slender figure, short skirts, up-to-date clothes, the use of make-up, cigarette-smoking, dancing certain dances, going to the cinema, drinking cocktails, working in a career and being independent. Yet, side by side with this emphasis on the modern woman as a busy, fashionable, professional woman, there was a recurrent fear that she would become unfeminine, as evidenced by the simultaneous appearance of articles and columns that defended the traditional woman. The modern woman was thus measured against a traditional ideal of femininity, and found to fall short of it. This was particularly the case in popular magazines, where the traditional woman was defined as the ‘Irish girl’, who was ‘dearly beloved’ by her family, and who was ‘pert, pretty and smartly dressed’. This traditional ideal was often contrasted with the modern woman, who was seen as lacking in these qualities. However, the modern woman was not entirely without qualities, and there were ways in which she could be seen as a positive influence on Irish society.

161 Woman’s Life, 4 July 1936.
162 Woman’s Mirror, January 1945.
163 Woman’s Life, 18 March 1939; 1, 29 April 1939; 24 June 1939.
side with this image were advertisements for dances, cinema and cigarettes. Indeed women had smoked as long as men had, but they gained visibility from the 1920s onwards through advertising and film. Moreover, Catholic, political and newspaper figures failed to campaign in a sustained way for social and cultural amenities in Ireland, which contributed to Irish women and men turning to the newest incarnations of the American way: the cinema and jazz. In 1920s rural Ireland there were few halls or clubs. In the 1940s Muintir na Tire commented on the need for local community activities and in the 1950s the ‘loneliness, dullness and [the] generally unattractive nature of life in many parts of rural Ireland’ was one reason for migration. Those who lived furthest from cities, towns, villages and the main road fared worst of all and, of course, the availability of time, money and transportation dictated the extent of access to organised public entertainment, as did gender. The Irish Countrywomen’s Association reported in 1932 that for ‘all young girls in the country’, the absence of ‘recreational and cultural facilities’ created a ‘leaning towards town life … such facilities as exist are poorly organised, haphazard and without co-ordination.’ Much of the entertainment available to married women in rural areas centred around either their own or a neighbouring home with dancing and music a feature of church-related activities such as stations, rosaries, wakes and weddings. Emigrant departures, markets and fairs also brought people together and concerts, plays and card-playing were popular with married women. In urban areas, the entertainment available to working-class married women also centred on church activities and the home with regular ‘hooleys’ held in Dublin tenements. Single women in urban areas, depending on income and class, could engage in sporting activities including cycling and tennis and attend plays, theatre and dances. American popular culture promoted more representations of American womanhood.


New Forms of Cultural Encounter

Cinema-going and Hollywood films
In 1939 weekly film attendance in the USA averaged 80 million, in Britain 23 million and in Ireland 21 million. By 1950, one in every three people in Ireland went to the cinema at least once a week and viewed mainly American and specifically Hollywood-produced films. Cinema became the main form of mass public entertainment. In addition to the new or renovated cinemas in the cities, a hall or wall in a village or town was adapted with little financial outlay and capital and admission prices were kept low to attract a wider selection of people than previously attended theatre or concerts. From 1922 onwards, Hollywood on the American west coast became the primary location for film production and the studio system dominated the industry. In the mid-1930s, James Montgomery, the Irish film censor, commented that America ‘called the tune in the film industry’. In 1939, Irish film-goers viewed 1,232 American films and 269 British films, representing 60 more US films than in 1937 and 18 fewer British films. By 1953, 1,965 films were viewed by the public and five times as many American films as British were shown in Ireland.

In 1930s Britain a number of studies examined the impact of cinema-going on women. Except for the Irish censor’s records and certain individuals’ interest in the cinema phenomenon, no large-scale studies of regular cinema-goers’ motivations exist for Ireland, as they do for Britain, and thus oral history, advertisements, articles and public discourse become useful. Rockett’s contention, that memories of childhood are often clouded...
by nostalgia which undermines evidence on cinema-going, can be countered by the oral historian’s view that personal testimony offers a valid source of evidence with the same caveats employed as for all historical sources. Thus, recollections offer some insight. Part of the experience started with the building: many cinemas were converted halls, theatres, shops but there was a wave of purpose-built cinemas. The latter were designed according to new art deco and modernist architectural styles. Among the many examples in Dublin were the Savoy (1929), the Theatre Royal (1935), the Green (1935), the Carlton (1937), and Adelphi (1938); and in other towns there was the Curzon in Belfast (1936), the Tonic in Bangor (1934), the Ritz in Athlone (1939), the Savoy in Limerick (1935), the Savoy in Waterford (1937) and the Ritz in Cork (1939). As in Britain and the USA, most cinemas were warm, comfortable and luxurious and the new buildings were exotic like ‘oriental pleasure domes or Moorish palaces’.

Once inside, the film critic C. A. Lejeune, of The Observer, commented in 1926 that ‘the kinema must please the woman or die’; women and cinema had become more culturally connected than was the case with men. Following from this, one of the few contemporary Irish studies was by Brigid G. McCarthy, a lecturer in University College Cork. In 1944 she identified the appeal of cinema-going: it offered not only ‘warmth and comfort’ but older people could relax; it was a diversion for children of all classes; and it was ‘a meeting place for lovers’. During childhood it was a form of entertainment but also an escape from daily hardship. In 1920s and 1930s Dublin, Alice Caulfield from tenements in Newfoundland Street recalled she went to the ‘picture house. Oh, we’d get excited.’ Maura grew up in 1950s Ennis and recalled having to ‘beg, borrow or steal to get to the cinema’.

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178 Dyhouse, Glamour, pp. 63–64.


181 See for example Stephanie McBride and Roddy Flynn (eds), Here’s Looking at You, Kid! Ireland Goes to the Pictures (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1996). Also present in Kearns, Dublin Tenement Life: An Oral History, p. 72.

182 ULOHP, Tape 8; AOHP, Tape 8.
June Considine who attended cinema avidly as a young girl in 1950s Dublin, came out of the cinema a ‘different’ person because she had discovered the ‘power of imagination’, and ‘another world’ was opened to her which never closed.\textsuperscript{183} Other young girls’ cinema experience led them to think about potential careers in Hollywood, which surprised the editor of \textit{Our Girls} in the 1930s who received many letters asking for information to be printed. Among the careers promoted by \textit{Woman’s Life} in 1936 was that of cinema usherette.\textsuperscript{184}

As girls grew older, cinema-going was more than just a leisure activity and other cinematic pleasures emerged.\textsuperscript{185} Single young woman attended with female friends. Dublin tenement women were ‘very fond’ of the pictures because they would ‘go in together’.\textsuperscript{186} Alice Kelly, aged twenty-five years, worked in the silk department of a Dublin shop and went to the cinema on ‘wet evenings’.\textsuperscript{187} Most young Irish people grew up ignorant of sex which was rarely, if ever discussed.\textsuperscript{188} Cinema, therefore, in addition to the dance hall and the motor car, provided the courting couple with a private, dark space, despite the vigilance of lay and religious organisations and perhaps parents.\textsuperscript{189} During her courting days in inter-war Dublin, May Hanaphy recalled that ‘maybe the third night you might make a date for the pictures and your fellow would naturally hold your hand. And if you didn’t like him you’d just be squirming.’\textsuperscript{190} June Considine felt that what she saw both on screen and on the ‘back seat’ in the Casino cinema ‘slowly’ eroded her ‘innocence’. Similarly, Doireann Ní Bhriain felt the ‘sexual excitement’ from the screen and surroundings in Sutton Cross cinema in 1950s Dublin.\textsuperscript{191} In other words, the whole experience contributed to the woman’s sexual awakening.

\textsuperscript{183} McBride and Flynn (eds), \textit{Here’s Looking at You, Kid! Ireland Goes to the Pictures}, pp. 14–16.
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Our Girls}, 1 (April 1931); \textit{Woman’s Life}, 19 September 1936.
\textsuperscript{185} McBride and Flynn (eds), \textit{Here’s Looking at You, Kid! Ireland Goes to the Pictures}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{187} \textit{Woman’s Life}, 29 August 1936.
\textsuperscript{189} Luddy, ‘Sex and the Single Girl’, pp. 79–81.
\textsuperscript{190} Kearns, \textit{Dublin Tenement Life: An Oral History}, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{191} McBride and Flynn (eds), \textit{Here’s Looking at You, Kid! Ireland Goes to the Pictures}, pp. 15–16, 59.
Catholic Church-led vigilance campaigns did not feature in the testimony examined here, suggesting again a gap between Catholic preaching, Catholic beliefs and the personal behaviour of many young women. However, sixteen-year-old Mary Norris, who was working as a domestic servant for a family in Tralee, County Kerry in the 1940s and was allowed out once a week, went out without permission to the cinema on a second night. Following this she was ‘taken down to a doctor’, and he, ‘gave me an internal examination’ to see if she was ‘intact’. Her punishment for an innocent transgression was to be incarcerated in a Good Shepherd-run Magdalen laundry in Cork.192 Cinema-going for her was not liberating; instead its association with illicit sexual activity, had dreadful consequences for her life. The censor, James Montgomery, acknowledged cinema’s role in the ‘the sexual dynamics’ of courtship.193 Cinema-going also contributed to an awareness of changing social behaviour elsewhere.

Dyhouse suggests that the glamour of stars and settings in the films had a significant effect on popular fashion. Stars became fashion and style leaders with their hairstyles, make-up and clothes copied by many and filling pages of magazines. Ginger Rogers, Kay Francis and Lana Turner were favourite role models for hair and make-up.194 In the 1930s Annie McGlynn, aged twenty years, who worked in Brown and Poulson in Dublin as a packer, loved ‘the pictures … my favourite star is Ginger Rogers’.195 Into the 1940s, Deirdre was impressed by Shirley Temple whose ‘pretty and lovely clothes … fur collars’ were so different from her own ‘sparse’ clothes.196 In the 1950s, Maura in Ennis liked Audrey Hepburn and with friends she went ‘not for the actual story’ but ‘to see what they were wearing … gorgeous, style, the evening dresses and the jewellery’.197 In addition to newspaper columns and women’s magazines offering further insights into stars’ lives, fashions and advice girl’s magazines such as the weekly Girls’ Cinema provided more film information. Between 1920 and 1932, this publication tended towards ‘sentimentalism rather than sensationalism’ and some of its advertisements adopted a ‘terrifyingly hectoring tone’. Nonetheless, priced at two pence, it appealed to many working-class women. The longer-running weekly Picturegoer, priced at three pence in 1942, featured advertisements and articles on clothes, cosmetics and beauty products as worn by film stars.

192 Quoted in Ferriter, The Transformation of Ireland 1900–2000, p. 393.
194 Dyhouse, Glamour, pp. 64, 71.
195 Woman’s Life, 5 September 1936.
196 AOHP, Tape 5.
197 AOHP, Tape 8.
Patterns were provided to allow women make the stars’ clothes at home. Hollywood also offered different kinds of femininity which were seen to be dangerously influential in Ireland. Politicians, censor, educationalists, social reformers, crusaders and the film business all took a keen interest in film content.

During the ‘silent era’, D. W. Griffith’s films were preoccupied with ‘female honour and chastity’. Others presented images that ranged from the ‘exotic, sexually aggressive vamp to the athletic, energetic “serial queen”; the street smart urban working gal, who repels the sexual advances of her lascivious boss; and cigarette-smoking, alcohol drinking chorus girls or burlesque queens.’ There was the heroine or ‘good woman’ and anti-heroine or ‘bad woman’ and the latter was usually a ‘loose or fallen’ woman. As early as 1918, John Ryan wrote in the Jesuit Studies journal that a ‘cosmopolitan gaiety of sin’ prevailed in US films, where bedroom scenes and quick marriages ‘take place anywhere and everywhere, in spite of Ne Temere [decree, 1908] or other impediments’. Later, into the 1920s, films moved from ‘Victorian moralism, sentimentality, and reformism’ and focused on ‘glamour, sophistication, exoticism, urbanity, and sex appeal’. Among the new stars were Greta Garbo, who represented ‘the mysterious sex goddess’, Rudolph Valentino, the ‘passionate, hot-blooded Latin lover’ and Colleen Moore, the first on-screen ‘flapper’ with ‘bobbed hair, skimpy skirts, and incandescent vivacity’. Immoral sexual behaviour and divorce became the hallmarks of the criticism levelled at Hollywood films in Ireland, although one motion-picture exhibitor in Dublin believed in 1922 that the majority of ‘light or “slap stick” American comedies’ did not meet with general approval because of their ‘extravagance and their reliance, for full effect, upon slangy sub-titles’.

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198 Dyhouse, *Glamour*, p. 66; PRONI, Eason and Son Ltd Papers, D398/1/2/1, Order Sheet, Mr O’Dempseys, 25 October 1924; PRONI, Eason and Son Ltd Papers, D398/1/2/1, Order Sheet, Stormont C. S. Club, 5 September 1931; PRONI, Eason and Son Ltd Papers, D398/1/2/1, Order Sheet, W. H. Smith and Son Ltd, 16 March 1942; PRONI, Eason and Son Ltd Papers, D398/1/2/1, Order Sheet, Mr Patterson, Randalstown, 21 August 1948; *Model Housekeeping*, 18 (July 1946).


Besides an anxiety about morals, there was concern about the effect of American consumerism on society. The Catholic *Irish Monthly* in early 1925 identified that young women in particular became ‘sick with discontent’ at the contrast between the glamorous lifestyles on screen and their own dull lives.\(^{204}\) One campaigner regarded this development as part of ‘Americanisation via the films’ and it was unwelcome.\(^{205}\) These campaigns were monitored by US diplomats in Dublin. Four years after the introduction of the Censorship of Films Act 1923, US Consul Harold Collins accepted that some groups, ‘super-sensitive Hibernians’ and the ‘more conservative and anti-American element in the pro-British Unionist class’, were hostile to American motion-picture films but he did not see it as ‘effective’. He reckoned that American films were ‘well-liked’ by cinema patrons because most of them had relatives or friends in the USA and were ‘especially interested in portrayals of American life’\(^{206}\) Deirdre who went to the cinema in Hospital, County Limerick in the 1930s and 1940s felt that ‘people were a lot better off in America … [in] the movies … there were the cars every place … every body was living in big mansions.’ Later on Peggy who regularly went to the pictures in County Kilkenny felt that ‘America was everything’ from the films she saw and ‘everything they touched turned to gold’. But neither Deirdre nor Peggy emigrated to the USA.\(^{207}\)

Other new genres to emerge in the 1930s were the ‘swashbuckling adventures; sophisticated sex comedies revolving around the issue of marital fidelity; romantic dramas examining the manners and morals of the well-bred and well-to-do; and tales of “flaming youth” and the new sexual freedom’\(^{208}\) Threatened by boycotts in the USA because of the prominent sexual themes in comedies and wild gangster films which corrupted the young, Hollywood producers accepted a code introduced by the censor Will H. Hays in 1930 and a Roman Catholic censor, Joseph Breen, in 1934. It was voluntary and resulted in a toning down of the sexual imagery, although more sophisticated techniques were used to present sexual messages. The ‘sex goddess’

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\(^{207}\) AoHP, Tape 5; ULOHP, Tape 8.

stereotype still persisted. There was Jean Harlow in the late 1920s, Mae West in the 1930s and Lana Turner in the 1940s and 1950s. Clarke Gable’s ‘gaze’ at Dorothy Mackail in No Man of Her Own in 1933 was excised by Montgomery but the film was passed for viewing in Ireland.  

As noted above, these stars attracted both the female as well as the male ‘gaze’. They were also backed up by magazines. Broadway and Hollywood Movies was regarded by the Catholic Truth Society as part of this ‘general pornographic trend’ and was so popular that when the Censorship Board requested issues from Eason and Sons in January 1933, there were no copies in stock. Another genre in the inter-war period was the melodrama, particularly maternal melodrama. Such films have also been described as ‘women’s films’ which offered a ‘window onto the world of female identity, desire and sexuality’. Usually they starred a well-known female actress with whose ‘passions, conflicts and repressed desires the audience could identify and empathise’. The theme of the wealthy, educated, single heroine was often presented either as ‘oppositional or parallel’ to the married woman and marriage. For example, there was the educated, wealthy, single Bette Davis, ‘Judith Traherne’ in Dark Victory in 1939 who found love too late, and the working woman, ‘Kitty Foyle’, played by Ginger Rogers in the 1940 film of the same name, who was torn between being single and married. But no matter how poor any marriage might be, it could not be ‘destroyed’ by the strong, independent heroine. Perhaps an Irish version of this theme was Song O’ My Heart, the Fox film released in 1930 in which marrying for love and not money was a central theme. The self-sacrificing, good mother was, of course, another theme which was particularly prevalent in films for Irish-American audiences. Mother Machree directed by John Ford for Fox and released in 1928 exemplified the genre as did the figure of ‘Melanie’ in the 1939-released Gone With the Wind. Romantic love dominated American melodramas in this period.

Campaigns against American films
The predominance of American films in the Irish censor’s work did not unduly concern American officials in Dublin in the 1930s. Consul General Frederick Sterling reported that ‘intense or titillating emotional scenes between the sexes’ were excised from American films. Another US official

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212 Fink and Holden, ‘Pictures from the Margins of Marriage’, pp. 239–45.
213 NARA, S/D, RG 59, 1231, roll 1, Sterling to State Department, 20 May 1932.
Henry Balch focused on the vigilant work of Reverend Richard Devane, SJ, who criticised the ‘basic vulgarity of ninety-nine per cent of America productions’, their ‘materialism’ and ‘monopoly’ of the Irish market. This attention mirrored the campaign of the US Roman Catholic hierarchy, who issued a ‘black list’ with the names of all films which parishioners should not view. Among its leaders were Dr Cantwell, Bishop of Los Angeles and native of Tipperary, who objected to ‘too many bathroom and bedroom scenes’ and Dr Curley, Archbishop of Baltimore and native of Athlone, County Westmeath, who started the American Catholic League of Decency against ‘filthy films’. Other clergymen such as Bishop McNamee of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise in 1937 took this further and saw a direct link between cinema and female emigration to the USA; ‘they are lured by the fascinations of the garish distractions of … glamorous unrealities of the films’. Once again, following earlier fears about female emigrants in the USA at the turn of the twentieth century, it was young women who were seen to be more susceptible to cinema’s messages. As chapter three indicated, the decision to emigrate was more complex than this, but film offered insights into other worlds both real and fictional which made impressions on the young in particular. On the other hand, the film industry promoted a positive view of itself also. In 1933, the results of a survey for the Kinematography Weekly, a British film trade journal, revealed that going to the cinema taught some Irish girls ‘good bravery, manners, love of country [and] generosity’. In other words, it was suggested that girls imbibed positive values from attending films.

By the eve of World War Two, opponents of American film drew on the experience of other countries to support their arguments about the effect of film on women specifically. Dr J. McAlister Brew, Education Secretary of the National Association of Girls’ Clubs in England, believed that the Hollywood film took the place of the ‘mother, the home and the lover’ in the working-class girl’s life. The UCC lecturer, Brigid McCarthy, also referred to in chapter five, described such views as ‘unusual’ but this did not prevent her from expounding on them in an article and extending the same argument

215 Irish Independent, 19 June 1934; 6 July 1934; 16 July 1934.
217 Micháel Ó Ciosóig told the emigration commission in 1948 that ‘films make the young emigrant more at home … abroad’ because they ‘already know Bing Crosby and Mickey Mouse. Dublin is less known than Boston. Dáil Éireann is only something in the papers.’ MARLTRCD, AMP, MS 8301, S.S. 1 (a), M. 74, Micháel Ó Ciosóig, Connemara, p. 6.
218 Finlay, Gavin, “Celluloid Menace”, Art or the “Essential Habit of the Age”, History Ireland, 15, 5 (September–October 2007), p. 36.
to working-class Irish people. Meanwhile, Devane and groups such as the Gaelic League, Gaelic Athletic Association and the Irish Tourist Association of Ireland called for the establishment of an indigenous film industry, on the basis that ‘we cannot be sons of the Gael and citizens of Hollywood at the same time.’

Father Felim O’Brien, professor of Philosophy in University College Galway, believed the Irish ‘are fast losing our national consciousness, and are being absorbed into a dangerous, characterless, Hollywood cosmopolitanism that is neutral to our traditional, moral, religious and national values’. Not all Catholic clergy held the same clear-cut position. Bishop Michael Browne in Galway was not opposed to the American motion picture but to the ‘gangster’ and other types which had a bad influence on children. Neither did he believe that American films harmed the revival of the Irish language, which was part of the Gaelic League-led opposition to film. Monsignor Hynes, president of University College Galway, agreed with the latter point and personally liked ‘low-brow’ action-type films. Indeed he worked with the management of Cullerton’s theatre to punish any students who disturbed film showings. Two priests ran cinemas showing the full range of American films as fund-raising activities for their respective parishes; Fr Connolly in Bundoran, County Donegal, showed the ‘sophisticated’ films to townspeople and country people saw ‘gangster and western films’. Father J. F. Stokes in Dundalk, who operated The Magnet, offered the same selection of films.

Nonetheless by 1942 after seventeen years as censor, Montgomery believed that the ‘menace of Los Angelesization’ had ‘lowered all decent conceptions of manly honour and womanly virtue’. Throughout his tenure, his work focused on weeding out sex, divorce, birth control and dancing. But it was the importance given in American films to ‘sex appeal’ and when the Irish female figure was not dressed modestly and portrayed in a self-effacing, pure manner, which particularly bothered him.

During World War Two, American films no less than German and British films were the subject of the Irish ‘censor’s blade’ due to the


221 Quoted in Anelius, *National Action*, p. x.


promotion of the Allied cause, its challenge to Irish neutrality and the preservation of the state.\textsuperscript{224} The arrival of American troops into Northern Ireland not only caused difficulties for the Éamon de Valera-led government from a political perspective but also brought the influence of Hollywood even closer to home. Lake argues that American soldiers personified the Hollywood stereotype which ‘coded American men as lovers, as sexual, as men to be looked at’. Concerns about their effects on women’s moral and social behaviour were present in the south as well as the north.\textsuperscript{225} As the war proceeded, however, film attendance declined, though it was due to import restrictions, film censorship and reduced electricity supplies rather than a response to censorship and vigilance. Among the American films which dominated Irish cinemas were westerns (\textit{Northwest Mountain Police}), literary dramas (\textit{Jane Eyre}), historical dramas (\textit{Cardinal Richelieu}), mysteries and thrillers (\textit{Double Indemnity}, \textit{The Mad Miss Manton}), comedies (\textit{Allergies to Love}, \textit{Hail the Conquering Hero}), musicals (\textit{Can’t Help Singing}, \textit{Irish Eyes are Smiling}, \textit{Meet Me in St Louis}) and religious films (\textit{The Keys of the Kingdom}). In 1943, Martin Quigley, the American intelligence officer who worked under the cover of the American film industry, toured the country, meeting cinema owners, clergy, newspaper editors and the public. He confirmed that the Irish motion-picture-goer liked the same types of film which were most popular in America, particularly musicals, comedies, detective, ‘Wild West’ and newsreel which provided information about relatives and friends in the USA and Britain. Star-studded musical films and particularly those featuring Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald were ‘very well liked’ while the \textit{Song of Bernadette} with Jennifer Jones in the lead role was a box office hit in 1943.\textsuperscript{226}

Foreign films equated to American-produced and still circulated after the war even though the vigilance campaigns resumed.\textsuperscript{227} The portrayal of single women as working, with an income and choices became more normal in American films in the post-war period, yet the traditional concepts of marriage, albeit a companionate one, and the nuclear family remained prominent. The focus on the American family in films presented the audience with the problems and difficulties of marital life but all

\textsuperscript{227} \textit{Irish Independent}, 28 April 1937; 14 August 1937; Curtis, \textit{A Challenge to Democracy}, p. 102.
was solved by love and patience. The *Andy Hardy* films made between 1937 and 1958, in which Mickey Rooney played the fictional character, were sentimental, moralistic comedies representing the ordinary American family’s life. Family and domesticity remained a constant theme with Doris Day personifying the modern woman. As noted above, the ‘sex goddess’ persisted and Lana Turner maintained her popularity. The 1954 release, *There’s No Business Like Show Business*, starred Marilyn Monroe as the beautiful hat-check girl who becomes the target of Donald O’Connor’s attention. The appeal of Rita Hayworth made her another star attraction. Nonetheless, *Gilda* was rejected by the censor, Richard Hayes, although passed by the appeal board in 1946.228

Social change and the Cold War also produced more hard-edged films. The dark side of American life, as portrayed in the ‘hard-boiled’ depression literature of Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain, arrived on screen in the *film noir* genre with male heroes displaying ‘masochistic’ tendencies and with ‘domineering women’. Rockett suggests that many were passed by the censor because the theme echoed official ideology. *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) were released as well as *Double Indemnity* (1944) following a successful appeal to the censor. *The Postman Always Rings Twice* starring Lana Turner was not shown until 1962. In *noir* films both men and women led desperate lives trapped in poor circumstances, having failed to achieve the ‘American dream’. They evolved from the gangster film of the 1930s and led to the ‘youth culture’ films which on the one hand, dealt with youth rebellion characterised by James Dean and on the other hand, presented Elvis Presley in ‘rock and roll’ films. By the early 1960s, young American women and men were portrayed as challenging conventional social norms and adult authority.229

Depending on the group, some commentators recognised the power of Hollywood film for good and for ill; it offered cheap, accessible entertainment for all classes and was educational but it also presented poor values, false emotions and illusory glamour which some believed affected women more than men.230 From the mid-1950s onwards, cinema audience

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228 Rockett, *Irish Film Censorship*, p. 128.
began to decline due to the continuing growth of suburbs, emigration and increasingly television. From 1953, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) television signal was received in counties along the east coast and along the border counties from 1955, and Raidió Telefís Éireann was established in 1961. Nonetheless, cinema remained in Beere’s words ‘one of the greatest social institutions of the world’, and Cathcart comments that television replaced cinema in promoting ‘the Los Angelisation of Ireland’ through American films, situation comedies, crime or cowboy series.231 In the early 1960s, cinema-going was still synonymous for some in the Catholic Church with ‘the luxurious shallow life of Hollywood’.232 This was an outdated view of Hollywood films which were now an accepted form of entertainment and escapism for many, including many Catholic clergy.

**American music and dance**

Other American cultural imports that gained widespread following among young women and men were American music and dance, despite the efforts of Irish conservative forces to restrict them. The popularity of dancing in urban and rural areas has been established by Brennan as it moved from house dances, to local halls and later ball rooms.233 Facilitated by technological developments in recording, the American commercial music industry evolved during the late nineteenth century and popular music became a thriving business in the early twentieth century. John Healy’s mother brought a gramophone and records home to Mayo from New York in the 1920s. The records were mainly jigs, reels and hornpipes but she could dance the Charleston also. It was the latter along with ragtime and later jazz, emanating from the black community, that influenced popular music and dance in the USA, Ireland and elsewhere. In 1923, US Consul Henry P. Starrett, reported from his largely urban Belfast district that it was ‘probably safe to say’ that American popular music ‘predominates at all dances’.234 Writing from Cork in 1929, US Consul John A. Gamon commented that ‘American “jazz” music is heard everywhere – on the streets, in the theatres, in the homes, and at the dances’.235


Listening and dancing to jazz music offered young women and men another leisure time activity that was mixed-sex, but its effects on young women’s behaviour worried some. Conservative forces in the US already viewed jazz as a danger to traditional values because the music was improvised, and as the Catholic magazine *America* noted in 1922, ‘moral disaster is coming to hundreds of young American girls through the pathological, nerve-irritating sex-exciting music of jazz orchestras.’ It attracted attention in Ireland for exactly the same reasons: popularity with young people, particularly young women and threats to national stability and moral behaviour along with fears of ‘denationalising the people’. The Catholic Church hierarchy drove the campaign against jazz dancing in Ireland. Unlike Irish dancing, few jazz dances were ‘free from sin’ and most were ‘the occasion for sin’. Young women’s appearance and behaviour were again a focus. Dancing and immodest attire went hand in hand and parents, especially mothers, were publicly criticised for allowing their daughters (not their sons) to go dancing ‘immodestly dressed, unchaperoned and unprotected’. Reverend Devane linked young women’s exposure to American jazz dancing with emigration. Some priests successfully campaigned to have dances halls closed and Rev. L. P. Muireadhaigh from Dundalk told a meeting of the Maynooth Union in 1928 that there were ‘very few people now’ who did not admit that there was some ‘evil in connection with foreign dances’, and of course ‘those who practice them, especially girls, after a time cease to have any nobility of mind or sense of shame or desire for anything connected with Faith or Nationality.’

Opposition had come also from the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), which introduced a ban on ‘foreign dances’ in March 1932 with the penalty of expulsion from the association. Some members felt that ‘jazz was dead in Gaelic-speaking circles and the GAA had done much to kill it’ while others felt ‘jazz was not dying.’ Although the discussion revolved around jazz, the GAA was unable to define ‘foreign dances’. The same question went unanswered at the Camogie Association national convention held in Cavan in January 1935, but the ban was adopted. The Gaelic League favoured the same action against any ‘Gaelic Leaguer who took part in Jazz’. It frequently criticised the sponsored radio programmes because of the inclusion of jazz

238 *Irish Times*, 5 January 1938.
music. On one occasion, Seán MacEntee, the Fianna Fáil Minister for Finance, was blamed because he ‘has a soul buried in jazz and is selling the musical soul of the nation for the dividends of sponsored jazz programmes. He is jazzing every night of the week.’ Although Taoiseach Éamon de Valera lent his support to the campaign and the restoration of ‘national forms of dancing’, in January 1934 neither he nor his ministers attended the opening of a Conradh na Gaeilge ‘anti-jazz campaign’ in Mohill, County Leitrim.

Neither did the de Valera-led government follow up on a suggestion by J. Henecy of Henecy’s Gramaphone and Records, 18 Crow Street, Dublin that ‘there ought to be a censorship of records.’ The visit of the ‘Last of the Red Hot Mammas’, Sophie Tucker, to Dublin where she performed her jazz routine at the Capitol and then signed autographs on her records in Clery’s Gramophone Department in May 1931 provoked no opposition. Neither did any of the nine Woolworth stores receive protests; instead the sales of ‘modern’ music boomed in the inter-war period. In 1935, the Public Dance Halls Act was passed, which gave district judges the power to grant licences and aimed, in Flann O’Brien’s words, ‘to wipe out abuses bearing on everything from sanitation to immorality’, but it was not fully implemented and dancing continued. O’Brien estimated in 1941 that there were approximately 1,200 licensed halls in the country holding around 5,000 dances annually and 5,000 unlicensed ones, and entry prices suited all pockets. He calculated that one Irish dance was played to every twenty modern dances.

During World War Two, the GAA was clearer in its criticism: ‘Jazz is a negro production, while Irish dancing is traditionally Gaelic’. The former had ‘undesirable associations’ while the latter was ‘modest, graceful, stylish and distinct’ and the ‘nearest approach to contiguity is the joining of partly out-stretched hands.’ The stationing of 300,000 American soldiers in Northern Ireland seemed to reaffirm for some the links between jazz, dancing and loose morality. Wills notes that the soldiers transformed the ‘social and sexual landscape, for a time at least’, but once again Catholic and indeed Protestant clergy seemed to blame the young,

241 Leitrim Observer, 6 January 1934.
242 NAI, D/J, H315/6l, J. Henecy to P. S. Úa Dubhghaill TD.
243 Irish Independent, 7 May 1931.
244 Walsh, When the Shopping Was Good, p. 78.
246 Anelius, National Action, pp. 109, 111.
Irish female for the spread of licentiousness rather than the American soldier.  

The popularity of jazz music was also assisted by the development of Irish radio broadcasting which began slowly with a station in Dublin in 1926 and Cork in 1927. Soon it became a popular medium with the number of licences reaching 100,000 in 1933. Both the Irish radio station, 2RN, and the BBC offered popular music or ‘jazz’ to their listeners, much to the annoyance of opposition groups. Attempts to ban jazz from the airwaves came from within the station also. T. J. Kiernan, Director of Broadcasting in Radio Éireann, tried to persuade advertisers to use ‘quality’ music rather than jazz musicians and singers. In 1943, Radio Éireann stopped playing jazz music due to pressure from politicians and did not resume until January 1948. This did not affect its popularity as young people were also loyal listeners to the popular music coming from other sources. The commercial radio station Radio Luxembourg, in existence since 1932, was directed at listeners in Ireland and Britain. The BBC’s North American Services radio carried American music as did the many American short-wave transmitters in Europe from 1942 onwards. Beginning in 1943, the American Forces Network located transmitters near major American bases which included those in Northern Ireland, and the American Broadcasting Station in Europe operated from 1944. By the end of World War Two, when the band vocalist had risen to prominence, the music of Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, Doris Day, Peggy Lee, The Andrews Sisters, Lena Horne and Ella Fitzgerald was well known in Ireland.  

There was a revival of the vigilance campaigns led by the Legion of Mary and Knights of St Columbus in the post-World War Two period. However,

250 See http://www.rte.ie/laweb.  
the Catholic Church’s anti-dancing views became ‘rather ambiguous’ in the 1950s because dances were a source of income for parishes. Arlene Mulkerins recalled that ‘dixieland jazz and swing were all the rage’ after the 1940s and that rock and roll was the ‘next big thing’. ‘Rhythm and blues’ and ‘rock and roll’ emerged with singers, such as Ray Charles, Chuck Berry, ‘Little Richard’, Bill Haley and Elvis Presley, attracted young followers and extensively influenced the Irish music scene. Radio Luxembourg audience report surveys for 1955 noted that 3.9 per cent of its average adult audience was in Britain and Ireland, north and south. Most of its listeners were in the young (16–29 years) category and were in lower income groups. In 1955, when radio presenters Niall and Eric Boden presented a programme with rock and roll music, hundreds of young people flocked into the Henry Street radio centre in Dublin city. The ‘ChaChaCha’ dance was publicised in Ireland by American disc jockey Ronald Murray Shanik during a round-the-world tour. The style of American performers’ music and dance would heavily influence the Irish dancing and indeed show-band scene beginning in the late 1950s. By February 1956, one of the distinguishing features of teenage culture was that a young woman had a ‘room of her own’ where she could entertain her friends, where she could have a ‘jazz session when she feels like it’.

**Conclusion**

Vance Packard, the American social critic, wrote in 1957,

> For better or worse, most American habits and tastes and institutions are eventually imported in Britain: American tobacco and films, American car-designs and hair styles, even American accents – and American advertising techniques, some of them what many people would term sinister.

Britain was a different place to Ireland. During the forty-year period under...
review, Ireland was characterised by censorship, clerical dominance, legislation governing sexual behaviour and an under-developed economy. Social divisions and contradictions abounded. There was regular high attendance at mass, novenas, sodalities where ‘alien influences’ were constantly criticised and, in the public space, vigilance groups were active and politicians upheld Catholic social thinking. Yet as noted in this chapter and in chapter three, American ideas, practices and products slowly permeated Irish society, and Irish women were at the centre of this process. Catholic authorities saw links between Ireland’s problems, external influences and women’s changing roles. In other words, they saw unwelcome changes in women's behaviour and blamed American influences. Yet the primary reference points for women in their own lives related to domestic contexts centring on economic and social conditions, geographic location and religious and political forces. Just as chapters one and two revealed that the Enlightenment shaped the woman patriot and the educated woman this chapter suggests that American culture influenced Irish women, and Irish society in general.

Different images and models of American womanhood and definitions of femininity were read about, seen in the cinema and imagined. ‘America’ came to mean certain things for Irish women. The ‘American way’ incorporated materialism, godlessness, divorce and danger but also progress, modernity, higher standards of living, independence for women, birth control and companionate, loving marriages. ‘Americanisation’ had entered everyday lives through the dominance of labour-saving equipment, entertainment, fashion and standards of style. For others, American standards were aspirational; American women were ‘outgoing’, could talk ‘freely’, ‘could work, could have more money … a woman in business could be doing very well … driving cars’. This persistent and expanding exposure to different representations of the American woman and her life, combined with the emigrant experience, expanded some women’s horizons and contributed to a raising of expectations for a better quality of life for themselves and their families which would not be fulfilled until well into the 1960s.

260 Daly, The Slow Failure, pp. 36, 44–45.
261 See Daly, The Slow Failure, p. 135 for more on women’s changing expectations of marriage. Patrick Kavanagh described ‘the claim to portray American life’ in ‘Cat on a Hot Tin Roof’ by Tennessee Williams as ‘painful to any sensitive person’. Irish Farmers Journal, 2 May 1959.
263 AOHP, Tape 5.
This chapter has provided an historical perspective on the phenomenon of the Americanisation of Irish society. The dissemination of American literature and cinema was an important part of this cultural encounter. The next section will offer a cultural and literary critique of another cultural trend present in early twentieth-century Ireland. It will explore how avant garde modernism became part of Irish women’s cultural production.