

Moral maids and materialistic mistresses: Irish domestic servants and their American employers, 1850–1920

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During the last half of the nineteenth century, Ireland's once fertile green fields gave way to a deadly famine, leaving the country in economic and political ruin and forcing her starving people to emigrate. Between the years of 1840 and 1850 well over two million people emigrated from Ireland to countries around the globe. During these same years, America was enjoying the profits of an industrial revolution, making the United States a favourite destination for almost one million Irish immigrants. Of these, around half were women and they, like their male counterparts, came in search of gainful employment.¹ Irish women emigrated to America at a particularly opportune time. Due to the country's rapidly developing consumer culture, Irish women were highly employable, as America's cultural transformation from a producer to a consumer society created a plethora of domestic servant positions. American middle-class women suddenly turned to hired domestic help to maintain their homes, rather than maintaining them themselves, and the flood of Irish immigrant women provided the necessary population to fulfill this collective consumer desire.

Yet America's cultural morphing into a consumer society not only heavily influenced Irish women's employment opportunities, but also created whole new definitions of public and private space and reshaped middle-class mistresses' domestic duties.² When goods had been produced in the home, women stayed strictly within the domestic sphere, working constantly to provide for their families' needs. However, when the commodities of the home became purchasable items, women left that arena and entered the public sphere as shoppers. In a sense, the consumer culture widened the domestic sphere to include the public, or consumer, space. Middle-class women's new identities as 'shoppers' created quite a domestic predicament. Taking on the responsibility of household shopping did not free middle-class women from their more traditional roles as mother, wife, and maintainer of harmonious domesticity. Rather, her role as 'shopper' became an addendum to her

1 K.A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford, 1985). 2 See E.S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (Oxford, 1989), and S.A. Cordery, 'Women in Industrialising America' in C. W. Calhoun (ed.), *The Gilded Age: Essays on the origins of Modern America* (Delaware, 1996), p. 112 & ff, for discussion on the entry of women to the public sphere.

already long list of domestic duties. For many middle-class women, they found the demands of having to work in two places at once, both the home and the public sphere, too taxing. To create more time for themselves, middle-class women turned to domestic servants.

The flood of Irish female immigrants throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth provided the perfect means of fulfilling middle-class women's need for domestic servants. Irish women headed out of Ireland literally starving for work and, realising the economic potential of America, chose this country over all others as their new home of financial opportunity. It is estimated that between 1851 and 1920 about 1.2 million Irish women emigrated to America, and the majority found employment there as domestic servants.³ Between the years of 1860 and 1920 female workers claiming domestic service as their occupation climbed from 559,908 to 1,012,133.⁴ Additionally, the Women's Education and Industrial Union, a Boston-based organisation whose work for the advancement of women made them one of the nineteenth century's most successful and influential social reformist groups, conducted an investigation of the number and nationality of women in domestic service. The results of this study showed that Irish women held close to fifteen percent of all domestic servant positions nationwide. And, in areas as densely populated by Irish immigrants like Massachusetts, the Irish made up more than half of the domestic service work force.⁵ When the sheer volume of Irish immigrant women is combined with their desire to earn wages and the cultural shift to buy domestic services, these women positioned themselves and were positioned by the needs of middle-class women as one of the hottest commodities of the nineteenth century.

But it soon became apparent that employee and employer held rather different perspectives on the responsibilities of the domestic servant. The average Irish female immigrant came not only as an unskilled worker, but with little experience of any of the modern cleaning, cooking, or laundry techniques that were the backbone of the middle-class home. Within a short time after the influx of Irish domestics, middle-class women across the country realized what their 'Irish commodity' truly needed was a means of standardisation. Middle class women, and particularly social reformists of the time, called for domestic service to be shaped into an industry with the means to produce a perfectly standardised product. Thus, during the 1890s a proliferation of books and periodical literature addressed this issue in an attempt to metaphorically create a domestic servant factory line.⁶ Mrs C.H.

3 A.J. Fitzpatrick and W.E. Vaughan (eds) *Irish Historical Statistics, Population 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), pp. 261-66. 4 J.C.G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860* (Washington, 1864), p. 675; W.C. Hunt, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, Vol. IV: Occupations* (Washington, 1923), p. 358. 5 'Number and Nationality of Women in Domestic Service' in *Bulletin of the Domestic Reform League*, 3: 1, October 1908. 6 For a discussion of the standardisation of domestic training, see L.M. Salmon, 'Domestic Service from the Standpoint of the Employee' in *Cosmopolitan*, July 1893, pp. 347-353; K.G. Wells, 'the Servant Girl of the Future' in *North American Review*, July 1893, pp. 716-721;

Stone, a concerned mistress and dedicated advocate of social reform, set forth in *The Problems of Domestic Service* the deficiencies of these domestic servants and the means through which to create the model maid.⁷ Stone claimed that many of the problems within domestic service arose because mistresses have merely viewed their girls as purchased housekeeping machines and have overlooked that these servants were mere human beings with needs and failings. Stone recognised the humanity of these servants and realised that the remedy to resolve the frustrating relationship that existed between mistress and maid was to create a standardised training regime for new domestic servants. Thus, towards the end of her book, Stone proposed that each and every city nationwide open a 'Training Home' to instruct these domestic servants in such tasks as 'the proper way of sweeping stairs, with a brush and dust pan, into which the dust from each step is swept, so spreading it as little as possible.'⁸ These 'Training Homes' would ultimately produce pre-packaged model maids who could not fail to satisfy the most exacting mistress. Training homes would, therefore, produce the ultimate in standardized domestic commodities.

The Domestic Reform League of Boston, one of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union's most active departments, answered Stone's call. On 25 August 1897, Ada M. Child, chairman of the Committee to form the School of Housekeeping, wrote a letter to the members of the Domestic Reform League proposing the establishment of a School of Housekeeping. In this letter, she indicated how this school would enable both mistress and maid to obtain training in domestic service: '[it will] furnish an opportunity to both employer and employee, to study the science of housekeeping; its practical application to housework; and the principles which govern the domestic machinery.'⁹ The Domestic Reform League quickly responded to Child's suggestion, and by the fall of 1897 the School of Housekeeping officially opened its doors for instruction, promising to remedy 'the servant girl problem' by helping to train both mistress and maid in the proper way to tend house'.¹⁰

The difference in the course programmes offered to mistresses and maids further shows how this standardization process 'commodified' Irish domestics. The classes for the mistresses helped to enhance their understanding and skills of the art of housekeeping. They were invited to the school twice a week to listen leisurely to lectures whose topics ranged from house sanitation to the art of housekeeping to domestic service and its relation to the industrial problem. It was as much of a chance to socialise with the leaders in the trade of domestic service as it was to learn about housekeeping.¹¹ The programme for the maids, however, had

J.M. Parker, 'Profit Sharing and Domestic Services as discussed at a Women's Club' in *North American Review*, May 1898, pp. 639-40. 7 Mrs C.H. Stone, *The Problems of Domestic Service* (St Louis, 1892). 8 *Ibid.*, p. 28. 9 Ada M. Child, 'A Letter to the Domestic Reform League' (1897). 10 *School of Housekeeping Bulletin*, 1897. 11 *Course Bulletin for Employers*, November 1898, School of Housekeeping.

none of these leisurely aspects. Theirs was a regime with the sole purpose of rigorously shaping these domestics into model maids. Girls who signed up for this training committed themselves to an eight-month-long programme that was split between a five-month classroom stint and a three month probationary training period in the home of a potential employer. Within the classroom programme standardisation reached its peak as its goal was not only to instruct future servants on how to complete such obvious duties as caring for the fire or the bedrooms and preparing the three main meals, but also became as specific as 'care of parlor and halls, and answering the door-bell properly.'¹² All aspects of a general domestic's duties were covered, ensuring that School of Housekeeping graduates would each be identically trained, and therefore practically interchangeable, as far as employers were concerned.

Yet, the standardisation of these Irish maids proved problematic. Training schools seemed like the perfect answer to a middle-class American culture that enjoyed the fruits of an industrial revolution. The modern factory produced a plethora of new and purchasable goods that helped to create the social standards for the middle-class home and family, so what impeded such a system from producing an Irish domestic servant who upheld these same standards within her work? The problem was a consequence of America's own Gilded Age. Most of these Irish maids arrived in the United States during the emergence of the culture of consumption and, like many Americans, were overwhelmed by the mass of material wealth. In a letter to her family back in Ireland, one Irish girl ecstatically describes the opportunity for materialistic gain in America, 'I can have here as many gold rings and diamonds and silk dresses as I like!!!'¹³ And many Irish women had for the first time the prospect of a disposable income that would enable them to purchase such items. By 1893, Lucy Salmon, an expert on domestic service and professor of home economics at Vassar College, calculated that, at a lowest approximate estimate, employers paid \$160,000,000 annually in cash wages to domestic servants.¹⁴ A survey of servant wages in Boston at the turn of the century indicated that the weekly average wage of an Irish domestic servant was \$4.13, making her total monthly income close to \$20.00.¹⁵ In comparison, factory workers, the second largest occupational group amongst immigrant women, averaged a weekly wage of \$6.22, giving a total monthly wage of almost \$25.00.¹⁶ At first glance the factory girl appears to be the more advantaged, but it must be noted that she, unlike the domestic servant, had to pay for all her own living expenses from this salary. The domestic servant's whole salary, on the other hand, was hers to spend as

¹² *Course Bulletin for Employees, 1899-1900.* ¹³ R.A.M. Harris and B.E. O'Keffe (eds), *The Search for Missing Friends: Irish Immigrant Advertisements placed in the Boston Pilot, Vol. 4: 1857-1860* (Boston, 1995), xxviii. ¹⁴ Salmon, 'Domestic Service', p. 346. ¹⁵ Report of an Investigation of 500 Immigrant Women in Boston (Boston, 1907). ¹⁶ C.D. Wright, 'The Working Girls of Boston' in *The Fifteenth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labour for 1884* (Boston, 1889), reprint L. Stein and P. Taft (eds), *American Labor: From Conspiracy to Collective Bargaining* (New York), p. 81.

she pleased since her employers paid for not merely bed and board, but work clothing as well.

However, the Irish domestic servants' potential to become an active participant within the culture of consumption points to one of the most complex and contradictory aspects of the mistress-maid relationship. The mistress could not allow her servant to become a consumer simply because she could not afford for her servant to leave the home to fulfill her materialistic desires. Obviously there is an inherent contradiction within the mistress' need to deny her Irish servant access to the consumer culture. As I discussed earlier, the middle-class woman had herself become the most predominant and active member of the consumer culture. The question then is if the mistress herself enjoyed the freedom to consume, how and why did she deny this luxury to her servant?

The answer to this question lies in the complexity of the nineteenth-century middle-class female identity. Although the industrialisation of American society had allowed the middle-class woman to leave the home as a domestic consumer, this had not relieved her of her duty as the moral barometer of the household. As historian Stacy Cordery has argued, despite the fact that modern America had provided her with more leisure time to roam within the public sphere, she was still obliged to conform to the 'cult of true womanhood'.¹⁷ Thus, the middle-class woman found herself in quite a predicament. On the one hand, society expected her to continue her role as both domestic moral and material barometer. Yet, on the other hand, the transformations within American society during the nineteenth century had provided women with both the responsibility and the opportunity to leave the house to become fully fledged members of the public, or consumer, sphere.

One of the ways that middle-class women attempted to solve their paradoxical positions was by training their domestic servants to perform as surrogates for themselves not only as household labourers, but as moral compasses as well. In a sense, these middle-class mistresses needed to assimilate the Irish domestic servant into American society and turn her into a woman who reflected the moral and ethical character of the mistress herself. In an article entitled 'Ireland's Daughters in Their New Home,' Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and advocate of the 'cult of true womanhood,' discussed the vulnerable nature of Irish women in America and the important role the mistress should play in her life: 'Thousands of young Irish girls have landed on our shores, utter strangers, far from advice and protection of fathers and mothers . . . a kind, consistent, watchful, careful mistress will keep her servants in the way of honesty; a careless or incompetent one tempts them to fall.'¹⁸ Mistresses were, according to Stowe, responsible for ensuring the moral development of the Irish servant girl, and seeing that their Irish domestics adopted their mistresses' middle class value system. And, this value system emphasised,

¹⁷ Cordery, 'Women in Industrialising America', p. 112. ¹⁸ H. Beecher Stowe, 'Ireland's Daughters in Their New Homes' in *Donahoe's Magazine*, January 1879, pp. 53-4.

above all else, the importance of good work, self-advancement through cultural activities, and, most crucially, high character.

Mistresses' attempts to assimilate their Irish maids into an American middle-class Protestant culture were assisted by several nineteenth-century domestic service instructional manuals and popular periodicals. These manuals and articles show the mistresses' desires to fully shape their Irish maids into model American women who were expressions of the 'culture of character,' and thus could be entrusted to maintain the moral as well as the material aspects of the household.¹⁹ In both *Plain Talk and Friendly Advice to Domestic*s (author unknown) and *Letters to Persons Who are Engaged in Domestic Service* by Catherine Beecher, sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, both authors warned their servants of the evils of squandering their money on silken dresses and personal ornaments.²⁰ In the American middle-class spirit of using the dollar to get ahead, Beecher discouraged servants from buying 'showy dresses', and urged them to place the money thus saved into a savings account where interest would be earned. The thrifty servant could thus spend the time she would have squandered shopping, educating herself through reading daily to her mistress.

The suggestion of acceptable leisure activities also played a large role in persuading these women to adopt exemplary middle-class standards. Catherine Beecher indicated that attending religious meetings in the evenings was a perfectly acceptable activity if done to further one's understanding of and faith in Christ. Religious meetings were strictly for serious worship and she warned domestics against attending meetings for the purely social purpose of engaging members of the opposite sex in conversation.²¹ Beecher's sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, continued this line of advice by outlining some rules for leisure time:

Rule the first is that no young servant should be out alone after dark giving reasons for this rule that are easily understood. Rule the second, that no one comes to the back door after a certain hour, because their friends are quite welcome to come to the front door; and once it is dark, bad characters are about, and young girls are easily frightened.²²

19 Cultural historian W. Susman coined the phrase 'culture of character' in his book *Culture as History: the Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1989). Susman argues that nineteenth-century America was obsessed with obtaining and developing citizens who had a high character, expressed through strict adherence to the protestant work ethic, and morally acceptable recreational activities. **20** C.E. Beecher, *Letters to Persons Who are Engaged in Domestic Service* (New York, 1842), and (author unknown) *Plain Talk and Friendly Advice to Domestic*s with Counsel on Home Matters (Boston, 1855). **21** Beecher, *Letters*, pp. 122–5. **22** H. Beecher Stowe, 'Mistress and Maid' in *Donahoe's Magazine*, May 1885, p. 442.

Thus the mistresses' household standards stripped the servant of her freedom to choose when and how she would spend her leisure time, a time over which the employer should have had little control.

The question that begs to be asked is did these Irish maids heed their mistresses' advice? Was the mistress-maid relationship as truly influential as these mistresses hoped it would be? The answer to both of these questions seems to be an unqualified 'yes'. In several interviews, surveys, and articles written about the social activities of Irish maids, these domestics appeared to have assimilated the moral values of their 'concerned' mistresses. In an interview with Mary Meehan, an Irish woman who spent all her working years as a household cook, she described how she and the other maids only dressed as her mistress wanted, in the traditional black sturdy frock during working hours and in modest dresses with fashionable ribbons in their hair during hours of leisure.²³ In a survey conducted by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union on the social conditions in domestic service, 113 Irish servants in Boston claimed to have spent their leisure time and money just as Beecher, Stowe, and the other above mentioned mistresses had instructed them to do. These Irish servants used their leisure time to read, sew, or attend church services or socials and they diligently placed their money into secure savings accounts or sent it back to their families in Ireland.²⁴ An article in *Donahoe's Magazine*, one of the most widely read Irish-American monthlies, detailed the monetary support these Irish maids gave to their homeland:

Mr. Patrick Donahoe furnishes us with a significant fact. There are numerous offices in Boston for the transmission of money orders . . . during the four weeks ending on Dec. 20, 1879, drafts of \$2,250, and representing £5,736, passed through his hands. The senders were almost exclusively servant girls.²⁵

Finally, in a letter home to Ireland, household servant Mary Harlon proudly explained that after only a few short months in New York city she was, 'happy in her present post, she now had a bank account of eighty dollars, and was putting aside money for a new silk dress.'²⁶ While Mary clearly did have consumer desires, her ability to prioritise saving over spending signifies her apparent adoption of a middle-class value system. Each of the above examples not only validates the mistresses' attempts to block their maids access to the consumer culture, but they also reveal that through living and working in American middle-class homes, these

²³ M. Meehan, 'Irish Cook-Brookfield', interview by L. Bassett, in *American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940*, available at <http://www.loc.wpaintro/wpahome>. ²⁴ *Social Conditions in Domestic Service*, prepared by the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor in collaboration with the Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Boston (Boston, 1900). ²⁵ Unknown author, 'What is Thought of Our Irish Girls Abroad' in *Donahoe's Magazine*, May 1880, p. 437. ²⁶ Harris and O'Keffe, *Search*, xxxii.

maids were successfully assimilated, shedding their Irish rural identities to become mirror images of their American middle-class mistresses.

The 'americanisation' of Irish maids accomplished its main goal: freeing the mistress from her domestic responsibilities. However, what these middle-class women gained – personal freedom – these Irish servants lost. Initially, Irish immigrant women were so economically desperate that sacrificing their personal freedom to provide monetary relief for their suffering families back home was but a small price to pay. However, as Ireland's economic recovery from years of famine relieved these Irish domestic servants from their financial responsibility to their kin, they began to realise what a high price they had paid to enter service. Irish women began to discover that they had given up their independence and their Irish identities to become servants.

This realisation by Irish domestics caused a crisis within the mistress-maid relationship. As Irish women began to recognise the sacrifices they made to be servants, they simultaneously began to realise the hypocritical nature of their mistresses. Servants observed their mistresses behaving exactly as they were trained not to. By the turn of the century, these maids began to voice their frustrations towards the paradox within which they lived. In an April 1912 edition of *Outlook* magazine one maid voiced her dissatisfaction with her mistress, 'Perhaps the lady goes downtown in the morning, has her own nice lunch at a restaurant, and tells me I can give the children a pick-up lunch, and I am lucky if I have enough in the pantry to give them fried bread.'²⁷ What domestic servants increasingly realised was not only the unfairness of their position, but also that they wanted personal time to enjoy the fruits of their labours. Irish domestics had worked hard for their money and finally were in a position where they could afford to spend on themselves, but both their working hours and the demands of their mistresses left them with little free time to do so. Thus, through the combination of the servants' realisations of their desire for personal freedom and the rise of women's social reformist groups, maids and social reformists from across the country began to call for a complete revamping of the domestic service industry.

Domestic service had traditionally been an industry that demanded extremely long hours from its maids. In an investigation conducted by the School of Housekeeping, the range of working hours for maids was between twelve and fifteen daily. In comparison, shop and factory workers' hours ranged between eight and ten hours per day.²⁸ As a result of this discrepancy, many maids began to leave their service jobs, claiming they would find shorter hours, more individual freedom, and more time for leisure in other industries. In an investigation of New York City women wage-workers entitled *Prisoners of Poverty: Women Wage-Workers, Their Trades and Their Lives*, Helen Campbell, one of America's most dedicated urban and

²⁷ 'The Experiences of a "Hired Girl"' in *The Outlook*, 6 April 1912, pp. 778–9. ²⁸ *Social Statistics of Working Women*, prepared by the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor with information collected by the School of Housekeeping (Boston, 1901).

social reformers, chronicled domestics' reasons for leaving the service industry.²⁹ The former maids' complaints ranged from loneliness to abominable living quarters to unruly children. Yet, what each ex-servant always mentioned in her interview was the lack of freedom involved in servantry. As one maid claimed, 'It's freedom that we want when the day's work is done . . . in service you're never sure that your soul's your own except when you are out of the house.'³⁰

Articles written both by maids and social reformers within such popular periodicals amongst the middle-class population as *Harper's Bazaar*, *Ladies Home Journal*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Outlook* furthered this discussion on the need for a radical change within the domestic service industry.³¹ In a March 1905 edition of *Ladies' Home Journal*, Annette Jaynes Miller claimed that she never had any trouble with her servants because she treated her maid as both a professional and a human being, standardising her work hours and duties while giving her time off to do such things as visit the dressmaker. Another article in this same magazine by Mrs Christine Broderick went as far as to suggest that the remedy to the servant girl problem was to have them 'live-out.' Broderick claimed that 'living-out' would give them ample time to socialise with friends, take in a movie, and even spend a whole day shopping, returning to their work at seven o'clock each morning refreshed after an evening of leisure. These articles call for and give evidence of the changes that occurred within the domestic service industry during the early twentieth century. Due to the work of such women's social reformist groups as the Domestic Reform League of Boston and the pressures that the flight of women workers from the service industry placed upon the middle-class woman and household, servants' hours and domestic responsibilities were standardised. Although these changes may appear as minor adjustments, they greatly and positively affected the life of the servant. With shorter hours, maids found themselves with the freedom to live their lives as they pleased. They were, for the first time in the history of domestic service, able to venture outside the home as independent individuals, free from the ever-observant eye of their mistresses' and able to participate as at least part-time members of the leisured class.

This freedom for the Irish domestic servant in particular allowed them to re-establish the Irish identity that they were forced to give up when they entered service during the nineteenth century. Domestic service had isolated these women from their ethnic communities that had, by the twentieth century, become a very large part of almost every major urban centre in America. Most of these Irish neighbourhoods were recreations of Irish cultural life as they were filled with pubs,

29 H. Campbell, *Prisoners of Poverty: Women Wage-Workers, Their Trades and Their Lives* (Boston, 1900). 30 *Ibid.*, p. 224. 31 These include A.J. Miller, 'Why I Never Have Trouble with My Servants', *Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1905, pp. 4 and 52; author unknown, 'How My Wife Keeps Her Maids', in *Harper's Bazaar*, December 1909, p. 1231; author unknown, 'An Ideal Mistress', in *Outlook*, 10 August 1912, pp. 838-9; Mrs C. Broderick, 'Suppose Our Servants Didn't Live with Us' in *Ladies' Home Journal*, October 1914, p. 102.

dance halls, theatres, and homes with an open door policy that welcomed everyone Irish or non Irish to come in for a cup of tea and a long chat. To regain their identity, Irish domestic servants began to spend their free time in these communities and reconnecting with their Irish roots. In many of the interviews with Irish domestic servants who emigrated to this country during the twentieth century, they often discussed how they spent their leisure time with their Irish relatives and friends. Both Katherine Donoghue and Catherine Keohane discussed how they and their sisters, who were also domestic servants, would spend their 'days out' visiting each other and their aunts, uncles, and other relatives who lived in the Boston area. Elizabeth Linehan remembers spending her leisure time taking fresh baked breads and soups over to a neighbour's house for a friendly chat.³² And Mrs John Wesst vividly recalls how her Sundays were spent reviving Irish culture through singing folk songs from home.³³ These kinds of leisure activities were not ones prescribed by their mistresses, but rather they reflected elements of how the Irish socialised in Ireland. There were no strict social observances that Irish people followed to see one another, and there was limited emphasis placed on self-advancement through studying. The modern Irish domestic, then, reflected her native culture by spending her leisure time as she would have in her homeland. And, by participating in such activities she seemed to be flatly rejecting any form of forced assimilation of specific American cultural practices.

By 1920, the mistress-maid relationship had almost reversed itself. Domestic servants had, for the most part, become 'live-out' employees. This change in the domestic service industry re-established a sense of personal freedom and ethnic identity, which was lost when the maid became a permanent part of the household as a 'live-in' servant. By having her own home to return to at the end of the working day, the maid finally had her own place and time, free from the demands of the American middle-class home and mistress, to express her own individuality. And, surprisingly, with the onset of the live-out maid, middle-class women rediscovered the personal freedom she had once enjoyed through running her own household without having to attend to the needs and requests of her servant. In the words of one very insightful mistress, the household had become a site of independence for both the maid and the mistress:

Freedom lies in that quarter, privacy and individuality for the maid; freedom, too, for the household, to joke, to meddle, to be noisy, to have company; freedom to lock the house and with a clear conscience prolong the motoring trip and sup at an inn.³⁴

³² K. Donoghue, interviewed by E. Kaledin on 12/10/82, tape held at Schlessinger Library; C. Keohane and E. Linehan, interviewed by Ide O'Carroll. ³³ Mrs. J. Wesst, 'Pioneer life in Nebraska'. Interview with F.W. Kaul and L.A. Rollins, *American Life Histories*.

³⁴ Author unknown, 'A Maid in the House', in *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1920, p. 715.

In a sense, as the age of social reform ushered the servant out of the house and the mistress back in with a redefined idea of domesticity, their comings and goings signalled that the mistress-maid relationship had evolved from one of interdependence to one of independence. And, with their new found sense of independence, both the American mistress and the Irish maid faced the twentieth century with the freedom to choose whether they would continue to create their identities within the domestic sphere, the consumer culture, or, most likely, a combination of both.