

IRISH CROSS-DRESSING:

fashionably constructing Anglo-Irish identity

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The Celtic Tradition—Then and Now

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ABSTRACT

The Celtic Revival has become a ubiquitous theme in contemporary Celtic studies; a theme that occupies itself with myriad cultural artifacts that are appropriate in the name of history, memory, nostalgia, subjective and national identity formation as well as dream and fantasy. Irish costume and fashion of the Revival addresses the previously mentioned impulses and also allows for the possibility of escapism: achieving and artistic and imaginative respite from the darkness brought forth by English oppression and industrial decay. Jeanne Sheehy's suggests that early 20th century Irish fashion was a retrospective act, "based on what was known of the medieval dress from illustrated sources and from ancient Irish literature." This assertion can be helpfully augmented by a consideration of literature, the visual imagination and longings for a distinctly "Irish" mode of self-expression. My paper entitled "Irish Costume and the Construction of Anglo-Irish Identity" seeks to deploy various contemporary theories of identity formation in order to better understand how "Celticness" is [re] produced in numerous cultural artifacts.



Lady Aberdeen, Isobel Maria, 1898. Ottawa. Towalev Collection.

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat...
'A Coat', W.B. Yeats

Viceregal Lodge, 1886, during a Irish warr garden party. Aberdeen, *We Two Reminiscences of Lord and Lady Aberdeen, Vol 1.*



THESIS

The Celtic Revival and Irish Fashion as a whole is an ongoing, contingent and symbolic expression of changing popular attitudes towards "Celticness" and identity within a series of changing contexts from early Irish colonialism to postmodern issues relating to globalization.

METHODOLOGY

- Become acquainted with the foundational scholarly works - extracting the key theoretical framework which is utilized by recent scholars in the field.
- Identify cultural and political conflicts
- Trace medieval Celtic motifs in art and dress
- Investigate primary sources in literary, archival and fine art outlets, identifying and analysing appropriate cultural artifacts for investigation.
- Consider the complications of source and imitation, the function of dress and relevant cultural examples from the Celtic Revival.

DISCUSSION

- Costume as a product and producer of identity.
- Performative aspects of dress.
- Catholics designated themselves as the true heirs of Ireland's past; Protestants costume can be seen as an act of resistance and reinscription and modernizes and translates Irish identity.
- Lady Isobel Aberdeen and the garden party phenomenon.
- Irish Cottage Industries.
- Hybridization of cultures.

CONCLUSION

A 'Google' search of 'Irish Dress' brings forth the fanciful and brightly coloured greens, shamrocks, and essences of a simpler past characterized by a romanticised notion of the woollens industry that draws upon Western pastoral aesthetics. At the same time, however, on any given St. Patrick's Day a multitude of people will indulge in dressing in contemporary fashions embellished with shamrocks - legitimacy, authenticity or claims to Irish national identity are not part of this globally-decipherable code While such popular symbols and movements do not signify the "serious" or "authentic" moments of the *léine* and the brat, they share in the ongoing process of re-imagining and reviving an idealized Celtic past. And, in so doing, mark not only the emergence of a postmodern Neo-Irish Revival but enlarge the stage upon which this ongoing performative act is being staged.