

Shifting Values and Changing Tastes: Illuminating Irish Identity through Commemorative Material Culture and Civic Ceremony

*Kayla Rose**

Queens College, City University of New York, USA

* Address correspondence to Dr. Kayla Rose, Irish Studies Program, Queens College, City University of New York, 65-30 Kissena Boulevard, Flushing, New York, 11367, USA. Email:

Abstract: This article presents an introductory analysis of the social and cultural values of illuminated addresses as commemorative material culture imbued with civic and national pride in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland. As cultural expression made material, illuminated addresses are objects that express their intended messages both textually and visually, serving as an actual ceremonial vehicle of respect, esteem, and identity. The physical manifestation of a ceremony, addresses are intended for public presentation and provide the receiver with a material record of the occasion. Like their heraldic counterparts, the language and content conveyed in the text of an address asserts the receiver's qualifications and legitimises his civic or political role. The production, presentation, and circulation of illuminated addresses provide key evidence for the development and expression of civic and national identity, and through this expression helped mediate the shifting values and traditions of commemoration from the middle of the nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth. As material objects imbued with the meanings and messages of commercial and industrial Victorian life, illuminated addresses are socially and politically relevant examples of the visual culture of the nineteenth-century Celtic Revival in Belfast and Dublin, forming a microcosm of Irish civic culture.

Keywords: Irish identity; material culture; commemoration; ceremony; Celtic Revival