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REPRESENTING MAGIC IN MODERN IRELAND

Belief, History, and Culture

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Abstract: This Element argues that Ireland did not experience a disenchanting modernity, nor a decline in magic. It suggests that beliefs, practices, and traditions concerning witchcraft and magic developed and adapted to modernity to retain cultural currency until the end of the twentieth century. This analysis provides the backdrop for the first systematic exploration of how historic Irish trials of witches and cunning folk were represented by historians, antiquarians, journalists, dramatists, poets, and novelists in Ireland between the late eighteenth and late twentieth centuries. It is demonstrated that this work created an accepted narrative of Irish witchcraft and magic that glossed over, ignored, or obscured the depth of belief in witchcraft, both in the past and in contemporary society. Collectively, their work gendered Irish witchcraft, created a myth of a disenchanting, modern Ireland, and reinforced competing views of Irishness and Irish identity. These long-held stereotypes were only challenged in the late twentieth century.

Keywords: modernity, witchcraft, magic, Ireland, decline

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