

'Incroyables'

– the histincroyableorical background and style –

Yu-Kyung Lee

Dept. of Fashion Coordination, Daewon Science College

The period after the French Revolution was one of experiment and change in dress for both men and women. Directly after the close of the Reign of Terror, Directoire(1795-1799), came the extreme fashion displayed by the young dandies of the day, known as *Incroyables* which means 'impossible' 'incredible' or 'unimaginable'. The men's costumes of this period were very different from those of rococo style or empire style, it shows the characteristics of transition period between French Revolution and the Empire. Few more bizarre silhouettes have ever been seen than those of the French *Incroyables*.

The *Incroyables* is the masculine product of the Terror. While the *Merveilleuses* is the feminine product of the Terror, which is the exaggerated transparency and simplicity in the fashions of the female. This fashion madness is marked the emergence from the terrors of the guillotine. The disheveled, slept-in look was considered safer than being well groomed. Therefore, the *Incroyable* strove for a careless and wrinkled appearance.

In fact, the *Incroyables* is exaggerated and extreme styles of the late 1790s, and look as a fashion much affected by the young. It required a rather unkempt and raffish appearance and overall contrived carelessness. *Incroyables* were to be seen in a group of young dandies, who went to extremes in their costume and style.

Their coats had very high turndown collars, ridiculously wide revers(lapel), long tails and tight sleeves. Some of coats include velvet collar and cuffs. The coat is cut away in the front in the style of a morning coat and reaching the knees. Sometimes the coat had the padded shoulders and bulky pleats across the back, giving the ugly effect of a hump. Some of them were made with shot silk or wool cashmere. One of the most interesting example of the late 1790s is very faded and although the silk appears to be olive green, inspection of the seams showed that it used to be a shot blue and pink silk.

Usually coat was worn with a waistcoat of contrasting colored satin. If the coat were of solid color, the waistcoat was striped, but, as often, the coat was of striped fabric and the waistcoat plain. Blue and white and green and white were favorite striped combinations. And it is worn with a huge and sheer white cambric cravats. The cravat, or neckcloth, was sloppily bulky and colorful, loosely wound around the neck several times, often over padded cushions, so that it

rose up over the chin, its ends tied in front.

The culottes, or skintight breeches, ended below the knees, where they fastened with buttons and finished with ribbon loops over striped stockings. Some breeches have button and buttonhole on knee. Often they carry twisted heavy walking sticks, which are long or short.

The *incroyable* cut his hair raggedly in 'dog's ears', their hair is unkempt, wild and unruly. His hat was extreme in size, either felt bicorne or with tall crown beaver hat. And hoop earrings were hanging from his ears. Later, they changed to simple ringlets, lightly powdered, or the shaggy 'Brutus' cut. They also wore tight and short boots or leather pumps.

Vernet recorded many of these fantastic phenomena and extroverts examples of fashions of nineties. Those men who were depicted by Vernet deserve their epithet -their hair unkempt, cravats sloppily bulky, colorful and over-wrapped, lapels ridiculously large, and overall contrived carelessness. The emphasis of their costume is on striped or patterned vests and stockings, and a casual, careless look in hairdressing and clothing fit. The wrinkled buskins would appear on the fashionably dressed male as sleek well-fitted footwear. His hat will emerge as the aristocratic high hat of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The his spyglass perform the role of the snobbish monocle.

As the result, the costume of the *Incroyables* show the characteristics of transition period between French Revolution and the Empire. And the *Incroyables* is the masculine product of the Terror in a group of young dandies. In fact, the *Incroyable* strove for a careless, wrinkled appearance, and is extreme and exaggerated styles of the late 1790s.

incroyables

- * payne, 406-8
- * Russell, 314-315, 318
- * Wilcox, 228-9
- * www.bonus.com

Victoria and Albert Museum, (9400-1902 & T.1082-1913)

Description from Rothstein, Natalie, ed. *Four Hundred Years of Fashion*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984. "This morning coat of shot silk is a most interesting example of the exaggerated styles of the late 1790s, and with its broad revers and very high collar was possibly influenced by the fashion referred to as 'Incroyable'" (61). Rothstein describes the Incroyable look as: "... a fashion much affected by the young ... [it] required a rather unkempt and raffish appearance. The coats had very high collars, wide revers and tight sleeves. They were more like great coats in style, being cut straight to meet down the ground, and reaching the knees. The coat ...[in this photo] is cut away in the front in the style of a morning coat but has the exaggerated high collar and wide revers. Unfortunately, it is very faded and although the silk appears to be olive green, inspection of the seams showed that it used to be a shot blue and pink silk" (58).

* www.bonus.com

This wool cashmere coat is held by the Musee des Arts de la Mode, Paris (52.17.17). The description in *The Age of Napoleon: Costume from Revolution to Empire, 1789-1815*, edited by Katell le Bourhis et al. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989) reads: "Back view ... of wool cashmere coat (habit degage) with high downturned collar. French, 1795-99" (83). This coat has the padded shoulders that were associated with the "Incroyables." Big shoulders on men are still today seen as sexy.