Death of an Icon: Deconstructing the Irish Harp Emblem in the Celtic Tiger Years

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Since the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922 the Irish harp has been employed as the official emblem of Ireland. A design based on the Trinity College harp by the English sculptor Percy Metcalfe in 1928 has remained the model for all official representations of the harp emblem on seals of state, Irish coinage and the coat of arms. In the period following the adoption of Bunreacht na hÉireann (the Irish Constitution) it was considered necessary to adopt a new coat of arms which was designed and launched in 1947, an image, reproduced in Figure 1, which caused such controversy that it was withdrawn immediately. In an article entitled 'The Strings are False', which appeared as part of 'An Irishman's Diary' in *The Irish Times* of 23 January 1947, the writer criticized the representation of the Irish harp on the coat of arms. He pointed out that the harp strings were false and were presented in such a way that they were not vertical, as they were on government stationery.[1] Many in government circles noted the criticism in this column and Dr Nicholas Nolan, assistant secretary of the Department of the Taoiseach, enquired from Dr Edward MacLysaght, the head of the Genealogical Office, as to whether the harp on the coat of arms was 'by any chance the harp in the British Royal standard'.[2] MacLysaght explained that the strings of the Irish harp on flags and other insignia were always represented at an angle in accordance with centuries of heraldic tradition. Nolan responded that it was 'absurd that a sovereign State should in effect be told that it is not at liberty to regard a particular harp as its coat of arms because some obscure English knight may have adopted a harp with tilted strings as his coat of arms perhaps seven centuries ago'.[3]

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[1] 'The Strings are False', *The Irish Times*, 23 January 1947.

[2] Séamus Ó Brógáin, *The Wolfhound Guide to the Irish Harp Emblem* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1998), 60.

[3] As note 2.

Figure 1: Coat of arms (1947).
(Ó Brógáin, 58.)

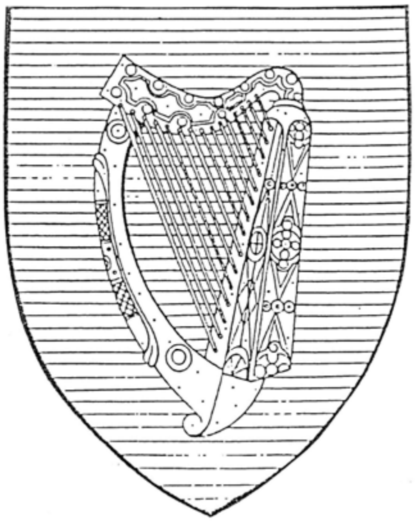
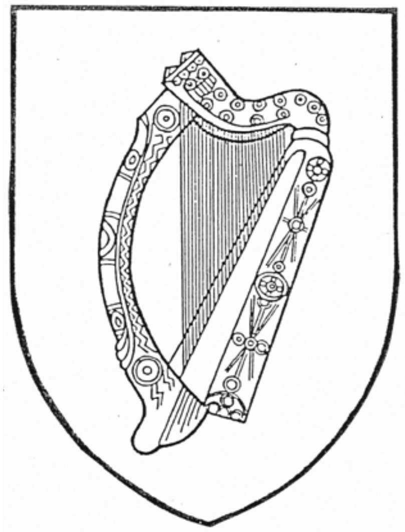


Figure 2: Revised Coat of arms (1947).
(Ó Brógáin, 61.)



The result of this debate was a redesign of the coat of arms showing a harp with thirty strings oriented vertically (Figure 2). Although the number of strings can vary, the official harp emblem, giving the instrument with vertically oriented strings and placed at a slight angle to show off the soundbox and its design, has remained constant since the late 1940s. This visual representation of the harp is the principal element of the seals of the office of the President and all government ministers, and all government agencies and their representatives in Ireland and abroad.

The controversy over the vertical or diagonal orientation of the strings on the harp was indicative of the importance of national symbols, particularly the Irish harp emblem, in post-colonial Ireland in the mid-twentieth century. Ireland is the only nation to have a musical instrument as a national emblem. The Irish harp, in musical and iconographical terms, has been embedded in Irish politics and culture for centuries. The harp enjoyed a high status in early Gaelic society due to the sophistication of the instrument and the considerable technical ability of the harper, acquired over decades.[4] The harper, along with the *file* (poet) and *reacaire* (reciter), epitomized Gaelic aristocratic culture until the demise of that order in the seventeenth century. The Irish harp icon has been employed on flags since the thirteenth century, and in recent times there has been considerable research into the shifts in iconographical representations of the instrument from its earliest employment to its prominence in the iconography of various political movements in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[5] As the status of the country changed from colony to democratic republic, and to membership of a federal European Union, the Irish harp has remained a prominent image of stability and continuity. However, since the mid-1990s there has been a considerable shift in the representation of the Irish harp emblem as employed by various institutions of the State. As Barra Boydell has observed, changes in the iconography of the Irish harp act 'as a metaphor for the changes both in political thinking and in the perception of Irish music'.[6] This article explores the shifting interpretations of the iconography of the Irish harp in the last two decades, a period marked by the affluence and excess of the 'Celtic Tiger' era (*c*1995–2007), the fallout from the banking crisis of 2008 and the collapse of the property market. By analysing Irish harp iconography, I explore how

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[4] For more information on the role of the harper as court musician in early Gaelic society see Joan Rimmer, *The Irish Harp*, third edition (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1984) and 'The Morphology of the Irish

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Harp', *The Galpin Society Journal*, 17 (February 1964), 39–49. The subject is also mentioned, though not in detail, in Ann Heyman, *Secrets of the Gaelic Harp* (Winthrop, MN: Clairseach Productions, 1988), 1–2 and Gráinne Yeats, *Féile na gCruitirí Béal Feirste, 1792: The Belfast Harp Festival, 1792* (Dublin: Gael Linn, 1980), 3–9. Several websites devoted to the wire-strung harp provide information on the structure of early Irish harps, harp repertoire, technique and harpers; these include http://www.earlygaelicharp.info and http://wirestrungharp.com/ (accessed 6 August 2012).

[5] See, for example, Barra Boydell, 'The Female Harp: The Irish Harp in 18th- and early-19th-century Romantic Nationalism', *RIdIM/RCMI Newsletter*, 20/1 (1995), 10–17, 'The Irish Harp on Glass', *Irish Arts Review*, 12 (1995), 110–14, 'The Iconography of the Irish Harp as a National Symbol', in Patrick F. Devine and Harry White (eds), *Irish Musical Studies 5: The Maynooth International Musicological Conference, 1995: Selected Proceedings*, 2 vols (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), ii, 131–45, and 'The United Irishmen, Music, Harps, and National Identity', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 13 (1998), 44–51; Emily Cullen, 'From the Comerford Crown to the Repeal Cap: Fusing the Irish Harp Symbol with Eastern Promise in the Nineteenth Century', in Ciara Breathnach and Catherine Lawless (eds), *Visual, Material and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 59–72; Mary Louise O'Donnell, 'A Driving Image of Revolution: The Irish Harp and Its Utopian Space in the Eighteenth Century', *Utopian Studies*, 21/ 2 (2010), 252–73 and 'Brian Boru's March: The Politics of the Irish Harp in the Nineteenth Century', *Folk Harp Journal*, 146 (Spring 2010), 16–19; Mary Helen Thuente, 'Liberty, Hibernia and Mary Le More: United Irish Images of Women', in Dáire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (eds), *The Women of 1798* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 9–25 and 'The Origin and Significance of the Angel Harp', in Patricia A. Lynch, Joachim Fischer and Brian Coates (eds), *Back to the Present, Forward to the Past: Irish Writing and History since 1798, Volume I* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 181–208.

[6] Boydell, 'The United Irishmen', 51.

the transformations of the Irish harp emblem have reflected changing political, social and cultural values in this period.

The earliest coding of the Irish harp as a symbol of Ireland dates from the thirteenth century. A gold harp on a blue background was cited in a French roll of arms as the arms of the 'king of Ireland'.[7] This association of the gold harp and the colour blue initiated the process of appropriating the instrument as a signifying image of foreign rule or an 'heraldic device of the invaders'.[8] The inclusion of a plain harp, with a distinctly non-Irish appearance, surmounted by a crown on Irish coinage in 1534 under Henry VIII reified the instrument as an emblem of Ireland under English rule and established the practice of inaccurate visual representations of the native instrument until the nineteenth century.[9] Whilst the basic triangular shape of the harp was retained over the following centuries, many modifications were made to its design. Gerard Anthony Hayes-McCoy identified three distinct phases in the representation of the instrument: the plain harp, the harp with a grotesque head and, finally, the harp with a female figure on the forepillar (winged-maiden harp).[10] In the nineteenth century the winged-maiden harp was superseded by an icon inspired by the oldest extant Irish harp, the 'Brian Boru' or Trinity College harp.[11] Since 1922, the Trinity College harp has been the model for all official representations of the Irish harp on coinage, seals of office and flags.

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[7] Boydell, 'The Iconography of the Irish Harp', 131.

[8] Gerard Anthony Hayes-McCoy, *A History of Irish Flags from Earliest Times* (Dublin: Academy Press, 1979), 23.

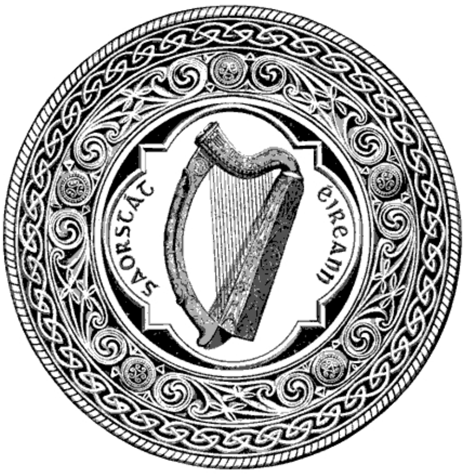
[9] See Boydell, 'The Iconography of the Irish Harp', 133–7 for a discussion on unrealistic iconographical representations of the Irish harp from the sixteenth century onwards.

[10] Hayes-McCoy, 46–7.

[11] An interest in the organology of the 'Brian Boru' harp can be traced back to the late eighteenth century, in particular to William Beauford's 'An Essay on the Construction and Capability of the Irish Harp in its Pristine and Present State' in Joseph Cooper Walker, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (Dublin: 1786), 113–24. The provenance of the instrument was first addressed in Charles Vallancey, 'The Harp of Brien Boiromh', in *Collectanea de rebus hibernicis, Number XIII, Volume IV* (Dublin, Marchbank, 1786), 32–7. Vallancey suggested that Boru's harp was given to the Pope by Boru's son Donnchad in 1023 as atonement for murdering his brother Teige. The harp was given to Henry VIII, along with the title 'Defender of the Faith', and it later passed to the Earl of Clanrickard and finally to Commissioner MacNamara of Limerick who presented it to Trinity College in 1782. The fanciful tale of the origin of the 'Brian Boru' harp and its symbolic temporary custodianship by an English monarch endured until George Petrie's erudite 'Memoir of Ancient Irish Harp preserved in Trinity College', published in Bunting's final collection, *The Ancient Music of Ireland* (Dublin: Hodges & Smith, 1840), categorically dispelled the myth. The attraction of the heroic figure of Brian Boru and the quasi-sacred musical relic associated with him endured throughout the nineteenth century. For more information on the development of the 'Brian Boru' harp as a cultural and political icon, see

In the aftermath of the War of Independence (1919–21) and the Irish Civil War (1922–23) it was necessary to create political and social stability. National symbols, in particular the tricolour flag, the Irish harp and the national anthem, 'Amhrán na bhFiann', adopted in 1926, were important unifying devices in the early years of the new state. The symbolic potency of the Trinity College harp was identified in 1922 by George Sigerson who emphasized the importance of placing this image 'of humanizing harmony in its highest place of honour' amongst the symbols of other nations.[12] The Trinity College harp was adopted as the basis for the Great Seal of the Irish Free State in 1923 and has remained a dominant, potent icon of Irish politics (Figure 3). The Coat of Arms of Ireland and the Presidential Standard include an image of a gold harp with silver strings set against a blue background and the Trinity College harp is the main element in the seals of office of Uachtarán na hÉireann (the President of Ireland) and all government ministers and departments. The harp emblem is protected in inter-

Figure 3: Great Seal of the Irish Free State.



Mary Louise O'Donnell, *Custodians of Culture: A Social, Political, Musicological and Cultural History of the Irish Harp and its Patronage from 1790 to 1845* (PhD diss., University of Limerick, 2009).

[12] Ciarán Swan, 'Design and Change: The Oireachtas Harp and an Historical Heritage', http://designresearchgroup.wordpress.com/2008/03/28/design-and-change-the-oireachtas-harp-and-an-historical-heritage.html (accessed 6 August 2012).

national law by Article 6*ter* of the 1925 Act of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property[13] and in national law by the Trade Marks Act, 1996, Sections 9 and 96, which prohibits the unauthorized use of the harp emblem and other state emblems, 'or those closely resembling them', without the consent of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.[14]

Noted semioticians, including Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes and Charles Sanders Peirce, have employed various models to explain the efficacy of the symbol with particular focus on the importance of the sign or symbol to linguistics.[15] For the purposes of this study on iconography, the triadic model employed by German art historian Erwin Panofsky in his study of works of art is pertinent to understanding the potency of the Irish harp emblem. In his *Studies in Iconology* (1939), Panofsky detailed how the study of art objects and images could be understood on three levels: primary or natural subject matter, secondary or conventional subject matter, and tertiary or intrinsic meaning or content.[16] He suggested that the recognition of a familiar object is the most basic understanding of an image. His secondary level is concerned with the domain of iconography that links images with themes or concepts. The tertiary level, often called iconology, is an integration of all three levels; it is the level at which the meaning of a work of art is understood as the product of its cultural environment.[17] The Irish harp icon, at the primary level, is simply a representation of a musical instrument. Most Irish people, and others familiar with Irish culture, can read the image of the harp at the secondary level as an iconographic representation of Ireland and/or the Irish people. For those familiar with Irish history and politics, the harp icon is a potent emblem of government departments and offices at home and abroad. The intrinsic meaning of the emblem can only be fully apprehended at the tertiary or iconological level, i.e. the point when the three levels of understanding are fully integrated.

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[13] Article 6*ter* is concerned with prohibitions concerning state emblems, official hallmarks and emblems of intergovernmental organizations.

[14] http://www.djei.ie/science/ipr/emblems.htm (accessed 5 August 2012). This information was supplemented by email correspondence with the Intellectual Property Unit, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (4 and 13 April 2012).

[15] See, for example, Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977) and Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss and Arthur W. Burks, 8 vols (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1998).

[16] Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 3–17.

[17] See Eric Fernie, *Art History and its Methods: A Critical Anthology* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 181–3. For an extensive discussion on the influence of Panofsky's methodology, see Irving Lavin (ed.), *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Views from the Outside: A Centennial Commemoration of Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968)* (Princeton: Institute for Advanced Study, 1995).

In semiotic terms, the Irish harp emblem is a perfect symbol. Its visual potency results from its consistent employment by various institutions of the State since the 1920s. It remains a central part of the iconography of the Office of the President and some government departments. Instead of the typical representation of a gold harp, e.g. for the Department of Finance (Figure 4), the instrument is often presented in a variety of colours, as exemplified by the green harp of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Figure 5) and the highly stylized white harp of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Figure 6).

Figure 4:

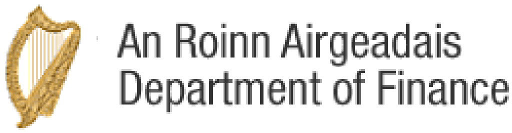


Figure 5:

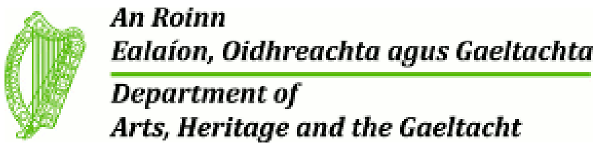
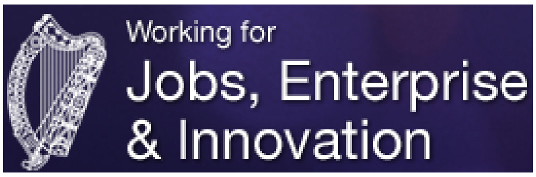

An Roinn
Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta
Department of
Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Figure 6:



Sometimes shapes or patterns are added to the core emblem. On its website, the Department of Finance uses an image of the harp surmounted by a helical pattern (Figure 7) and the logo of the Department of Justice and Equality combines the harp emblem with an abstract version of the scales—the symbol of Justice (Figure 8). Tony Schirato and Jen Webb suggest, in their discussion of visual culture, that 'signs take on meanings depending on the way they are arranged, and in the contexts in which they are read'.[18] Although these modifications and additions to the Irish harp emblem might appear trivial, in semiotic terms they dilute the visual potency of the image and affect our reading of it. Images of the harp emblem which are modified confuse the reader and are 'less perfect modes of semioticity'.[19]

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[18] Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, *Understanding the Visual* (London: Sage, 2004), 7.

Figure 7: Logo, Department of Finance.

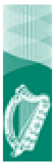
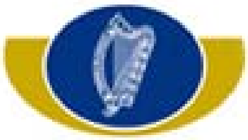


Figure 8: Logo, Department of Justice and Equality.



Peter Alter notes that 'national symbols are not static' and can 'lose their political integrating force and their credibility especially when the national programme for which they stand loses its persuasive power and is replaced by a different programme'.[20] Much has been written about the transformation of Irish society, politics and culture in the Celtic Tiger years, in particular, the impact of increased globalization and privatization.[21] Since the mid-1990s there has been a notable shift in how government departments operate. Apart from the considerable rise in the number of agencies to which power to perform governmental functions has been devolved, government departments view themselves increasingly in corporate terms as a commercial brand rather than as a political unit serving its citizens. Leading consultancy firms are engaged by government departments and quangos (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations)[22] to create and build a 'brand identity' represented visually by a unique logo.[23] A typical example is Paragon Design, who were engaged to design a logo for the Chief State Solicitor's Office which would retain the harp image but give it a 'fresher, more contemporary face' (Figures 9a and 9b). The harp was redrawn in 'a sleeker style' with 'fresher colours' resulting in a logo that 'maintained the seriousness of the Office but gave it a distinctive look amongst other government bodies which might be using a harp symbol'.[24]

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[19] Winfried Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 122.

[20] Peter Alter, 'Symbols of Irish Nationalism', *Studia Hibernica*, 14 (1974), 104–23: 121.

[21] The impact of these changes on Irish society, mental health, consumerism and immigration are addressed in Malcolm MacLachlan and Michael O'Connell (eds), *Cultivating Pluralism: Psychological, Social and Cultural Perspectives on a Changing Ireland* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 2000), Mary P. Corcoran and Michel Peillon (eds), *Ireland Unbound: A Turn of the Century Chronicle*, Irish Sociological Chronicles, 3 (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2002) and Fintan O'Toole, *After the Ball* (Dublin: New Island, 2003).

[22] For a discussion of the origin of the term 'quango' and of terminology often substituted for it, see Brian W. Hogwood, 'The "Growth" of Quangos: Evidence and Explanations', in Frederick F. Ridley and David Wilson (eds), *The Quango Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government, 1995), 29–47.

Figure 9a: logo of the Chief State Solicitor.

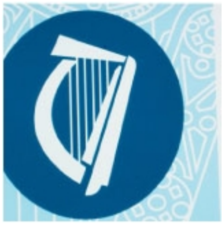
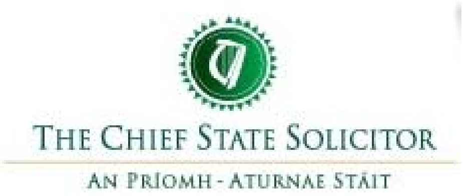


Figure 9b: logo of the Chief State Solicitor's Office.



The concept of branding has become an integral part of Irish harp iconography in the last decade. Terminology such as 'emblem' and 'symbol' has been replaced by the term 'logo', which is now the most potent tool in corporate branding and the creation of brand recognition. The Irish harp emblem, which is regarded increasingly as visually anachronistic, has been replaced by a variety of harp logos and, with the exception of the controversial rebranding of the Houses of the Oireachtas in 2007–8, the transformation of the emblem has gone largely unnoticed. In 2007 BFK brand identity consultants were engaged by the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission to redesign the harp emblem as part of a corporate identity strategy for the Oireachtas:

> Our corporate identity is an indispensable investment in our future and like any investment it requires careful management to protect it and allow it [to] grow in value … The harp, which has been specially drawn in gold ink, best represents the stature and position of the legislature; the green circles are in a lighter, fresher colour which adds to our new modern identity.[25]

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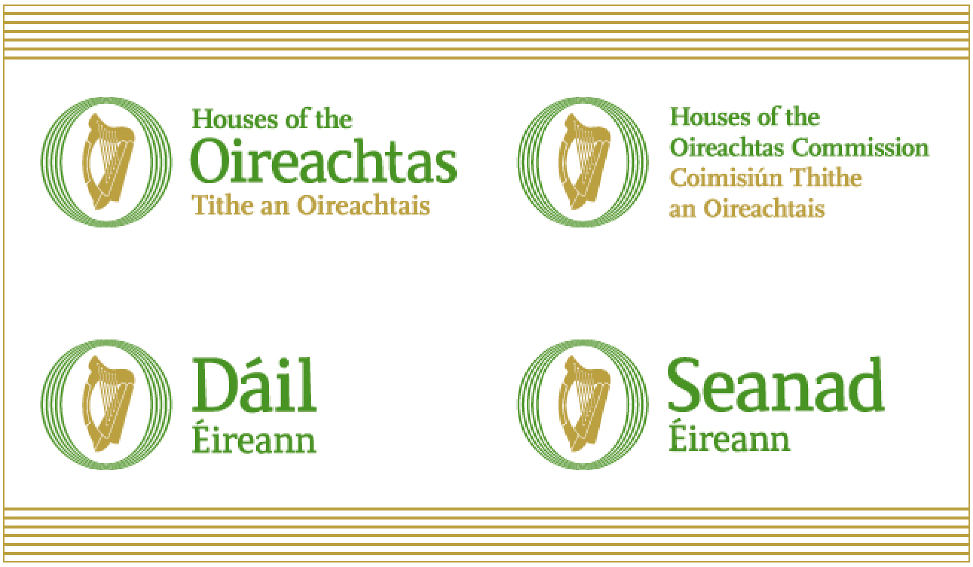
[23] http://www.bfk.ie/ (accessed 5 August 2012).

[24] http://www.paragondesign.ie/branding_csso.html (accessed 5 August 2012).

[25] *Corporate Identity System for the Houses of the Oireachtas* (Dublin: Government Publications Office, 2008), 1.

Figure 10: Logos of the Houses of the Oireachtas.


Houses of the
Oireachtas
Tithe an Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission
Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais
Dáil
Éireann
Seanad
Éireann

Four distinct logos, or 'identity marks', were designed for the Houses of the Oireachtas, Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann and the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission 'as part of a wider public communications strategy' and 'a complete new visual identity system that unites the communication of all facets of the legislature' (Figure 10).[26] These logos were introduced without consultation with, or the sanction of, senators and TDs[27] and caused a furore reminiscent of the 'false strings' controversy of the 1940s, mentioned earlier. The logos, which cost €63,000 to design, were described as a 'washed-out version of the existing gold harp', 'a woeful waste of taxpayer's money' and by Fianna Fáil minister, Tom Kitt, as 'something you'd see on the top of a restaurant menu'.[28] In its monthly bulletin the Genealogical Society of Ireland described the debacle as 'the insidious mania of "corporate logoism"' and questioned the legitimacy of such logos. The article concluded with a reference to the national flag, a national symbol which, because of its constitutional status, has escaped the 'dreaded "corporate logoism"'.[29] It is noteworthy that the Irish harp emblem is not protected by the Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann), so any modifications made to the harp emblem are left to the discretion of individual government departments or agencies.[30]

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[26] 'Houses of the Oireachtas Identity System', http://www.bfk.ie/our-work/2008/2/14/houses-of-the-oireachtas-identity-system.html (accessed 5 August 2012).

[27] TDs (Teachtaí Dála) are members of the Irish parliament, Dáil Éireann, directly elected by the Irish people.

[28] Miriam Lord, 'New Oireachtas Logo a No-no as TDs Harp on about Waste of Money', *The Irish Times*, 8 March 2008.

The harp logo was introduced despite protestations and is now used on all official correspondence of the Houses of the Oireachtas. TDs and Senators may, however, use headed notepaper with the traditional Irish harp emblem for their correspondence if they so desire. At a meeting of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission in November 2007 the new harp logo was officially adopted, but approved 'with the proviso that, in so far as practicable, the logo should not appear on its own without text'.[31] The idea of affixing a text to an image to create a context for interpretation is becoming increasingly necessary as the harp emblem is redesigned or rebranded. Roland Barthes suggests that all images are polysemous, i.e. they have the potential to be read in different ways:

> … in every society various techniques are developed intended to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs; the linguistic message is one of these techniques … The text helps to identify purely and simply the elements of the scene and the scene itself; it is a matter of a denoted description of the image.[32]

The suggestion, by members of the Oireachtas Commission, to affix text to the new harp logos was to counter the uncertainty that this version of the Irish harp emblem presents.[33]

'Uncertain signs' are now a feature of Irish harp iconography. Schirato and Webb have observed that 'our habitus, influenced by our cultural trajectory and constantly subjected to powerful visual regimes, orients and disposes us to look quickly at whatever is in front of us and categorise it'.[34] In the absence of a stable, core image it has become increasingly difficult to categorize a variety of images ranging from artistic interpretations of the Irish harp to obscure visual representations of the instrument. Many of the most unusual transformations of the Irish harp emblem can be found on the logos of various government departments. The harp logo of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs includes the outline of a harp, incorrectly oriented, with human-like figures taking the place of the strings (Figure 11). The logo of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport also includes a human-like figure but it is intertwined with the harp as if the figure and the harp are in an embrace (Figure 12). Combining visual elements—for example, the harp with sheets of paper on the logo of the State Examinations Commission (Figure 13)—is now a common practice in the design of harp logos. It is perhaps best exemplified by the union of multiple images, including a fish, an ear of wheat and blades of grass (to take the place of strings) to form the logo of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Figure 14).

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[29] 'Houses of the Oireachtas Attacked by "Corporate Logoism"', *Ireland's Genealogical Gazette*, 3/3 (March 2008), 1.

[30] I am indebted to Michael Murphy of Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, for drawing my attention to this point.

[31] http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/commission/min18112007.pdf (accessed 6 August 2012).

[32] Barthes, 39.

[33] For an introduction to the elements of a sign and the concept of speech-fixing signs, see Adrian Frutiger, *Signs and Symbols: Their Design and Meaning*, trans. Andrew Bluhm (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1998), 111–18.

[34] Schirato and Webb, 191.

Figure 11:

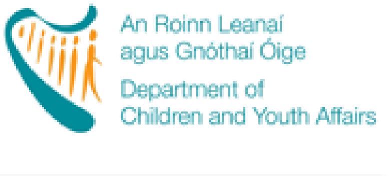


Figure 12:

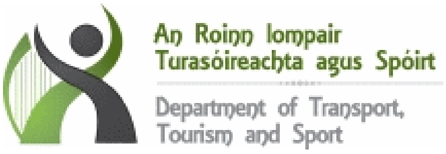


Figure 13:

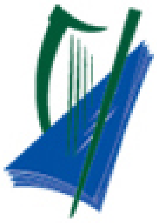
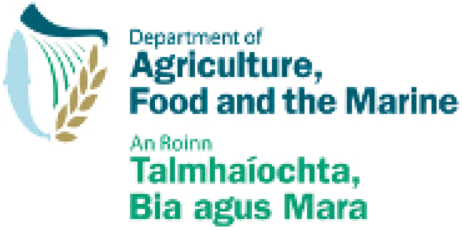


Figure 14:



Distortion of conventional images and manipulation of the dimensions of objects are common techniques employed in the design of logos. The results of these processes can be visually dramatic, as exemplified in the logo of the Irish Coast Guard, part of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, which presents a distorted image of a harp resting in an anchor—undoubtedly symbolic of the Coast Guard's role in protecting the Irish people (Figure 15). The logo of the Department of Defence uses an abstract figure holding a spear and shield which, combined, form the outline of a harp with strings (Figure 16). The most dramatic, and most bizarre, harp logo used by a government department belongs to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, established following the General Election of 2011 (Figure 17). The logo, which resembles an emaciated harp, is perhaps an ironic if unconscious visual comment on the economic crisis; it is also an indication that the attitude to the Irish harp emblem of the current government, although a coalition of Fine Gael and Labour, is no different to that of its predecessors.

Figure 15:

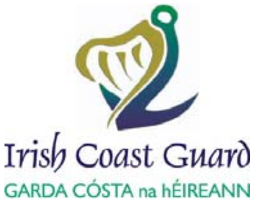

Irish Coast Guard
GARDA CÓSTA na hÉIREANN

Figure 16:

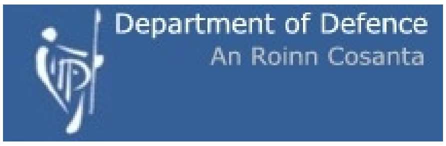
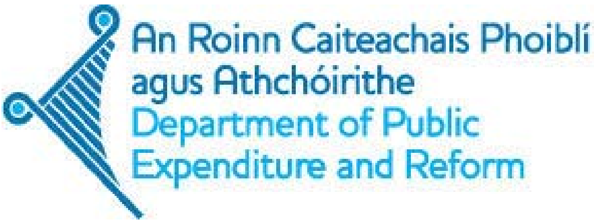

Department of Defence
An Roinn Cosanta

Figure 17:


An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí
agus Athchóirithe
Department of Public
Expenditure and Reform

The Irish harp emblem is increasingly rejected in favour of a selection of fluid, oblique images of harps which reflect postmodern Irish society and culture. Fredric Jameson suggests that postmodernism ‘only clocks the variations themselves, and knows only too well that the contents are just more images’.[35] He notes that ‘there cannot but be much that is deplorable and reprehensible in a cultural form of image addiction which, by transforming the past into visual mirages, stereotypes, or texts, effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future’.[36] Dorothea Olkowoski-Leatz explores the consequences of this dispersion and fragmentation of images, suggesting that ‘there is nothing to know; there is only the distribution of information. There is no longer any history, only the parodying repetition of the past: a repetition visible in art, culture, styles, political posturing.’[37] Harp logos, as employed by government departments or agencies, are arbitrary images which claim to represent reality but which, in truth, mean nothing. Jean Baudrillard used the term ‘simulacra’ to describe signs which serve no purpose and have no connection with reality. In *Simulacra and Simulation* he identified four orders of simulacra: firstly, the creation of false images which no longer represent what they are intended to signify; secondly, the reproduction and repetition of these false images; thirdly, the collapse of any distinction between the real image/sign and its simulation; and finally, pure simulation which has no relation to any reality.[38] The increasing employment and reproduction of harp logos, or false harp images, in place of the Irish harp emblem exemplifies the early stages of Baudrillard’s theory of simulacrization.

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[35] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1990), ix.

[36] Jameson, 46.

The most diverse collection of false harp images can be credited to Irish quangos. Quangos, also known as non-government agencies, public bodies, ad hoc agencies and non-departmental bodies, are the result of structural changes to government and the devolution of government powers in recent decades. They have been the subject of considerable debate due to a lack of democratic accountability, concerns over inconsistencies in governance and the absence of a published list of appointments.[39] The common characteristic shared by all Irish quangos is that they are funded, partially or wholly, by the State and therefore accountable ultimately to the Irish people. Each quango uses a different logo and the majority of the *c*350 quango logos are not based on the Irish harp emblem. A detailed survey of the harp iconography of quangos is outside the scope of this article but I will focus on some of the more unusual examples.

Quango harp logos are best described as a collection of ironic, comic, pathetic and bizarre images of harps. The logo of the National Crime Council, formed in 1999 to focus on crime prevention, uses a harp which is cartoon-like in appearance (Figure 18), while the logo for the Probation Service uses disconnected fragments of a harp which appear to be quivering (Figure 19). Many of the harp logos are artistic renditions in vibrant colours which modify and/or omit integral elements of the original harp emblem, e.g. strings. The Irish Youth Justice Service, whose remit is to reduce youth offending and rehabilitate offenders, uses a logo with a mustard-coloured harp with three strings (Figure 20), while Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, is represented by a multi-coloured harp with fragments of three strings—perhaps symbolic of the weakness and voicelessness of those affected by violence (Figure 21).

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[37] Dorothea Olkowski-Laetz, ‘A Postmodern Language in Art’, in Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist (eds), *Postmodernism: Critical Concepts: Legal Studies, Psychoanalytic Studies, Visual Arts and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 1998), 257–72: 266.

[38] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1–42.

[39] For a summary of the principal arguments for and against quangos, see David Hunt, ‘Worthwhile Bodies’, in *The Quango Debate*, 14–28; and Philip Holland, *The Governance of Quangos* (London: Adam Smith Institute, 1981) and *The Quango Explosion: Public Bodies and Ministerial Patronage* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1978).

Figure 18:

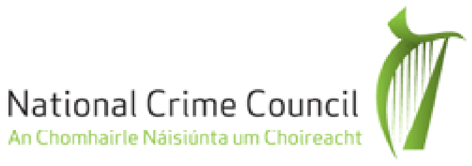

National Crime Council
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Choireacht

Figure 19:

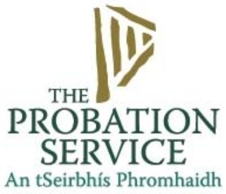

THE
PROBATION
SERVICE
An tSeirbhís Phromhaidh

Figure 20:

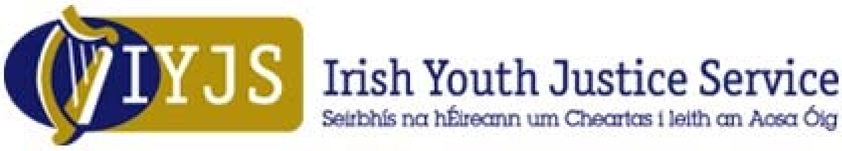

IYJS
Irish Youth Justice Service
Seirbhís na hÉireann um Cheartas i leith an Aosa Óig

Figure 21:

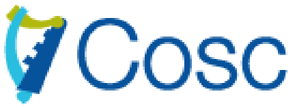
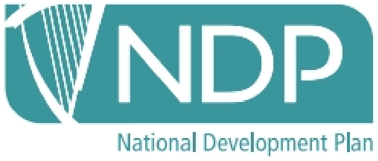


Figure 22:


NDP
National Development Plan

Many of these images can be read as disconnected metaphors commenting on contemporary Irish society, politics and culture. The logo of the National Development Plan presents a harp which is tilted, or on the verge of falling over, an apt visual representation of the current economic climate (Figure 22). The logos of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA),[40] established in December 2009 by the Irish Government in response to the collapse of the Irish property market, and the National

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[40] For information on NAMA's objectives, ethos, constituent committees and board members, see http://www.nama.ie/about-us/ (accessed 7 August 2012).

Treasury Management Agency, which manages the National Debt, the National Pensions Reserve Fund, NAMA and New Era, are strikingly similar (Figures 23 and 24). Both are rigid, one-dimensional images whose diagonal strings are more reminiscent of prison bars than the strings of a musical instrument. BK, the designers of the NAMA logo, outlined their objectives for the logo as follows:

> In order to fulfil this weighty and economically important remit NAMA needs to be perceived to be connected to the State, but not part of it. It needs also to reflect the core values: strong, fleet-footed and discrete. To reflect these and other attributes we created a direct, striking and effective corporate identity mark combining a unique harp symbol with the organisation's name. The logotype uses the complete name in preference to the acronym NAMA, so as to better communicate the full weight and authority of the body. The typographic treatment contributes to the appropriate corporate positioning by using a contemporary serif typeface. The stylised modern gold harp reinforces the organisation's nature as an agency of the Irish state. Overall this corporate identity mark is formal and understated and in keeping with the nature of this agency.[41]

Figure 23:

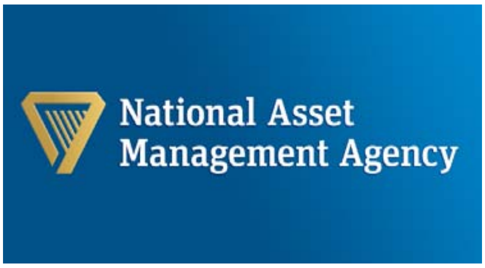
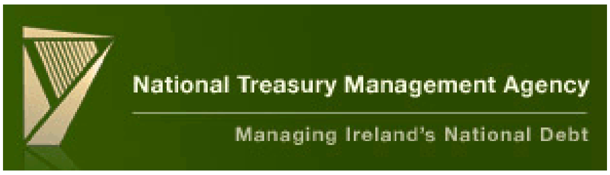


Figure 24:


National Treasury Management Agency
Managing Ireland's National Debt

The harp logos mentioned above are only a selection of the gratuitous, eclectic images that are a pastiche of the Irish harp emblem. These simulacra seem likely to supersede the Irish harp emblem leaving a collection of images of the harp which are aligned visually with government departments and agencies, but which mean nothing. Another difficulty is that, although the Trade Marks Act of 1996 prohibits the registration of trademarks consisting of the harp emblem or those resembling the emblem, many companies in the private sector are using images of the Irish harp that are abstract and often not dissimilar to the logos of government departments and quangos. Since its earliest employment on the first bottle label of Guinness in 1862, the Irish harp has been a potent tool of advertising moguls promoting a variety of products or services.[42] Ryanair's harp logo, which is based on the winged-maiden harp associated with the Irish Ascendancy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is one of numerous examples of the use of the harp in the private sector (Figure 25).[43] Some logos, e.g. for Guinness or Independent Newspapers, include uncomplicated images of an Irish harp in different colours, while the logo of Independent College Dublin, a private third-level college, amalgamates a harp and human-like figure (Figure 26). These designs blur the distinction between public and corporate logos and are illustrative of what Julie Donovan calls 'the harp's protean projections, which co-exist in a somewhat ironic symbiosis'.[44]

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[41] http://www.bfk.ie/our-work/2010/3/12/national-asset-management-agency-corporate-identity.html (accessed 7 August 2012).

Figure 25:

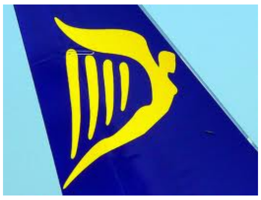
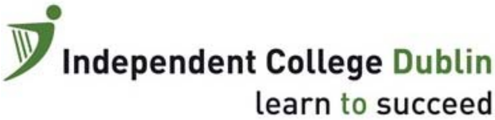


Figure 26:



The significant manipulations and transformations of the Irish harp emblem in recent years have caused little or no controversy, and, certainly nothing on a par with 'the false strings' debate over six decades ago. Sadly, it seems that the Irish harp emblem has no significant role in the image-driven culture of postmodern Ireland. It has an uncertain future. This is exemplified in the logo for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2013. Ireland last held the Presidency in 2004 and the logo used for the period of that earlier Presidency consisted of a harp with three stars coloured white, blue and navy—a visual representation of a nation that was part of the European Union but which retained its own identity (Figure 27). In 2011, Red

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[42] http://www.guinness-storehouse.com/en/pdfs/factsheets/factsheet_pdf_9.pdf (accessed 8 August 2012).

[43] See Boydell, 'The Iconography of the Irish Harp', 136–9.

[44] Julie Donovan, *Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan and the Politics of Style* (Bethesda: Maunsel & Company, 2009), 90.

Dog Design was commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to design four logos for Ireland’s Presidency of the European Union in 2013, none of which references the State’s official national emblem (Figure 28). Members of the public were encouraged to vote for their favourite logo and the winning design (Figure 29) was launched in February 2012.

Figure 27: Logo for Ireland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2004.

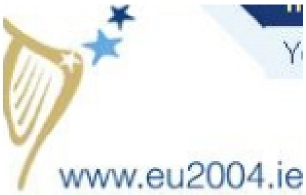

www.eu2004.ie

Figure 28: Logos shortlisted for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2013.

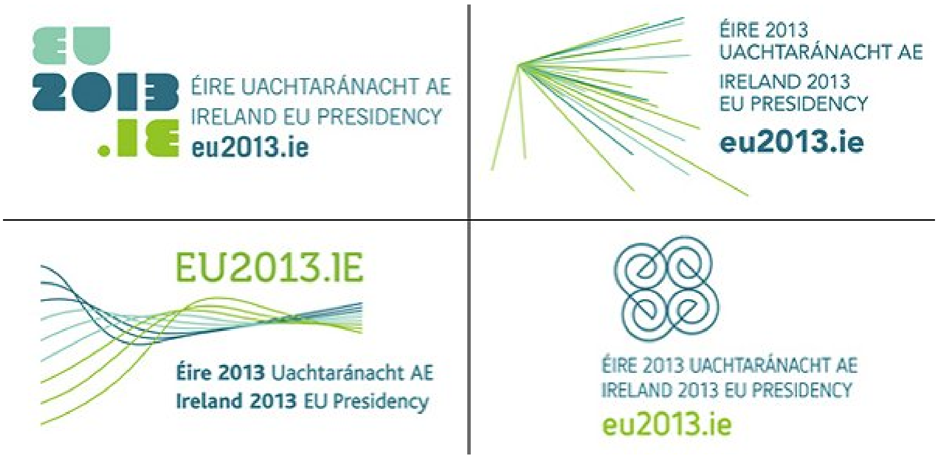
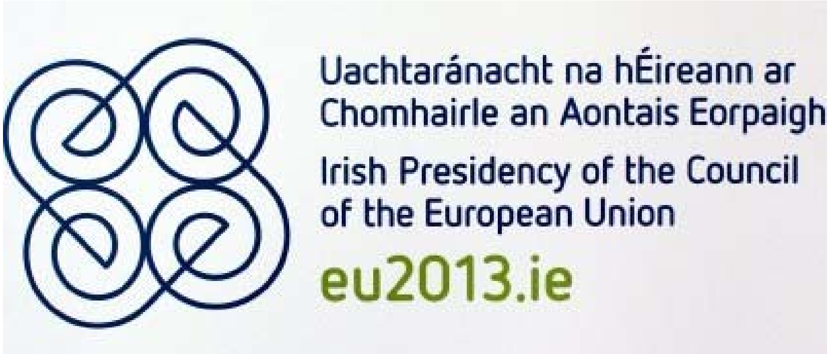

EU
2013
.IE
ÉIRE UACHTARÁNACHT AE
IRELAND EU PRESIDENCY
eu2013.ie
ÉIRE 2013
UACHTARÁNACHT AE
IRELAND 2013
EU PRESIDENCY
eu2013.ie
EU2013.IE
Éire 2013 Uachtaránacht AE
Ireland 2013 EU Presidency
ÉIRE 2013 UACHTARÁNACHT AE
IRELAND 2013 EU PRESIDENCY
eu2013.ie

Figure 29: Logo for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2013.


Uachtaránacht na hÉireann ar
Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh
Irish Presidency of the Council
of the European Union
eu2013.ie

The winning logo, which was described by Lucinda Creighton, Minister of State for European Affairs, as an 'integral part of the development of a visual identity for Ireland's Presidency', does not include a harp.[45] The national symbol, the potent visual representation of centuries of Irish politics, culture and history is evidently not an 'integral part of a visual identity' for the period of the Presidency. In light of the transformation of the Irish harp emblem over the last two decades one wonders how much longer it can remain an integral part of Irish identity.

Mary Louise O'Donnell

University of Limerick

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[45] 'Ireland's EU Presidency logo launched', http://www.merrionstreet.ie/index.php/2012/02/irelands-eu-presidency-logo-launched (accessed 4 August 2012).