



# The Color Green in Ireland: Ecological Mythology and the Recycling of Identity

Frédéric Armao

## ► To cite this version:

Frédéric Armao. The Color Green in Ireland: Ecological Mythology and the Recycling of Identity. Environmental Issues in Political Discourse in Britain and Ireland, 2013. hal-02508051

**HAL Id: hal-02508051**

**<https://hal.science/hal-02508051>**

Submitted on 16 Mar 2020

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# THE COLOR GREEN IN IRELAND: ECOLOGICAL MYTHOLOGY AND THE RECYCLING OF IDENTITY

FRÉDÉRIC ARMAO

UNIVERSITY OF TOULON, BABEL RESEARCH LABORATORY

“He had that curious love of green, which in individuals is always the sign of a subtle artistic temperament, and in nations is said to denote a laxity, if not a decadence of morals.”

Oscar Wilde

The color green is deeply connected with various, clearly distinct concepts and ideas in our modern world and its symbolic role seems multifaceted to say the least: if it is connected for obvious reasons to Nature –and has been so for centuries<sup>1</sup>– the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries associated the color with numerous aspects of our social life, be it the concept of ecology and the environment, money and capitalist values – as the color is still to this day used on dollar bills – or more political and religious matters, from the ancient association to Islam, which is today perhaps more lively than ever, to the modern creations of a number of national flags, including the *bratach na hÉireann*, i.e. the national flag of Ireland.

The connection between the color green and the very idea of Ireland itself seems prominent today. The Emerald Isle may take its nickname from its lush verdant vegetation which has inspired a large number of poets throughout the centuries; according to the Christian tradition, this naming might have actually been inspired by Saint Patrick himself –although this claim does not stand up to historical analysis. Many questions remain unanswered and this study aims at analyzing the role

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance PLINY THE ELDER, *Naturalis Historia*, 37, 62. Quoted by TRINQUIER Jean, “Les Vertus Magiques et Hygiéniques du Vert dans l’Antiquité”, in *Couleurs et Visions dans l’Antiquité Classique*, Rouen, Publications de l’Université de Rouen, 2002, pp. 97-128.

played by the color in Irish history and more specifically its impact on contemporary Irish identity: the use of the color in itself –more than the use of the mere term “green” in connection with Ireland– will therefore be studied. I will first of all wonder whether the association between the color and Ireland is justified and relevant while reviewing the different theories that may or may not explain its apparent recurrence in connection with Irish history; in other words, the question will be: to what extent is Ireland inherently “green”? The use of the color in the context of modern Irish society will then be analyzed in order to understand how exactly the color contributes to the building of contemporary Irish identity (or identities):<sup>2</sup> our focus will include a study of Irish folklore –more specifically that of Saint Patrick’s Day. This research will finally concentrate on the political use made out of this color in Ireland which, as can be easily imagined, goes far beyond the concept of ecology alone. This study will therefore try and provide some answers and perspectives on the following questions: is green actually the color of Ireland? To what extent can it be considered a part of the Irish identity? How and to what end is it used today in a political and ecological context?

From a strictly political point of view, the answer to the question “is green the color of Ireland?” is rather simple: it is not, as no legal document mentions the formal use of an official color for the Republic of Ireland. As a matter of fact, if there were to be an official color, it would most likely be the color blue; the *Standard of the President of Ireland*, that is to say the official flag which has been used by the Irish president since 1945,<sup>3</sup> is similar to the coats of arm of Ireland: it represents a golden *Clàrsach* (the Gaelic harp) on a blue background. The name of this blue color, which is also to be found in the Irish heraldry, remains to this day “Saint Patrick’s Blue” and the color seems to have been associated with the island since at least the tenth century:

The State harp is invariably shown on a deep blue background. Here it is worth noting that *Gormfhlaith* appears in the early Irish texts as the name of several queens closely connected with dynastic politics (including the Kingship of Tara) in the 10th and 11th centuries. *Gormfhlaith* is a compound of gorm (blue) and flaith sovereign. In early Irish mythology the

<sup>2</sup> Regarding this debate, see for instance GUILLAUME André, *L’Irlande, une ou deux nations ?*, Paris, P.U.F., 1987.

<sup>3</sup> 9 November 1945, National Library of Ireland. Genealogical Office: Registration of the Arms of Ireland. See <http://www.nli.ie/GetAttachment.aspx?id=72fd744a-aced-43b4-a63b-b64be7b272ec>.

sovereignty of Ireland (*Flaitheas Éireann*) was represented by a woman often dressed in a blue robe.<sup>4</sup>

Henry VIII officialized the Irish coats of arms –the golden harp on a blue background (“d’azure à la harpe d’or”)<sup>5</sup> – at the creation of the Kingdom of Ireland in 1542<sup>6</sup> and the symbol is still used on the modern version of the Royal coats of Arms of the United Kingdom in order to represent Northern Ireland.

This fairly clear historical background seems at odds, however, to our contemporary “collective imagery” or rather to the modern public Western imagination which seems to connect the country of Ireland to the color green. Yet stating that “most people” associate the color green to Ireland in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century is one thing: proving it is another matter. There is to our knowledge no thorough scientific research demonstrating that the color green is associated to Ireland by a majority of people. We have just shown with the example of Saint Patrick’s Blue that Ireland is not inherently “green”: why would this color be universally acknowledged as a modern symbol of the island of Ireland? Hopefully, the modern researcher has at his disposal powerful tools and sometimes the simplest ideas might be the most effective in trying to prove a point. Thus, simply typing the word “Irish” into a popular search engine<sup>7</sup> – a practice often referred to as the “Google test” – showed a rather effective way of establishing the current association of the color to the demonym. The 850 first pictures found by the search engine undoubtedly favor the color green over any other (blue or orange<sup>8</sup> for instance) –a fact confirmed by a color histogram analysis of those 850 images.<sup>9</sup> Although by no means a strictly scientific process,<sup>10</sup> this approach enables us to acknowledge the fact that,

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> This description is to be found in a French roll of arms dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. O’LAUGHLIN Michael C., *The Irish Book of Arms*, Irish Genealogical Association, 2001, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland 1847-1848*, Vol 1, Dublin, 1850 quoted by John Kennedy. See <http://www.theheraldrysociety.com>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://images.google.com>.

<sup>8</sup> Those two colors were analyzed and compared to the use of the color green for obvious reasons as they could stand as a symbol of Ireland: blue for the blue of Saint Patrick and orange for the other color of the national flag of Ireland.

<sup>9</sup> The detail of this analysis and the meta-pictures of the images put forward by Google can be found here: <http://bit.ly/OR74Im>.

<sup>10</sup> The results produced by a “Google test” are not absolute in that they cannot but reflect indirectly what web-surfers and web-masters (a fraction of the human population in itself) searched during a given period of time and by no means what



today, a substantial fraction of the population (people using the Internet, creating websites and implementing pictures) clearly associate the color green to Ireland and that this association is sufficiently powerful to produce images which look predominantly “green”.<sup>11</sup>

The color is therefore – at least partially – associated to Ireland. Before this research moves to political and ecological matters – i.e. to what extent this “Irish color” is used today in those political and ecological context– one may simply wonder the reason why the color green is so closely connected to Ireland. The answer seems, as always, obvious: the island is, factually speaking, “green”. In other words, the green landscapes of Ireland might have triggered this association with the color and, among other examples, the popular nickname of “the Emerald Isle” is quite relevant. The creation of the term “Emerald Isle” is generally attributed to William Drennan in his late 18<sup>th</sup>-century poem “When Erin First Rose”;<sup>12</sup> despite the highly political nature of the poem it is true that the green aspect of the island necessarily played a role in this association and most likely coined the term “green Erin”.<sup>13</sup> The country is today one of the least wooded in Europe as it was massively deforested, especially at the time of the English settlement and the plantations of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the mild humid climate of the island still favors lush vegetation of herbs and grass. If Ireland is in fact green, the Irish “green” would then be that of Nature –a theme which will later be taken up by the Irish ecologists. The association between the color green and the beautiful landscapes of Ireland most likely appeared along with –or was at least

a majority of humans think, feel and imagine regarding a specific word. Therefore those results are necessarily biased and partial and they obviously need to be interpreted and contextualized.

<sup>11</sup> The definition of a “color” as an optical phenomenon (what is green and what is not) is in itself problematic; we assume that this research does not need to go into detail relative to optical sciences –such as references to the spectrum and the proper wavelengths corresponding to the color green.

<sup>12</sup> “Let no feeling of vengeance presume to defile / The cause of, or men of, the Emerald Isle.” *The cabinet of Irish literature*, READ Charles Anderson (ed.), London, Blackie & Son, 1884, Vol.2.

<sup>13</sup> “When Erin first rose from the dark swelling flood, /God bless’d the green island and saw it was good”. But once again, the poem is before anything political: “O! sons of green Erin, lament o’er the time / When religion was war, and our country a crime” or “The cause it is good, and the men they are true / And the Green shall outlive both the Orange and Blue.” See *supra* for the political use of the color.

strengthened by– the Romantic Movement.<sup>14</sup> However, from a purely societal and political point of view, the first connection between the color and the country appeared undoubtedly before.

Between 1641 and 1653, the Green Harp Flag was one of the symbols of the Irish Catholic rebellion against English Protestant settlers during the Irish Confederate Wars; there is in particular a mention of its use by Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill, one of the leaders of the rebellion<sup>15</sup> and the Green Ensign was apparently used by various Irish merchants from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward.<sup>16</sup> During the Irish Rebellion of 1798 a version of the Green Harp flag was once again used by the rebels: the idea was to change the golden harp on a blue field, a flag which had officialized by Henry VIII, and turn the blue background into green in order to represent the change of sovereignty – a shift from the English supremacy to independence. In other words, the color green was used as a symbol of independence and rebellion as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Ireland and more specifically a representation of the Catholics against the Protestants.<sup>17</sup> The question however remains: why should green represent Ireland and the Irish rebellion in general and Catholicism in particular? Two possible explanations can be put forward and they are both connected to some extent to the notion of Nature. The first answer comes directly from the Irish rebels in 1798. The oath<sup>18</sup> of the United Irishmen –obviously united against the English– runs as follows:

What have you got in your hand? - A Green bough.  
Where did it first grow? - In America.  
Where did it bud? - In France.  
Where are we going to plant it? -In the crown of Great Britain.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> It is hard to track the first instance of the use of the term “green” associated with Nature in Ireland; this study focuses of the use of the color in itself, not on the use of the term.

<sup>15</sup> HAYES-MCCAOY G.A., *A History of Irish Flags from the earliest times*, Boston, G.K.Hall&Co, 1979.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/ie-colon.html> See also a document provided by the official website of the Prime Minister of Ireland: [http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Youth\\_Zone/About\\_the\\_Constitution,\\_Flag,\\_Ant\\_hem\\_Harp/The\\_National\\_Flag-PDF.pdf](http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Youth_Zone/About_the_Constitution,_Flag,_Ant_hem_Harp/The_National_Flag-PDF.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill was for instance one of the strongest proponents of Catholicism in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Ireland.

<sup>18</sup> Also called “catechism” of the Irish Ulstermen. See *supra*.

<sup>19</sup> PAKENHAM Thomas, *The Year of Liberty. The Great Irish Rebellion of 1798*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1969.



This oath does not only place the Irish rebellion in the context of some of the most notable political events of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that is the American independence and the French revolution:<sup>20</sup> it is also the first instance of an official political metaphor based on “natural”<sup>21</sup> (in the sense of “relative to Nature”) grounds. This metaphor of a growing and flourishing green bough of liberty could therefore be one of the origins of the popular use and association of the color in Ireland. It should be noted that during the rebellion of 1798, the mere fact of wearing green ribbons, garments or sometimes a shamrock –the famous three-leaf clover – was not tolerated by the English authorities as it implied that the wearer was a supporter of independence.<sup>22</sup> A 19<sup>th</sup>-century version of the popular Irish ballad *The Wearing of the Green* is rather telling:

They're hanging men and women there / For wearing of the green.  
Then since the color we must wear / Is England's cruel red  
Sure Ireland's sons will n'er forget / The blood that they have shed.  
You may take the shamrock from your hat / And cast it on the sod, But  
'twill take root and flourish still / Tho' underfoot 'tis trod.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, the color green and the shamrock both represented not only the rebellion but also one key figure of Irish history: Saint Patrick. And indeed, the other possible explanation for the political and religious use of the color might be even older than the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century – and paradoxically may have even more impact on modern politics. According to tradition, Saint Patrick is the Apostle of Ireland and is today one of the most important figures of Irish Catholicism. The Saint is supposed to have Christianized Ireland in the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>24</sup> and is believed to have used a shamrock, a three-leaf clover, in order to explain the concept of Trinity to the heathen Irish. Even if this legend is a modern reconstruction (as there

<sup>20</sup> Some authors even believe the green bough to be a sprig of acacia, inspired by Freemasonry. CAULFIELD James, *The Great Irish Rebellion, Secret and Silent Men of 1798*, Victoria, Trafford, 2004, p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> The terms “environment” and “ecology” are obviously difficult to apply in an 18<sup>th</sup>-century context.

<sup>22</sup> ZIMMERMANN, Georges Denis, *Songs of Irish rebellion: Irish political street ballads and rebel songs, 1780–1900*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, p. 167.

<sup>23</sup> “The Wearing of The Green” by Dion Boucicault.

<sup>24</sup> The history of the Christianization of Ireland is however much more complex. See MAIGNANT Catherine, *Histoire et Civilisation de l'Irlande*, Paris, Nathan, 1996, pp. 7-13.

is no mention of such events at or around Saint Patrick's time),<sup>25</sup> the Saint was actually associated to the concept of Nature through the prism of the now worldwide famous shamrock at least as early as the 1680s.<sup>26</sup> This is accentuated by the fact that Saint Patrick is traditionally celebrated at the beginning of spring, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, and that most of his legendary feats are supposed to have taken place at or around Easter, i.e. at a time where Nature renews itself and vegetation regenerates.<sup>27</sup> Saint Patrick is therefore directly associated to Nature: on the one hand to the three-leaf clover and on the other to a flourishing Nature that is brought back to life at the beginning of spring. The fact that Saint Patrick is often associated with the color green –beside the existence of an “official” Saint Patrick's blue– should therefore not be surprising at all: the Saint can often be seen holding a green Shamrock, wearing a green chasuble and/or surrounded by greenery on the numerous representations that are to be found, for example, on stained-glass windows of churches and cathedrals.<sup>28</sup> By extension, the color green became over the centuries the symbol of Irish Catholicism and therefore of the struggle against the English settlers and later the British army. This gave birth to the Irish flag as we know it today, as it was created in 1848,<sup>29</sup> adopted in 1916 then officialized in 1937;<sup>30</sup> the official website of the *Taoiseach*, the Irish Prime Minister, acknowledges the fact that:

<sup>25</sup> MACKILLOP James, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 363-4.

<sup>26</sup> See CRONIN Mike and ADAIR Daryl. *The Wearing of the Green, a History of Saint Patrick's Day*, London, Routledge, 2006, p.25. Consider also the following quote: “This Plant is worn by the People upon St. Patrick's Day. It being a current Tradition, that by this Three Leafed Grass, he emblematically set forth to them the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.” Threlkeld Caleb, *Synopsis Stirpium Hibernicarum*, 1726 at “Trifolium”. Quoted by the Oxford English Dictionary at “Shamrock”.

<sup>27</sup> On the importance of Easter and Saint Patrick in Ireland and on one mention of a house made of “green” wood connected with the Saint, see ARMAO Frédéric, “de Beltaine à Pâques”, *Etudes Irlandaises*, Lille, 2002, II, pp. 29-41.

<sup>28</sup> For example in Saint Patrick's Cathedral (Dublin), Carlow Cathedral (Carlow), St. Mary's RC Church (Ballinrobe), Sacred Heart Church (Galway) to name but a few. It is true however that this propensity seems more likely to be found in the most modern representations of the Saint and is particularly popular in the American tradition.

<sup>29</sup> The Irish tricolours were mentioned as early as the 1830s. See source *supra*.

<sup>30</sup> See Article 7 of the new Constitution: “The national flag is the tricolour of green, white and orange”



The green represents the older Gaelic tradition while the orange represents the supporters of William of Orange. The white in the centre signifies a lasting truce between the 'Orange' and the 'Green'.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the Irish flag symbolizes a lasting peace between the "green" Gaelic, that is to say the Catholics, and the "orange" Protestant supporters of William – a political and religious symbol indeed. Saint Patrick, the Catholic Patron Saint of Ireland, is closely connected to the color green and the association with the color is perhaps more lively than ever today. A short study of the celebration of Saint Patrick's Day in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century will show just how important (and conversely how political) this association is.

The first actual recording of the tradition of wearing shamrocks and greeneries on Saint Patrick's Day dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>32</sup> and it grew increasingly popular in Ireland, Great Britain and the United States in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first official Saint Patrick's parades occurred in North America even before the creation of the United States (for instance New York, 1762 and Boston, 1737)<sup>33</sup> and even if the Patron of Ireland was celebrated as early as the early Middle Ages in Ireland, the first official parade in Dublin only occurred in 1931. Interestingly enough, it is only in 1995 that the decision was taken to make out of this day a real cultural and therefore touristic event in the capital of the Republic of Ireland.<sup>34</sup> Today, the celebration of Saint Patrick's Day is a worldwide phenomenon and the color green as well as the shamrock are the emblems of Ireland throughout the world. It would obviously be impossible to mention here every single instance of that fact. In the last couple of years however, a number of significant events took (and still take) place in many countries on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March involving the use of the color green. Many cultural landmarks and historical monuments in Ireland –the first being

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Youth\\_Zone/About\\_the\\_Constitution\\_Flag\\_A\\_nthem\\_Harp/National\\_Flag.html](http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Youth_Zone/About_the_Constitution_Flag_A_nthem_Harp/National_Flag.html)

<sup>32</sup> *The Wearing of the Green, a History of Saint Patrick's Day*, *Op. cit.*, p.25.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> According to the official website of the Saint Patrick's Day Festival (<http://www.stpatricksfestival.ie>) the first official celebration happened the following year "to offer a national festival that ranks amongst all of the greatest celebration in the world, to create energy and excitement throughout Ireland via innovation, creativity, grassroots involvement, and marketing activity, to provide the opportunity and motivation for people of Irish descent (and those who sometimes wish they were Irish) to attend and join in the imaginative and expressive celebrations, to project, internationally, an accurate image of Ireland as a creative, professional and sophisticated country with wide appeal."

Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin– are illuminated in green. In the United States, the Empire State Building turns green just like the fountain of the White House and the Chicago River (starting in the 1960s) are dyed green every year in the honor of the Saint, to name but a few examples. From Australia to Canada,<sup>35</sup> from London to the Caribbean,<sup>36</sup> from Monaco, France, Italy<sup>37</sup> to Dubai and its famous Burj Al Arab hotel that bore for some time a gigantic green shamrock on its front, the celebration of Saint Patrick has turned into a global tradition the color of which undoubtedly remains the "green" of Saint Patrick and its emblem the three-leaf clover.

It is interesting to remind that, originally, the connection between Ireland and the color green most likely derived from the notions of Nature through the idea of a "green" Ireland which, on Saint Patrick's Day, left winter behind to fully embrace spring;<sup>38</sup> as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the symbolism of the color shifted and "green" started to represent the need for an independent Catholic Ireland as celebrating Saint Patrick's Day while displaying green colors echoed the inherent Catholic identity of the Saint and his shamrock. It therefore became a symbol of Irish independence and freedom or, more broadly speaking, of Irishness in the most political sense of the term. Today, a new change in meaning and substance is emerging: the color green is being used and taken over by commercial and marketing ends. Saint Patrick's Day and the color of Saint Patrick's Day are becoming a means to sell and promote. Green shirts and shoes, green hats, green bagels, green pretzels, green beer, green balloons in the shape of three-leaf clovers and much more are sold throughout the world on that specific date. Interestingly enough, the digital market is not left behind and companies like Guinness –whose impact on the marketing of Saint Patrick's Day should not be neglected – released in 2011 an unmistakably "green" mobile application which promoted the festival. Similarly, the video game industry never fails to use Saint Patrick's Day's strong imagery to promote and sell new versions of their top-selling hits.

<sup>35</sup> The Opera of Sidney, the CN Tower in Toronto, the Niagara Falls were all illuminated in green.

<sup>36</sup> The London Eye turned green and the parade of the island of Montserrat is a peculiar (and still very popular) local tradition.

<sup>37</sup> The Prince's Palace of Monaco, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Moulin Rouge...

<sup>38</sup> It should be noted however, that, traditionally, spring began on Saint Brigit's Day (also called *Imbolc*, e.g. the 1<sup>st</sup> of February), especially in the most rural parts of Ireland. The view that Saint Patrick's Day is, at least partially, associated with spring is nevertheless accepted by most researchers.



To give but one example, the multi-million selling *Angry Birds* series conveniently launched in 2010 and 2011 a brand new edition pack: *Angry Birds Seasons* was offered in a variety of themes, including a Halloween theme, a Valentine's Day theme and a Saint Patrick's Day theme. That last example is all the more interesting that the subtitle of the game was: "Go green, Get lucky".<sup>39</sup> The ecological slogan is actually often re-used and recycled in the context of Saint Patrick's Day and anything can become a reason to "go green" especially when it is about selling a – not necessarily eco-friendly – product, be it a video game, an alcoholic beverage, a humorous T-shirt or a stuffed Leprechaun.

This "recycling" of the symbolism of the color green in Ireland is quite popular today, especially in the field of politics. Since the Irish rebellions, the color has been associated with nationalism and republicanism. This tradition is still very lively and the green of the Irish flag, as mentioned earlier, echoes the so-called Gaelic tradition when orange is a direct reference to William of Orange and the loyalists. Those colors are still used to this day by supporters of each political side. The examples are too numerous to be listed here: let's simply mention the fact that on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2011, demonstrations against the Queen's visit in Ireland were organized in the streets of Dublin; placards bore the slogan "Britain out of Ireland" where "Britain" was written with orange letters and Ireland green letters, which obviously owed nothing to chance.<sup>40</sup>

More broadly speaking, the color has become in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the unofficial color of the Irish republic, its visual representation, a sort of concrete metonymy of the nation and its people. The example of sport is in itself quite telling: on modern rugby or football national teams outfits, the rather discreet use of the color orange and the overwhelming color green leaves very little room for doubt: green has now become the representation, the graphic archetype of Ireland. The same could be argued about Saint Patrick and his legendary green tool, the Irish clover, especially in the political context of international relationship, and more specifically Irish-American bonds. Since 1952 tradition has held that on Saint Patrick's Day the Irish prime minister or the Irish ambassador to the United States hand shamrocks to the American President, regardless of

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.angrybirdsnest.com/angry-birds-seasons-go-green-get-lucky-update-is-here/>

<sup>40</sup> See the article of Henry McDonald "Queen's visit to Ireland: Garda foil plans to disrupt Dublin events" in *the Guardian*, Tuesday 17 May 2011 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/may/17/queens-visit-ireland-garda-foil-disruption>).

their political affiliation.<sup>41</sup> When Barack Obama has posters and signs created to promote his election or re-election to the Irish-American minority, he uses and abuses of the color green and the shamrock while amusingly changing his name to O'Bama, reminding the voters of his Irish ancestry.<sup>42</sup> The shamrock and its color are therefore political and diplomatic vectors or symbols of Ireland. When Queen Elizabeth decides to go visit the Republic of Ireland for the first time, she naturally and quite diplomatically chooses to wear green clothes (yet featuring a slight touch of blue). Stewart Marvin, one of the fashion designers of the Queen, clearly states that the choice in the colors of the monarch's apparel is never a matter of coincidence when she visits a foreign country<sup>43</sup> and that was certainly not the case there; once again, the "Go Green" play-on words was used by some journalists and the title "The Queen Goes Green in Ireland" was unoriginally – yet quite appropriately – chosen by *People Magazine*.<sup>44</sup> The same happened when on 17 March 2012 Kate Middleton chose to visit the Irish Guard: the Duchess of Cambridge presented sprigs of shamrocks to the guards – conforming to a tradition dating back to 1901 – while wearing a deep green coat dress and a gold shamrock brooch.<sup>45</sup>

If most Irish political parties<sup>46</sup> use logos where the color green is predominant, with the notable exception of *Fine Gael* and some left-wing and workers' parties,<sup>47</sup> the political use of the color is most notable as regards ecology. It is quite clear that everything prompts the Irish ecologists to comply with the unspoken rules of this green political

<sup>41</sup> *Fina Gael's* Enda Kenny in 2012, *Fianna Fáil's* Brian Cowen before him to name but the last instances of this tradition.

<sup>42</sup> See the article "Obama Campaign Touts his Irish Heritage" by Byron Tau in *Politico*, 17 February 2012 (<http://www.politico.com/politico44/2012/02/obama-campaign-touts-his-irish-heritage-114862.html>).

<sup>43</sup> For the interview of Stewart Marvin, see "Des Racines et des Ailes", broadcast 9 mai 2012 on France3, hosted by Louis Laforge. Report by Hélène Frandon, Antoine Placier, Laura Kalmus, Didier Pêcher, Pascal Montagna, Jérôme Sarfati, Marc Mazeas.

<sup>44</sup> For a picture of the Queen and the article of *People Magazine*, visit [http://www.people.com/people/package/article/0,,20395222\\_20490446,00.html](http://www.people.com/people/package/article/0,,20395222_20490446,00.html)

<sup>45</sup> See the article "Green goddess: Duchess of Cambridge presents shamrocks to Irish Guards at St Patrick's Day parade" by Natalie Evans in *Mirror*, 17 March 2012 (<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/duchess-of-cambridge-presents-shamrocks-to-irish-764890>).

<sup>46</sup> *Fianna Fáil*, *Sinn Féin*, *Éirígí* and the Republican *Sinn Féin*.

<sup>47</sup> The Workers' Party, the Socialist Party and the Labour Party still favor the color red for obvious historical reasons.



marketing: green is the unofficial color of Ireland just like it is the obvious color of ecology; under these circumstances, why would the official logo of the Irish ecologists not be green? Today the logo of the *Comhaontas Glas*, the Irish Green Party, features a stylized sunflower with yellow petals and a light-green center on a dark-green background, which should not be surprising. However, it must be noted that the Green Party in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland region of the *Comhaontas Glas* created in 1983, has two official colors: green and blue. The logo of the Green Party in Northern Ireland is an adapted version of the standard green logo of the Green Party: the sunflower is now presented on a deep blue background. Politics and national identity are once again symbolically united as the choice of those two colors cannot be accidental. The color blue was most likely chosen for historical reasons; obviously, it cannot be understood as a provocation towards the Republic of Ireland (as the Green Party of Northern Ireland is an offspring of the Irish Green Party): it must be considered as an example of the symbolic complementarity of those two colors. If the color used by the ecologists from Northern Ireland obviously reminds us of the color chose by Henry VIII to represent the island thus placed under his authority, it must most of all be associated to Saint Patrick's blue and therefore be considered as an alternative way to represent Ireland – as the self-professed cross-community nature of the party prevents it from any Unionist or Loyalist endeavors.

The question of whether the use of the color green by Irish ecologists in the context of graphic design is supposed to embody the green of ecology or that of Ireland, in other words the “green of Nature” or the “green of Identity”, is difficult to answer. The truth probably lies somewhere in between as we should remember that the symbolic use of that color in Ireland probably comes from the flag of the Irish rebellion but also from two “natural” symbols: the bough of liberty and the legendary clover of Saint Patrick. Finally, the fact that Ireland literally looks green must not be minimized. It is therefore possible to briefly sum-up the history of the color in Ireland: originally, or more precisely “as far back as we can trace”, the color seems to have been associated to nature, to “greenery” or, in other words, to the “natural” aspect of Ireland. The color was then Christianized through the prism of Saint Patrick and his legendary life: his hagiographers and supporters associated the color to religion as the green shamrock was supposed to have epitomized the concept of Trinity. The color was then politicized: Saint Patrick is obviously linked to Catholicism and green became the symbol of the

struggle against the English settlers in the 17th and 18th centuries. Finally, in more recent times – i.e. from the second half of the 20th century on – the Irish green took its current meaning under the double influence of the marketing of Saint Patrick's Day on the one hand and the political ecology on the other. Nature, religion, politics, ecology, marketing: all those elements combined and gave birth to a true national – yet non official – symbol: the Irish Green. The past of Ireland has been reused, adapted, recycled by the religious, the political, the advertising man or simply the average citizen so that this past has finally become itself a vector of creation –or rather re-invention– of identity. The myths of Nature, the ecologic mythology of Ireland have actually led for over 1,500 years to a constant regeneration of Irishness that is, in the true sense of the word, to a persistent recycling of identity.

### Bibliography

- Armao, Frédéric, “De Beltaine à Pâques”, *Etudes Irlandaises*, Lille, 2002, II, pp. 29-41.
- Brennan, Paul et Peyronel, Valérie, *Civilisation Irlandaise*, Paris, Hachette Supérieur, 1999.
- Caulfield, James, *The Great Irish Rebellion, Secret and Silent Men of 1798*, Victoria, Trafford, 2004, p. 114.
- Cronin, Mike & Adair, Daryl. *The Wearing of the Green, a History of Saint Patrick's Day*, London, Routledge, 2006.
- Guillaume, André, *L'Irlande, une ou deux nations ?*, Paris, P.U.F., 1987.
- Hayes-McCaoy, G.A., *A History of Irish Flags from the earliest times*, Boston, G.K.Hall&Co, 1979.
- Kee, Robert, *The Green Flag, A History of Irish Nationalism*, London, Penguin Books, 2000 (1972).
- Mackillop, James, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998
- Maignant, Catherine, *Histoire et Civilisation de l'Irlande*, Paris, Nathan, 1996
- Mollard-Desfour, Annie, *Le vert : Dictionnaire de la couleur, mots et expressions d'aujourd'hui XXe-XXIe*, Paris, Editions du C.N.R.S., 2012.
- O'Kane, Michael, *Considering the Irish Greens, An Ethnographic Approach to Identity and Environmentalism*, Verlag DM, 2009.
- O'Laughlin Michael C., *The Irish Book of Arms*, Irish Genealogical Association, 2001



- Pakenham, Thomas, *The Year of Liberty. The Great Irish Rebellion of 1798*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1969.
- Trinquier, Jean, "Les Vertus Magiques et Hygiéniques du Vert dans l'Antiquité", in *Couleurs et Visions dans l'Antiquité Classique*, Rouen, Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 2002, pp. 97-128.
- Zimmermann, Georges Denis, *Songs of Irish rebellion: Irish political street ballads and rebel songs, 1780–1900*, Dublin, Four Courts Press