



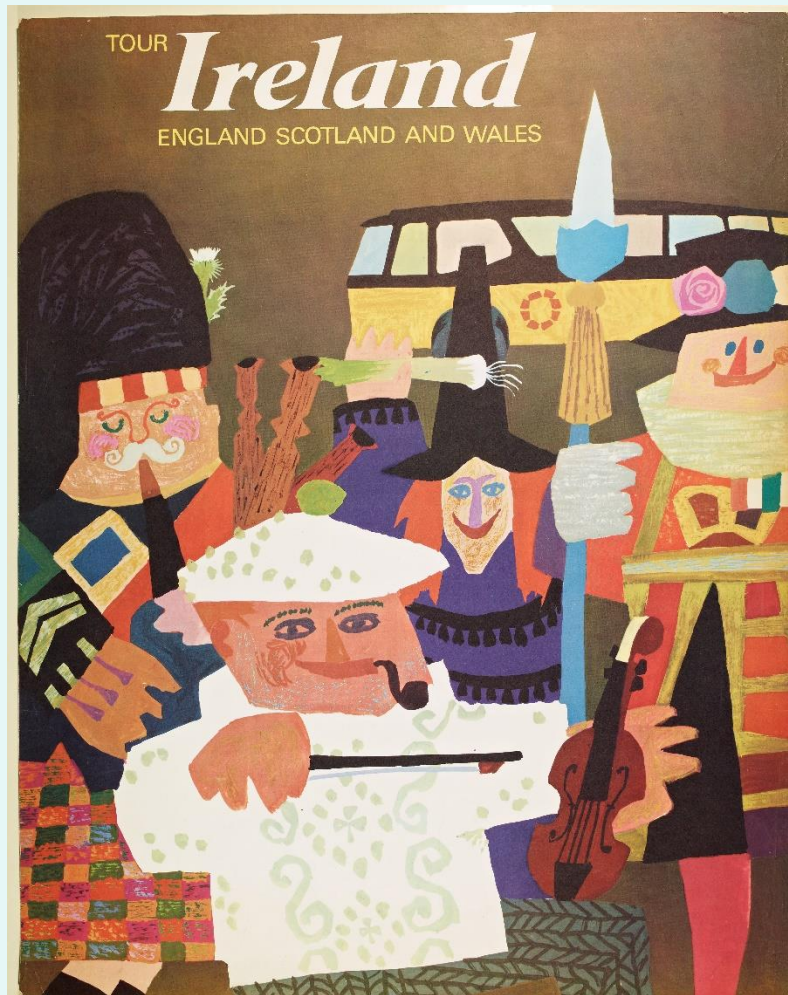
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# TRANSLATING TOURISM

Varying Visual Arts Representations of Irish Tourism



Following the formation of the Free State and into the mid-twentieth century, there were debates over how Ireland should be represented and promoted—these debates were held in many spheres including art and tourism.



EPH G25

This poster was designed by the Dutch graphic designer Pieter Sluis in the 1960s to promote travel in Ireland and Great Britain.

In the 1950s, bringing tourism to Ireland grew as a national and governmental interest. Stereotypes of friendliness, warmth and relaxed attitudes were overlaid on the people of Ireland. Meanwhile Bord Fáilte, Aer Lingus and advertising firms produced “various forms of marketing materials most of which emphasised Ireland as being unspoiled by modern times.”

# An Tóstal

From this atmosphere came the An Tóstal Festival. The largest tourism development scheme in the 1950s, the Irish Tourism Board said that the festival would be an “expression of Irish national life...to project our spiritual and cultural place in the modern world.” This juxtaposition of an unspoiled Ireland and modern attractions highlights some of the complexities of An Tóstal. An Tóstal, translates to “a gathering,” was created in part to attract visitors to Ireland during the off-peak season.

The following graphics were released in 1953 by Fógra Fáilte, the National Tourist Publicity Organisation, as part of a promotion pamphlet to advertise and explain the purpose of the festival.

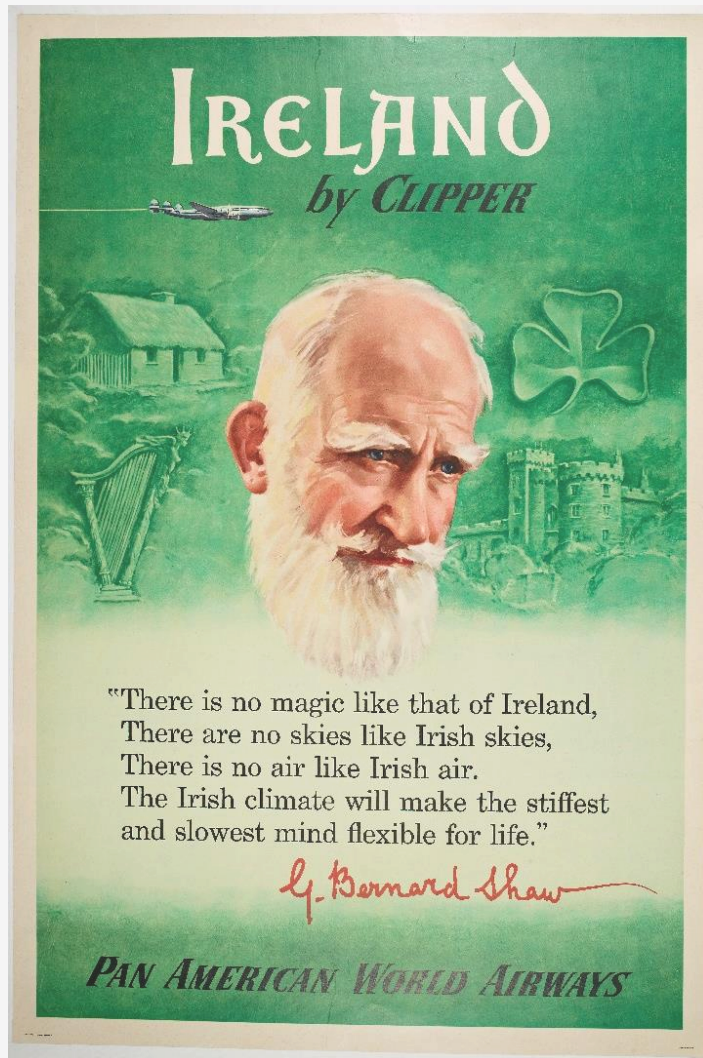


TO APRIL 26th, 1953

## an tóstal

WILL BE HELD IN IRELAND

WHAT is AN TÓSTAL? Other countries have their own phrases to express what it means. FESTIVAL is not quite the right word. The dictionary describes it as “a pageant, muster, array or display”, but in its present connotation AN TÓSTAL means far more. It means IRELAND AT HOME.



EPH G5

This poster was published by Pan American Air to promote flights to Ireland in 1948.

Today scholars say that An Tóstal stands as “an excellent example of how Irish identity was influenced both from within and without Ireland.” The idea for the festival did not come from within Ireland, but rather from the president of Pan-American Airlines.

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**I**T means that for three full weeks beginning on Easter Sunday, 1953, Ireland will be AT HOME to her friends and exiles from all over the world. During that time the Irish people will unite as one family to receive and entertain their guests and to show them with pride that Ireland is a land of hospitality, a land of beauty, a historic land. A land which lives in the memories of its guests.

## Visual Analysis

Look at the previous advertising graphics from Pieter Sluis, Fógra Fáilte and the Pan American Airways and consider the following questions.

Who is the intended audience?

What sentiments are the designers appealing to?

How is Ireland portrayed?

What symbols are used?

What are similarities and differences between these publicity graphics?

## Festival Design

In another example of Irish identity and representation being shaped from abroad, the logo for the festival was done by Dutch designer Guss Melai.

Featuring a harp, analysis of the design concludes that Melai, “graphically linked this very modern tourist gathering to the distant past, it also linked modern Ireland symbolically to the musical and artistic outpourings of a previous age.”

Here at the NLI we have a copy of the 1954 An Tóstal poster featuring this design.





*This is the official emblem of*

**an tÓstail**

The design is based on the traditional Irish Harp, symbolising ancient Irish Festivals and Gatherings.

The forepillar and head of the Harp are woven into an ornamentation taken from the Table of Canons—F.5R—in the Book of Kells.

The copyright of this Emblem is vested in An Bord Fáilte, 13 Merrion Sq, Dublin.

This page was included in the Fógra Fáilte publicity pamphlet regarding the initial festival in 1953.

What other symbols do you see in the poster? Use the next page to write down and identify the various emblems within the design.

# Analyse





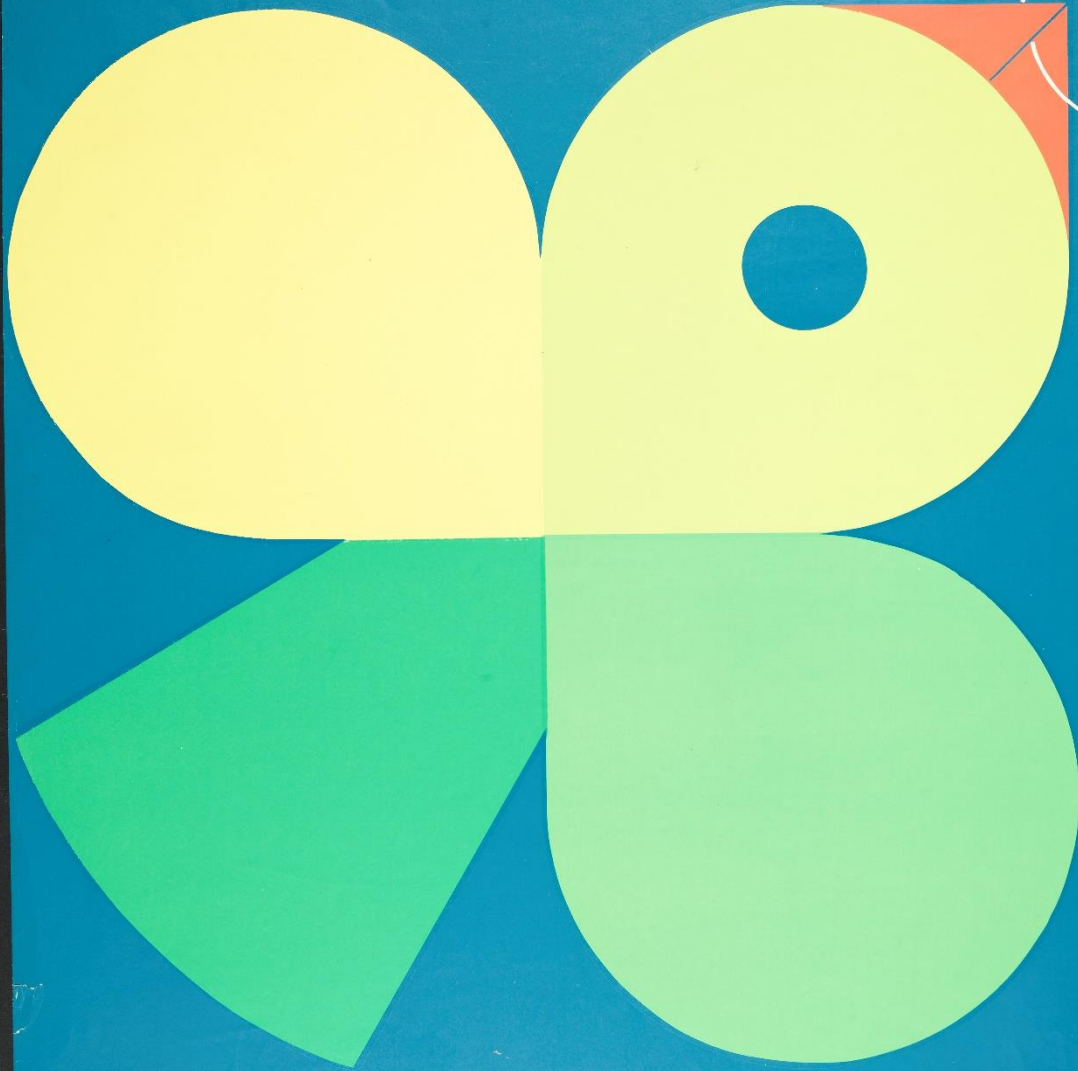
## Ireland Week

An Tóstal encouraged the exodus of Irish and Irish descendants to return to Ireland for a “celebration at home,” promoted by Pan American Airways. Meanwhile Ireland Week—sponsored by the Irish Export Board, Aer Lingus and the Irish Tourist Board—brought Ireland abroad.

The first Ireland Week in London was planned around St. Patrick’s Day 1964. The Irish Embassy in London asked the then Taoiseach Sean Lemass to visit and make addresses to promote Ireland as an industrial and tourist destination. Lemass said in his speech he did not want to focus on “wishes or hopeful aspirations, but about hard facts and realistic calculations.”

Ireland week continued over the years. The NLI has an advertisement from sometime in the 1960s when it was held between September 26-30. It is unclear why there was a shift away from the original dates around St. Patrick’s Day. The poster was designed by Pieter Sluis.

SEPTEMBER 26-30 IN LONDON  
SPONSORED BY: -IRISH EXPORT BOARD.  
AER LINGUS-IRISH • IRISH TOURIST BOARD



**IRELAND  
WEEK**

## Visual Analysis

You have now seen two graphics from Pieter Sluis, both produced for tourism purposes in the 1960s, as well as one by Guss Melai. Refer to the images, think about your previous ideas and consider these questions.

What are similarities and differences between these publicity graphics?

Who is the intended audience?

While the purposes were similar and two were sponsored by airlines, the designs are very different. What might contribute to this?

Which design do you find more convincing or appealing and why?

The Dutch designers were employed in Ireland when they produced these designs. Compare their graphics to the advertisement created by Pan American Airways.

Dutch design revolutionised representations of Ireland in tourism. The painterly and overblown traditional visuals were abandoned; however, they still focused on aspects unique to Ireland from a tourist perspective.

Designers such as a Melai and Sluis were known for the aesthetic they learned in Holland design schools that blended “European modernism with contemporary American illustration styles.”

Typical markers of their work included:

“sans serif typography, grid structures, bright colours and bold shapes and visually condensed complex levels of information”



# Activity

## Step 1.

Create your own travel poster promoting travel to Ireland.

## Step 2.

Write a paragraph explaining why you designed your poster the way you did. Justify your choices and be sure to include answers to questions like—who is your audience? What symbols did you use? You can refer to the graphics and visual analysis questions for inspiration.

## Sources

- *Making Ireland Irish: Tourism and National Identity since the Irish Civil War* – Eric Zuelow
- *Brand New Ireland? Tourism, Development and National Identity in the Irish Republic* – Michael Clancy
- *Irish Tourism 1880-1980* - Irene Furlong
- “An Tóstal and the Visual Arts” – Brian O’Doherty

## Catalogue Links

An Tóstal [Bray] exhibition of contemporary Irish art, International Hotel, Bray, April 21st to May 5th, 1954	Catalogue	LO P 160	<a href="#">catalogue link</a>
An Tóstal: Ireland at home, April 18th - May 9th 1954	Ephemera - Poster	EPH G29	<a href="#">digital access</a>
An Tóstal Ireland at home: April 5th to April 26th, 1953	Ephemera - Programme	EPH A46	<a href="#">digital access</a>
Tour Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales – Sluis	Ephemera - Poster	EPH G25	<a href="#">digital access</a>
Ireland Week – Sluis	Ephemera - Poster	EPH F156	<a href="#">digital access</a>



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