**Abstract**

This proposed paper will address the various uses of the harp icon as a signifier of Irish identities among emigrants from Ireland in the nineteenth century. While the harp began its iconic life as an elite symbol, the use of the harp image had widespread appeal among the greater Irish population in the nineteenth century as a result of its repeated use in O'Connell's Repeal Movement and by Parnell's Parliamentary Party. Its employment as a marker of Irishness on the green flag of emigrants gained in visibility among the middle classes, and proletariat alike, throughout the century. The changing signification of the harp in its varied diasporic contexts offers a variety of interpretations of the Irish nation. As an especially volatile symbol, the harp’s particular meaning was controlled through the contextualisation of its uses, for example, through juxtaposition with other symbols. The amalgam of the Irish harp and the American bald eagle reminds us of the malleability of the harp ensign and the ways its meaning could be modulated through association with other devices. This paper will explore some of the new visual meanings which the harp insignia accrued among the Irish diaspora in America and Australia. It will pose the following questions: what exactly did the harp represent for Irish emigrants, how did it function semiotically, and what associations did it carry? My paper will also consider the utopian function of the harp for those Irish emigrants who clung to their nation’s emblem as a source of national pride and, frequently, as a sign of respectability.

**Emily Cullen** is an Irish scholar, poet and harpist based in Melbourne. She currently works with the School of Arts and Sciences at the Australian Catholic University. Emily was awarded an IRCHSS Government of Ireland fellowship for her doctoral study on the Irish harp, which she completed at the Moore Institute, NUI Galway. A former member of the Belfast harp Orchestra, she has recorded on a number of albums and also as a solo artist. Her second collection of poetry entitled, *In Between Angels and Animals* has just been published by Arlen House.