

Nicoleta Stanca<sup>1</sup>

## Icons of Irish Cultural Heritage and Tourism

*Abstract: The article attempts to discuss icons, such as promotional films, music and dancing shows, Irish-themed pubs and Celtic symbols in all forms of souvenirs, meant to represent Irish identity abroad, especially in the US, where many descendants still feel nostalgic about their origin. Issues of authenticity, commodification and tourist practices and ethnicity will be tackled in relation to these iconic images.*

*Key words: Irishness; icons; tourism; America; emigration; diaspora; cultural heritage*

This article is concerned with an analysis of examples of material culture and tourist strategies used by Ireland especially in the latter half of the twentieth century. The cultural practices tackled seem to be marked by a process of commodifying Irishness and a representation of Irish identity for its diasporic community more than for a non-Irish audience. Examples like the sale of Irish soil or “Irish Spring” soap ads on television, the success of Irish-themed pubs and of the *Riverdance* shows have created narratives of commodification, ethnicity and belonging, with an effect on Irish(American) identities.

Cultural and tourist manifestations meant to promote a country may be poetic and may try to capture the spirit of the land, but their main purpose is to create a desire to commodify reality. Tourism promotes these aspects of culture which encourage visitors and it stems from the desire for new experiences. There are theoreticians who include countries like Ireland and Greece in the heritage industries circuit due to the interrelation between tourism and this genre of ethnic entertainment.

In the 1970s and 1980s, ads for Leprechaun Land Ltd., Chicago, offered readers of the American press the chance to “become an Irish landowner for only \$10”. The slogan was “And remember, wherever you go, and whatever you do, you’ll always have one foot in Ireland”, in county Dublin. Or Heritage Lands Ltd., Virginia, offered people a piece of the “ould sod” (in Connemara) for \$25. The connection of the second or later generations with “home” triggered by this marketing strategy resumed the effect obtained earlier, in 1897, at the Irish Fair, organized in New York, where visitors were invited for a small fee to walk on Irish soil, which filled a large map of Ireland. However, the tradition of selling Irish soil to the diaspora was treated in an ironical way in a typical postmodern exhibition by John Byrne at the Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin, in 2001. The event, *the Border Itself*, displayed

---

<sup>1</sup> Ovidius University of Constanța, Romania

various border items, such as bags of soil and other examples of border litter with a satirical touch.

In spite of the more detached approach of the present day, there is a certain concept, discussed by Stephanie Rains in her study on *The Irish American in Popular Culture 1945-2000* (2007), which seems to have marked the psyche of many members of the Irish community abroad, that of the diasporic “return” or of the going “back” for the first time. It is recurrent in touristic and filmic representations of Ireland from the 1950s onwards. After WWII, the idea of “the return” to Ireland became a constant theme in Irish-American culture, exploited by the developing Irish tourist industry.

The Irish Tourist Board conceived of the US as a market for three categories: the Irish-born, the Irish-American descendants and the non-Irish. The travelogues produced in these decades were especially aimed at the first two categories. The distribution of films such as *The Quiet Man* was controlled by *Bord Fáilte* and the major tour operators, such as the Irish-American “parish associations”.

In 1952 appeared one of the most popular representations of the journey home: the film *The Quiet Man* by John Ford, the story of Sean Thornton, who goes back to the west of Ireland and marries an Irish girl, Mary Kate. Sean returns to his home cottage *White O’Morn* in the village of Innisfree, a name for Heaven and a location invoked in W.B. Yeats’s poetry, this journey being similar to a return to Eden. Sean, as a first-generation emigrant, is guided through his native place and his memory is influenced by his mother, whose voice-over is present in the movie. Sean’s vision of home seems fictitious, blending what he sees with what he recalls from his mother’s words. The images of *White O’Morn*, Innisfree, and of Ireland itself are filtered through the collective and inherited diasporic Irish-American constructs. It was meant to reconcile Irish and American identity, symbolized by the romantic relationship as well. *The Quiet Man* was criticized for the sentimental diasporic image presented, yet, it may actually contain an interrogation of the division between the idyllic diasporic image and reality; for example, when Sean sees Mary Kate in the sunlight he asks “Hey, is that real? She couldn’t be.” Sean’s image of Ireland may have been “unreal”, yet, his “return” seems to have played a crucial role in the shaping of the Irish-American identity in the 1950s.

Another film, Peter Bryan’s *O’Hara’s Holiday* (1959) is the story of a New York policeman with Irish roots who takes a trip to “the old country”, meets an Irish “colleen” (who is actually an employee of the Irish Tourist Board) and is joined by his Irish-American friends, who enjoy the various products and services offered by the Irish (the Shannon Airport, the rich greenery of the west of Ireland, Irish coffee, Limerick ham, hotels and restaurants in Dublin). By comparison with the 1950s America, Ireland looks like a “bucolic paradise” (O’Brien 7).

Another similar production mentioned in Rains’s study is *Honeymoon in Ireland* (1963), which is the story of an Irish girl and her American husband visiting Ireland and enjoying the attraction to foreign tourists. Throughout the movie, Ireland is explained to Bill, the American husband, like for non-Irish audiences, in such a way that he becomes an Irishman as a result of his profound emotional Irish experience (Rains 108-110). The message of the film seems to be that it is not Mary who has become American through her marriage, but Bill has become instead an Irishman through his journey to Ireland. Both Mary and Bill, a first-generation emigrant and an American married into the diaspora, are questioning issues of ethnicity and identity in spite of the apparently simple context of commodification

tourist practices. Mary says: “I felt terribly sentimental in Cork, and we didn’t talk very much” (Rains 108). She was finally back. The representation of Ireland in these films is made in terms of hospitality, warmth and the caring for the guest, whether an Irish-American emigrant or an adopted “Irishman”.

Part of cultural tourism experiences are also films such as *W.B. Yeats – A Tribute* (George Fleischmann, John D. Sheridan, 1950) and *Yeats Country* (Patrick Carey, 1965) (O’Brien 5-6). The first one celebrates the life and work of the poet and statesman; it is about Ireland represented by Yeats’s poetry and the landscape of Sligo which inspired him. The country seems inhibited only by the presence of Yeats. The film was considered successful abroad, winning a prize at the Venice Festival, 1950, and being presented at the Edinburgh festival, 1951. The second film features Yeats as an icon of Irish identity. The film also enjoyed international recognition, restating the correlation between landscapes and poetry, locating Yeats firmly in the physical and cultural landscape of Ireland. Though Yeats’s poetry is valuable for world literature, the films presented do not focus on this aspect, as their major interest is tourist promotion.

How could we account for the patterns present in the promotional films discussed earlier and other iconic images of Irishness? One explanation may be offered by postcolonialism. Postcolonial countries often retreat into myths of racial purity in the attempt to shed off the colonial heritage. Paradoxically, at times, the native authorities tend to follow the templates imposed by the colonial authority, once the new state is free and ready to establish itself. Declan Kiberd discusses, for instance, how J.M. Synge portrays the Aran Islands as a picture of cultural stereotypes where “every man and woman becomes a sort of artist,” encouraged by the English typology (Kiberd 288).

... idealizations of rural existence, the longing for community and primitive simplicity, are the product of an urban sensibility, and are cultural fictions imposed on the lives of those they purport to represent. In the United States, for example, it was not cowboys who sang the praises of the old West but rather writers and ideologues from the East, intent on establishing a mythology of the last frontier. By the same token, it was urban-based writers, intellectuals and political leaders who created romantic Ireland and perpetrated the myth that the further west you go, the more you come into contact with the real Ireland. (Luke Gibbons qtd. in O’Brien 8)

Thus, Americans are not the only responsible for this kind of image of Ireland. It has roots in a British colonial interpretation of the nineteenth century. Then the Irish government itself adopted the picture of Ireland as a pre-modern idyll of peasant life, which appealed to visitors because it relied on the romantic myth of rurality corresponding to the past of the country. The Irish have become aware of the necessity to commodify their culture and in time this has led to various forms of counter-exploitation or irony. For instance, O’Brien gives an instance of a 1930 short story entitled “An Corp”, by Michael O Siochfhradha, in which Irish villagers stage a false wake to mock a visiting author wanting to document Irish customs and rituals.

Ireland appears in the advertizing films in this period as cut off from the loss of cultural “authenticity” which is typical of the modern world. Interestingly enough, these films actually intertwine traditional and modern representations of Ireland because, for instance, in *Honeymoon in Ireland*, Bill and Mary are travelling from the airport in a brand-new

open-top red sports car towards the “thatched cottages” of Irish countryside. This phenomenon shows the complexity of the experience of the Irish “return”. For the second or late generations of Irish-Americans, the image of Ireland was not only mediated by collective memory but also by these films. Thus, an informed (Irish-American) viewer will pick out the intertextual dialogue with *The Quiet Man* of the documentary travelogue *The Spell of Ireland* (1950), the narrator’s mother being a presence in the film just like Sean’s mother (Rains, O’Brien 8).

Ireland’s heritage was an important feature of promotional films before the 1980s, yet, this decade seems to have marked an increase in the context of global tourism. Irish architectural heritage depicts almost stereotypically the same castles, such as Blarney Castle in Co. Cork. Other frequently advertized locations are Bunratty Castle and Folk Park, in which the pastoral and historical associations are often contrasted with the duty-free shopping at Shannon Airport. The image that *Bord Fáilte*, established in 1955, proposed for promotions was of a pastoral, romantic, ideal Ireland; yet, there were also informational films which emphasized progress and modernity, in the end resulting in a hybrid image.

The emphasis was often on the Gaelic and Catholic heritage, while colonial architecture, such as the Georgian buildings in Dublin, was ignored. And if Dublin was shown, the focus was on the city’s contribution to the struggle for independence and on its contemporary life (Rains 118-9). Irish cultural heritage included traditional crafts and music (villagers dancing at a crossroads, music festivals in Ennis, a demonstration of uilleann pipes). From the 1970s onwards, reaching a climatic level in the 1990s, heritage centres spread throughout Ireland (Rains 120). Many targeted an Irish-American audience, such as Strokestown Famine Museum in Co. Roscommon and the Ulster-American Folk Park, Omagh, Co. Tyrone. Colonial rule, the Famine and emigration are now present in the tourist representations of Ireland since they are addressed to the Irish-Americans. The same issues were tackled at a seminar at the National Tourism Council of Ireland, in 1977, where the editorial director of *Travel Agent Magazine*, US, Chris Lockwood urged not to “let success and sophistication change the ways of Ireland. They are a consistent and universal appeal to all the tired, huddled masses across the Atlantic yearning to breathe a drop of Irish air” (qtd. in Rains 121).

Let us entice tourists with images of what they expect to find and allow them to discover the real Ireland once they’re here. One of the major things going for Ireland is the pre-established image of a rural, slow-moving, witty country of characters which has been established in American’s minds through a wealth of Irish mythology from the myth mills of Hollywood ... Such a suggestion may sound like blasphemy to a nation pre-occupied with the notion that it should show itself to be the antithesis of the stage Irish ‘top O’ the Mornin’ shore and begorra how’s yer leprechaun’ image, like it or not, still persists. This image, in its worst form in America, is what we have come to call the ‘Irish Spring’ syndrome, named after a particularly distasteful, corny and insulting TV commercial. However, it does sell soap! (Lockwood qtd. in Rains 121)

Another example of events in the Irish advertizing campaign for Irish-America was the creation of the Irish Tourist Board Chicago office in 1978, announced in an article in the *Chicago Irish-American News*, which mentioned that “whereas Ireland’s greatest

commodity traditionally was grandmothers for many decades, today the greatest commodity that Ireland has to sell is trips and tours to Ireland to see from whence these beloved grandmothers come” (qtd. in Rains 122). The same strategies of completing the cycle through the visit to Ireland of the Irish-American guests in a circuit of commodity exchange was used by the Irish Tourist Authority in the 1990s when two ads were produced, “Invaders” and “Humour”, targeting the Irish areas of New York and Boston. The understatement in “Invaders” is that tourists are the only ones who did not invade Ireland and this presence would correct the absence created by the exile of their ancestors and the trauma of colonial history.

Other tourist practices which should be mentioned are the buying of souvenirs while visiting Ireland and the trading of Irish goods in Irish stores in the US, in New York, Boston and Chicago. The question in the case of material goods relates to the authenticity of these mass produced objects symbolically related to “homeland”. These objects operate as markers of ethnic identity, so they have to be recognizable with a minimum effort as standardized representation of Ireland. They are also mobile functioning out of the Irish context, identifying its cultural meanings across wide geographical areas. Interestingly, these objects mirror goods that would have been inherited by earlier generations from their predecessors and they functioned as material mnemonics of past generations. These would have been:

paintings and watercolours; sculpture in silver, bronze and porcelain; rosaries, crucifixes, and statues of the Virgin; crystal, china and pottery; jewellery; linen tablecloth, runners, napkins, mats, doilies, anitmacassars and handkerchiefs; woolen blankets, hats, sweaters, coats, suits, skirts, socks, scarves, ties and tartans; blessings to hang on the wall, doorknockers, shillelaghs, coats of arms, crests, banners and flags; framed maps; coffee-table books of photographs, volumes of history and poetry; musical instruments, dancing costumes and shoes; CDs, records and tapes of Irish music. (R. Byrn qtd. in Rains 127-8)

The origin of these objects is found in older craft and folk production processes and in general they are focused on domestic items. Other products finding their roots in traditional crafts and the work of artisans are the items produced by the Waterford Glass Factory. Therefore, being hand-made by skilled glass-makers, these “luxury” goods are presented as “authentic”.

In multi-ethnic America, Americans of Irish origin celebrate St. Patrick's Day to mark their separate ethnic background and show solidarity among the Irish. In 1983, it was reckoned that 14 million St. Patrick's Day cards were posted in the USA (Walker 86). Contemporary commercial and tourist celebrations in the USA must have been given a boost in the 1960s, when Ireland became “a holiday destination for members of the international jet set”. J.F. Kennedy's visit to Ireland in 1963 is said to have epitomised the new mood of internationalism and to have made Ireland safe for western-style consumerism. The Irish must have found it hard to accommodate their myths of rebellion with consumerist actuality, yet consumerist demands seem to have prevailed. The number of visitors, who want to uncover half-forgotten Irish roots in the “ould sod”, has mushroomed in recent years. And the trend was given added impetus - especially among Americans - by the 1984 visit of President Ronald Reagan to his ancestral home in County Tipperary. The Hibernian Research Company, Ireland's largest genealogical agency, was responsible for identifying the grateful village of Ballyporeen as the home of the president's ancestors. Genealogy seems to be very popular because people enjoy finding

things out for themselves and internationalism has helped in the popularisation of roots tracing (*Insight Guides* 66).

Part of the world-wide celebrity of St Patrick's Day is also due to Hollywood. The first Beverly Hills parade was broadcast in 1889. There were magnificent parades, where celebrities wore Irish outfit and leprechaun-like costumes. Those excluded even created satirical versions of the celebration. The holiday seems to be the best means of delivering successful tourist messages as it incorporates all Irish icons. It is on St. Patrick's Day that everybody is Irish and wears green and shamrocks and goes to a pub to drink Guinness, to have a potato pancake, to listen to Irish music and enjoy Irish dancing. It is on March 17 that huge amounts of St. Patrick's Day's cards and souvenirs (jewellery and watches with Celtic motifs and towels printed with Irish jokes) are sent and received - and more recently, everything in the flamboyant American style. In a humorous online tourist guide of Ireland, American travellers and their shopping habits are exquisitely mocked at. Ireland produces vast quantities of woollen knitwear. Under a US / Irish trade agreement, as it is may be suggested, American visitors may not leave Ireland without a minimum two sweaters of which one at least must be green. European visitors are only required to have one woolly jumper but must have a copy of *The Collected Works of Seamus Heaney* as well.

The most well known emblem of Ireland is "the shamrock". St. Patrick is said to have expounded the theory of the Trinity and then to have driven the serpents into the sea with it. A custom adopted to be worn on St. Patrick's feast day. Wearing "green" - the colour associated with Irish hills, the shamrock and spring - would be another must on St. Patrick's Day. Harps, round towers and Celtic crosses would be other well-known items of Irish iconology. Ireland has inherited great works of art and craft from the Golden Age of Irish civilisation (around 400-800 BC): the Books of Kells and Durrow with manuscript illuminations, the gold filigree of the Ardagh Chalice, Tara Brooch and the Cross of Cong. They all display lush ornamentation, interweaving patterns and complex knotwork according to the Celtic creeds that "all things relate" and "all things are holy". Irish artists have taken over these motifs as integrative symbols of national identity and legitimisation of their distinctiveness as a people. This imagery can be found today on all kinds of souvenirs, medals, stamps, cards, jewellery and books. They are all icons of Irishness, irrespective of issues of quality and authenticity. These Celtic images are proof of an "over-performance" of ethnicity, as part of a circuit of global exchanges.

Where would an Irishman, whether in Ireland or in New York, go after marching in St. Patrick's Day parade? To a welcoming Irish pub, where "You are home with Guinness".

This brew, a strong black beer with a creamy white head, is even more than Irish whiskey, the country's national beverage. Brewed in Dublin since 1759, it is a temperamental drink, needing great care in pouring to remain as smooth as velvet. Traditional Irish food is also an essential part of any St. Patrick's Day feast: soda bread, Irish stew, potato pancakes and Irish coffee. The brown soda bread made from stone-ground wheaten flour is baked crusty yet soft inside, the perfect accompaniment for smoked salmon. Irish stew is known all over the world; it is a creamy braise of lamb or mutton, onion, herbs and potatoes. The Irish have always eaten a lot of potatoes. Recipes now show that potatoes were made into elaborate tarts filled with butter, sugar, brandy egg-yolks and sieved potatoes. These dishes have been popularised and turned into icons together with kitschy "green cakes", for example, these being ordinary cakes and a dash of green food colouring added, to the great delight of tourists.

In the 1990s, also proliferated Irish pubs. These themed pubs have become extremely popular especially in the US, as a simulacrum of typical Irish pubs (sociable, relaxing and authentic). Traditional food and drink (Guinness whiskey, Irish coffee) and the Irish pubs are meant to reinforce the portrayal of Irish experiences as "authentic". There is an organization of the Irish Pub Company in

Dublin with an American subsidiary in Las Vegas. They are meant to display “Irishness”, offering “designer packages” which encompass everything, from the layout of the pub to its inner design and menus. These pubs are usually designed in the nineteenth century style, the patina of age being very important. Actually, both *Riverdance* fans and Irish-themed pubs customers are aware that there is no authentic tourist experience. It is only a game, in a postmodern experience for post-tourists (Urry qtd in Rains 137).

A St. Patrick's Day feast would necessarily include Irish music and dancing. In broad musicological terms, Irish musicians draw from long-planted Gaelic/Celtic roots; and the country had to develop musical ways of expressing its complex colonial and post-colonial relationship to the English (and, in particular, to the English language). Irish culture has been marked by religious disputes between Catholicism and Protestantism, which have been marked by movements of people to and from across the Irish Sea. For as long the Irish have migrated across the Atlantic, they embedded their music in the popular culture of America too. Music has been a key to cultural identity, to a sense of history and tradition; it has been a way of defending oneself against English cultural hegemony and sustaining a sense of community in foreign lands and circumstances.

This is the historical context for a number of features in the contemporary musical life of Ireland: live music, whether bands and Karaoke nights in pubs and bars, or dances in hotels; Irish “popular” music encompasses sounds from the most traditional (including the Gaelic tradition) to the most contemporary - and the special relationship with American music, country music being an important strand of Irish-American music, rooted as it is in Irish balladry. The uses of the “harp”, now an Irish icon, date back from the eleventh century, when this instrument was used to accompany the poetry of the Irish bards at the courts of Gaelic princes. The uilleann or union pipes have replaced the ancient bagpipes in Ireland. Other well-known instruments are the fiddle and the flute. Closely allied to the playing of traditional music is Irish dance, which seems to have come into its own in the eighteenth century. Traditional dances involved communal and group dancing to a variety of tunes and tempos which are known today as Irish jigs, reels and hornpipes. There can certainly be no doubt that Irish musicians have made a contribution to the global success of Anglo-American music. And it is equally clear that music has become essential to what one might call the country's heritage industries — the construction of “sites for tourism” and locations for films makers. In the tourist season, many hotels in Ireland lay on after-dinner dancers and traditional musicians.

In the 1990s, Irish-themed products became best-sellers in the world; in the context, Irish-America was a major site of Irishness. We may refer to the success of *Riverdance* shows and of the Irish-themed pubs. *Riverdance* began in 1994, at a Eurovision Song Contest, held in Dublin. The performance changed in time into a glamorous “Broadway” show, benefitting from the dancing of two brilliant Irish-Americans, Michael Flatley and Jean Butler. The spectacle included a real narrative of Irish-American emigration, settlement and identity formation, its success being due to its diasporic hybridity. *Riverdance* has been associated with “postcard” tourism (Rains 134), kitsch and local culture becoming commodified. It is an example of local practices turned into a global phenomenon through a process of cultural hybridity and commodification.

Apart from *Riverdance*, and now more successful than it, there is this phenomenon of the Irish dancing world: “Lord of the Dance” Michael Flatley. The son of an Irish immigrant, born in Chicago, he became in 1975, when he was only seventeen, the world champion of Irish dance. Michael Flatley was the first non-European to win this title and now he is the world's fastest tap dancer and a great flute player. He declares that Irish dancing has been done for centuries but his merit is to have given it a modern-day form and to have created an insatiable global demand for Irish dancing.

The critics have not spared Michael Flatley. They called his shows “superficial, calculated innocence, too Las Vegas”; everything he touches turns into glitz, literally in the shows, through costumes, props and special effects, and metaphorically, as his productions have been blockbusters since “Lord of the Dance” (1996). The reproaches range from the loose story-line (Flatley *versus* Lord of the Dark, Flatley resisting The Temptress and winning his Lady, Flatley saviour of the Little Spirit / the Jester) to Flatley's assumed infatuation (his numerous masks and costumes: gang leader, magician, martyr, lover, husband, rock-star, country-music star, flutist, prize-fighter, bare-chested sex symbol and deity, frequently changing jackets and accessories - headbands and wristbands) and to the emphasis on spectacle (a sensory overload of exploding flash pots, frequent sonic booms and complicated lightning meant to distract the audience from the supposedly emptiness at the core of the show).

Michael Flatley's response was prompt: “I did it in my own way, which may be more flamboyant than the British press cared for, but it's typically American. Audiences pay a lot of money and they want to see somebody out there walking the line, walking the edge”. His shows work better in big American arenas of about 10 000 seats; this is the type of space they are designed for, according to the American belief “the bigger the better”. The crowds appreciate Flatley's solos and flamenco-like duel with Lord of the Dark and they absolutely love it when he and the whole company line up across the stage with military precision and crank the speed. To the critics' claim that what upsets them is not the lack of purism and the abundance of box office but the repetitive excess of “Irish Gold” showmanship, he answers: “It was always gonna be a series anyhow ... There's still the same hard, fast, in your face hard shoe dancing that er, sort of, got us going in the first place” (*BBC Main National News*, July 23, 1996).

Michael Flatley is either loved or hated - anyhow, he brings out the passion in people. He is an amazing dancer, choreographer and musician. His charisma, talent and showmanship, backed up by exciting music and a gracious troupe have won him thousands of fans all over the world. People attend the shows to watch, dance, listen to the music and be entertained. They should not mistake “Lord of the Dance” or “Feet of Flames” for high art or traditional Irish dancing. Their appeal may have something to do with our primitive desire to beat drums, to which one can add Flatley's well-oiled chest and a pinch of sexy, leggy Irish dancers. If one is determined to see nothing beyond the glitz of an Irish icon – “the world's greatest dance show”, Michael Flatley's shows fail to appear rewarding. However, there is nothing “simple” about these shows, which contain a world of meanings - commercially packaged as they are - comment on Irish history and mythology and depict the Celts meeting other cultures, travelling across the world to reach homeland - Planet Ireland.

The primary element that is new in the latest shows is the unexpected content of “foreign” culture: Spanish, Egyptian (in “Feet of Flames” - 2000) and American. In a commercial context, the added colour of multi-cultural flavours must give the shows even wider and more immediate appeal world-wide but this could be explained by references to Irish cultural and musical history, which engendered and accepted hybridised forms. Consider, for instance, the Temptress's Spanish dance or the flamenco-like duel between Flatley and Don Dorcha in an Irish dance show. All are illustrations of the Irish culture's attempt to merge with or to twist and absorb other cultures. Removable giant towers and/or doors framed with Celtic knotwork and interlaces in the Book of Kells style usually flank the stage. Celtic motifs will be traceable on the characters' costumes as well. Tiny tinkling chimes and shimmering sounds like cascades of raindrops grow into a deep rumble that seems to vibrate from the depths of the ground. Cloaked court attendants lead the company onstage, chanting sinisterly. Are these masked characters, their faces like something from a Venetian carnival, the high Kings of the Royal Court of Tara? Or are they monks, creating a scene very appropriate to Irish spiritual identity?

The moment is Celtic, ancient, foreign, exotic and futuristic - a mesmerising fusion of times and cultures.

The conclusion to the article is that many of Irish tourist practices (selling Irish soil at various events, advertizing “Irish Spring” soap, organizing trips for the Irish-Americans to trace their roots) have been mainly mediated through the diasporic gaze and as a means of reconciliation between Irish history and its narratives and contemporary Ireland with its tourist practices and experiences, such as films, music, dancing, pubs and a whole process of commodification, some Irish iconic images being labeled by its very culture as being overtly ethnic.

## **References**

*BBC Main National News*. July 23, 1996.

Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation*. Reading, Berkshire: Vintage, Cox and Wyman, 1996.

*Insight Guides: Ireland*. edited and produced by Brian Bell, Apa Publications, 1995.

*The Quiet Man* (John Ford, Republic Studios, US, 1952).

O’Brien, Harvey. “Culture, Commodity, and Cead Mile Failte: U.S. and Irish Tourist Films as a Vision of Ireland”. *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*. March, 2002.

Rains, Stephanie. *The Irish-American in Popular Culture 1945-2000*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007.

Walker, Brian. *Dancing to History's Tune (History, Myth and Politics in Ireland)*. Belfast: Queen's University of Belfast, 1996.