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Ireland on Tour —*Riverdance*, the Irish Diaspora, and the Celtic Tiger*

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Abstract

Incorporating a historical perspective into culture studies, this paper contends that, as an emblem of the Celtic Tiger, *Riverdance* is a parable of Ireland's response to the forces of globalization as the nation moved away from preoccupations with its traumatic past toward the economic competition of today. In their early forms, responses to global influences were embedded in Irish culture. Long before what is commonly called the age of globalization, Irish dance was already "proto-global" in its openness to the flow of cultural exchanges generated by people's travel. This flow formed an interesting dialectic with cultural nationalism and endowed Irish dance with a national(ist)

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character. Meanwhile, this narrowing of Irish dance was interrogated by dancers in diaspora who began to travel to the home country to participate in dance competitions in the late 1960s. This reversal of migration coincided with a nationwide revision of cultural memory, leading to the emergence of cultural tourism—a marriage between tradition and commerce—along with the emergence of the Celtic Tiger in the 1990s. Adopting cultural tourism studies as my framework of interpretation, I subsequently explore how *Riverdance* renovates tradition to produce a showcase of modern Ireland. In conclusion, I argue that *Riverdance* is interesting in that it compels us to redefine nationalism and its attendant categories in the age of globalization.

Key Words: *Riverdance*, the Irish Diaspora, the Celtic Tiger, globalization, cultural tourism