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Poitín – a Spirit of Rebellion and Inspiration

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Poitín – a spirit of rebellion and inspiration

Introduction

In his foreword for the strategic vision for Irish Whiskey Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Simon Coveney T.D. stated that with a growth rate of almost 200 percent over a decade Irish whiskey brands now represent the fastest growing premium spirit globally and with investments of €1 billion planned over a ten year period it is well placed to generate growth, exports and jobs and a very special tourist offering celebrating an all-island heritage (ABFI, 2014). Behind these successful Irish whiskey brands lies a story of the grandfather of Irish whiskies poitín a unique distilled beverage available in alcohol by volume strengths ranging between 40 to 90 percent (McGuffin, 1978). At these strengths this makes it one of the strongest alcoholic drinks on the planet when compared to an average beer which is around 4 to 6 percent and whiskey which is roughly available around 40 percent (Journal.ie, 2013). Poitín has been referred to as Ireland's Mescal, Cachaca or Grappa and with the Irish Whiskey Industry estimating that 35 new distilleries will be opened in Ireland by 2019 it offers huge potential with the advent of new spirit and whiskey brands to satisfy the development of the domestic and international markets (Report Linker, 2016).

This paper will explore the evolution of this ancient Irish spirit from its earliest mentions to its modern day popularity in the world of distilled spirits. Poitín is history in a bottle it is inextricably woven into the fabric of Ireland and its development over the centuries has been closely linked with the story of the Irish distilling industry. Mulryan (2002) suggests that as time progressed over the last five centuries the two great spirits of Ireland uisce beatha and uisce poitín two ancient Irish beverages drifted apart. Usige beatha gained an international reputation and eventually became known as Irish whiskey by adopting the marketplace and maturation approaches while uisge poitín remained in the primordial bogs and rural towns of Ireland avoiding change and embracing infamy. Poitín making was officially banned between the years of 1661 right up to 1997 in this period the illegal spirit continued to flow, finding its way under the counters of Irish pubs and into the limelight of Irish folklore (Marcus, 2013). Mulligan cited in Hartley (2014) maintains that during this 336 year period when poitín production was declared an illegal activity 'you wouldn't go to a village in Ireland and not find Poitin. Although poitín was originally the rogue distilled spirit of Ireland with a complex past and muddled reputation, the drink is being embraced today as something new on the world drinks stage (Mulligan cited in O'Connor, 2015). Mixologists around the world and small artisan producers in Ireland are breathing new life into poitín claiming that it contains more flavour than vodka or whiskey (Sweeney, 2013).

1. Distilling in the ancient era – from aqua vitae to uisce poitín

The first written record of distilling records that the ancient Greek philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias describes the process of taking sea water and distilling it into pure drinking water around 100 AD. Broom (2000) indicated that it is clear from AD 4 onwards; alchemists in China, India, Arabia, Egypt and Greece were using distillation to make turpentine, medicines, makeup and perfumes.

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Medieval civilizations evolved their techniques over the following centuries, the Moors are generally associated with rediscovering the art of distilling in the eleventh century, but because of their religious beliefs (Muslim) distilling in this period for primarily used for medicinal rather than recreational purposes (Mulryan, 2002). It is not until the thirteenth century when a Moorish alchemist Arnold de Villa begins distilling wine to produce a beverage referred to as *al-kohl.* The Moors eventually succumbed to the Catholic armies of Spain and distilling passed to the monks who spread their knowledge and expertise for making the 'water of life' worldwide.

Figure 1: Early mentions of distillation.



Figure 2: Aqua vitae – Latin term for distilled alcohol.



Lloyd & Mitchinson (2006) propose that the twelfth century medieval Irish monasteries were producing 'uisce beatha' and it was used as a cure for a variety of illnesses, including smallpox and colic. The water of life was indeed a medicine made in monastic laboratories, and markedly different to today's whiskey. The earliest claims to mentions of whiskey in Ireland comes from a 1627 English translation of a lost Irish text the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* from 1405 A.D describing the death of Richard Magranell, Chieftain of Moyntyreolas at Christmas from 'taking a surfeit of aqua vitae'(Lloyd & Mitchinson, 2006). As we can see from this text this distilled drink was in fact *aqua vitae* made by the monks consisting of brandy or wine flavoured with heather, honey, roots, herbs and spices, partly because it was a medicine – this medieval mix was closer to a crude whisky liqueur and was very popular in Ireland since the Roman period (Broom, 2000). Jim Murray's research of the original 14th century work entitled *Rosa Anglica* by John Gaddesden held at Merton College the oldest seat of learning in Oxford confirms the earliest claims to whiskey as appearing as aqua vitae (Murray, 1997).

Figure 3: Annals of Clonmacnoise (1405).

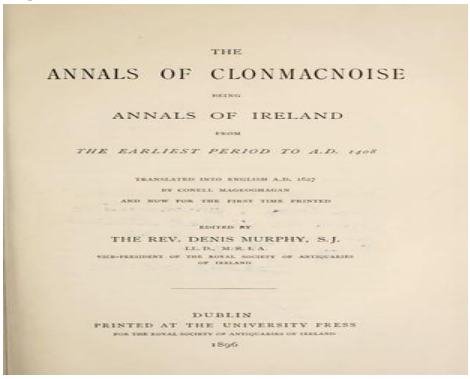
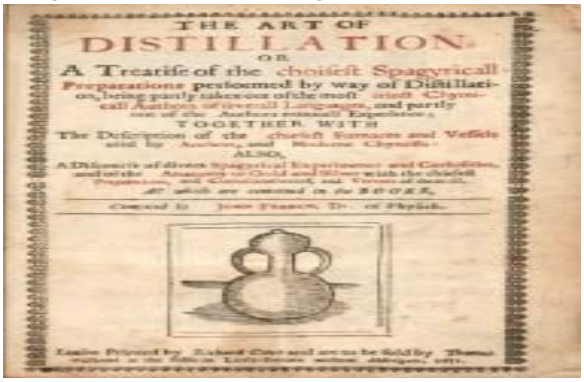

THE
ANNALS OF CLONMACNOISE
BEING
ANNALS OF IRELAND
FROM
THE EARLIEST PERIOD TO A.D. 1408
TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH A.D. 1627
BY CONELL MAGEOGHAGAN
AND NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME PRINTED
EDITED BY
THE REV. DENIS MURPHY, S.J.
LL.D., M.R.I.A.
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF IRELAND
DUBLIN
PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
FOR THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF IRELAND
1896

Figure 4: The Art of Distilling - John French (1651).


THE ART OF
DISTILLATION
OR,
A Treatise of the choicest Spagyricall
Preparations performed by way of Distillati-
on, being partly taken out of the most
TOGETHER WITH
The Description of the choicest Furnaces and Vessels
ALSO,
A Discourse of three Spagyricall Experiments and Curiosities,
Composed by John French, D. of Physick.
London Printed by Richard Cotes and are to be Sold by Thomas

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1.1 Controlling whiskey through laws and excise

Between the years of 1536 to 1541 when King Henry VIII of England dissolved the monasteries the production of whisky shifted to the general public this change made a large number of monks independent and looking for new ways to make a living and fortunately distillation was it (Bernard, 2011). Control of whiskey production in Ireland was not an issue until Henry VIII officially declared the Kingdom of Ireland in 1541, from that year every government ensured that they added their piece of legislation to the multitude of whiskey laws which were openly ignored. In Samuel Morewood book '*A philosophical and statistical history of the inventions and customs of the ancient and modern nations in the manufacture and use of inebriating liquors; with the present practice of distillation in all its varieties*' published in 1824 he highlights the earliest mentions of the origins of excise tax imposed on distilled spirits in Ireland. Morewood a Dubliner states that 'to authorise the distillation of spirits a requirement was introduced at the parliament at Drogheda in 1556 which necessitated a licence under the great seal', he adds that this act was also used to protect grain, corn and other consumable items. These grants afforded individuals the right to make, distil, or sell, aqua vitae, usquabaugh and aqua compositae in any village of the province stated, the following examples highlight the scope of these grants;

- 23rd March 1607 - Walter Taillor, Dungury, Galway for the province of Connaught
- Sir Thomas Philip Knt for Colrane (now Coleraine), Antrim
- 10th June 1608 - Charles Waterhouse for the province of Munster
- 23rd March 1608 - George Sexton for the province of Leinster

Significantly these grant holders were also afforded the authority to also restrict any further licensing (without permission) in their assigned areas, penalties for illegal distilling in this period were harsh, individuals who were found to be distilling without the nomination of the license holder had their property forfeited to him for his sole use and benefit (Morewood, 1824) .

In this period (23rd March 1609) Sir George St. Poll and Henrie Yelverton Esq also obtained the grant to nominate fit persons to keep taverns and inns in Ireland. These grants lead to hundreds of licenses being issues to individuals to sell aqua vitae in Ireland until on the 18th May 1620 these grants were withdrawn because of complaints of over indulgence amongst the few (Given, 2011). Poitín was traditionally distilled in a small pot still and the term is a diminutive of the Irish word pota, meaning "pot" (O'Donaill, 1977). Poitín or 'little pot' was shortened from *uisge poitín* this distilled beverage alongside *usage beatha* were similar in so many ways, both were initially white distilled spirits produced from local grains up until 1661. Mulryan (2002) maintains that after this date (Christmas Day) when taxation on spirit production (4p on every gallon - later specified as 'proof spirit') was first introduced by King Charles II to raise funds for the English Civil War although successfully enforced in cities and towns it was largely ignored in rural Ireland. Murray (1997) maintains poitín making began the very next day Boxing Day, with immediate effect. The only difference between uisce beatha and uisce poitín was that duty was paid on *uisge beatha* and not on *uisge poitín*.

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In 1662 the first revenue personnel were appointed by the Irish Government to collect excise duties but achieved little success (Given, 2011). The benefits of this illegal activity attracted many individuals to produce *poitín* including the clergy and the local landlords who were complicit in the production as they were keen to receive their rental money. Corruption was rife, with MPs and powerful landowners producing what they wanted tax-free, or they undertook to collect the duty from others and diverted it into their own pockets (Murray, 1997). In 1707 to 1725 The Acts of Union were adopted which resulted in the merging of the Kingdoms of England and Scotland, creating Great Britain, and in the following years, taxes rose dramatically. *The English Malt Tax of 1725* seriously threatened the production of whisky, and led the majority of Scottish distilleries to head underground and begin production at night, giving whisky one if its finest nicknames, 'moonshine' (Parliament UK, nd; Burg, 2004). In the middle of the 18th century more strategic changes in the legislation altered the direction of skill based distilling in Ireland towards large scale production and high volume outputs.

Given (2011) reports that in 1760, John Beresford Ireland's first Chief Commissioner of revenue championed the move towards large stills in order to reduce the costs incurred by the excise towards assessing and collecting revenue from the indefinite number of small craft based distillers spread across the whole of Ireland. He adds that Beresford's strategy did indeed contribute towards reducing the high costs of the Irish excise institution; the strategy also helped to create a smaller number of high volume distilleries in Ireland and also contributed towards helping the English reassert authority in the parliament of Ireland. The Pot Still Act of 1771 was introduced to try to prevent corn being 'wasted' and used for distilling, however this act had a disastrous impact on the legitimate distillers who were also liable for these taxes, many were forced to close down. Connell's (1965) research into the history of poitín making offers an insight into the huge popularity of poitín during this period he states that price increases of whiskey throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century helped to contributed to the growth in the production of illegal poitín. McCann cited in Ahlstrom (2007) maintains that by 1770 there was 2,000 poitín stills producing about two million gallons of uisce poitín until the British government moved to introduce excise duty of 10 pence a gallon in the early 1800s, the number of legal stills dropped to 20.

This widespread availability of illegal poitín was also brought about due to the fact that this beverage was sometimes the only source of livelihood for some people in the community, and it gave them a bit of financial freedom over the ruling classes. Poitín did not only provide the pleasure of an alcoholic beverage it also assisted members of the peasantry with rental money (Connell, 1965).

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Figure 5: Making poitín in County Mayo.



Figure 6: Distilling on the land.



(Source: Irish whiskey Museum)

Throughout the 18th century illegal distilling was still common especially on lands where the Landlord was absent. George III introduced The Distillation act of 1765 which required spirit distillers to obtain a license this act encouraged good law-abiding distillers to go illegal because under this act they were also taxed on the size of their still and its estimated output if operating at maximum capacity, every day rather than the actual amount of whiskey produced. To counteract this challenge the Irish people decided to distil in small capacity stills which they could change, boil and empty from the stills quickly thereby allowing them to make uisce beatha legally around the clock while returning lower taxes (Irish Legislation Database, nd). Private distillation was now outlawed and many illegal distillers decided to emigrate to escape detection. Whiskey distilled under this new licence, and which the excise duty was paid on became known as 'Parliament Whiskey'. With these additional taxes, licences, quotas and new regulations the quality of 'Parliament Whiskey' declined while the cost of it increased (The Irish Whiskey Trail, 2014).

Another act adopted in 1783 threatened to fine the entire community where an illegal still was found, Sweeney (2013) reports that if you were caught with poitin by the excise men, who would go around with the British army, the whole community would be fined. The cumulative effect of these changes in legalisation and the appalling treatment of the Irish people, including the atrocities by Oliver Cromwell's army generated a spirit of rebellion and rage towards England (Nephin, 2016). The decades prior to 1823 are referred to as the golden age of poitín. Look-outs were posted. They used iron rods as detectors. They put a plank on the road with the iron rods standing up on it and held their ear to the other end. They could hear horses galloping five miles away (see also appendice IV).

1.2 The golden age of poitín

Throughout the early 19th century as the laws aimed at stopping illegal poitín making increased, poitín makers adopted clever cat and mouse techniques to avoid detection (Sweeney, 2013). However militarized detachments from the revenue referred to an 'excise men' assisted by *gaugers* went sent to combat illegal poitín making, very often these towns and villages would successfully confront these men and deadly altercations were commonplace (Smyth, 1992). Gaugers methods were harsh, brutal and corrupt they would also confiscate malt, barley and spirit, assault those they managed to arrest, destroy the stills and drag the poitín makers before the courts for severe fines of £20 for a

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first offence rising to £60 in an age when one shilling could have been the largest coin people would see their whole lives (Townsend, 1997).

Poitín sales still exploded in remote rural areas and especially in the counties of Donegal and Mayo where it is claimed that revenue forces found it impossible to control. The western side of Inishowen, a peninsula in County Donegal was an ideal example of the challenges involved in 1812 the people of Inishowen (which contained 800 poitín stills shipping output to Belfast, Dublin and even Scotland) declared themselves the independent nation of the 'Urris Republic of Poitín' and sealed themselves in by collapsing the Mamore Gap pass (a narrow pass between two sheer cliffs). The Urris Republic of Poitín carried for 3 years before the English attacked in force and brought down their stronghold in 1815 (Connell, 1968; Townsend, 1997). Glass Island near the town of Lahardaun in North Mayo, Inishmurray Island off the coast of Sligo, Inishkea of the coast of Mayo and Achill Island were just some also famous locations for producing poitín and a regular target for excise raids, but residents of the island were able to see the excise men coming by boat with plenty of time to cleverly hide their poitín. The majority of excise men during this period were not required to have any formal training or experience in the making of uisce beatha and uisce poitín or the enforcement of the law; it was also common practice amongst some of them to extract bribes (Townsend, 1997).

Figure 7; Figure 8: Illegal distillery raids and detection - Garda Siochana and officers of the RIC (1880s) with some captured stills.



(Source: Monreogh Heritage & Education Centre)

The legislation changed again in 1823 to made legal distilling much easier, consequently a lot of illegal distillers decided to switch to the legal production of whiskey and unfortunately the hostility against uisce poitín increased. A 'Poor Law' report published in 1837 stated that an Irishman could get 'dead-drunk' for as little as 2p. This reflects the price of 'Parliament Whiskey' being much dearer at about 13 shillings per gallon, with poitín at 3 shillings per gallon. The price of corn had fallen allowing poitín makers to pass this reduction on to their customers whereas the legal whiskey still had to pay taxes (Irish Poor Law Project, 2014).

The 1831 Illicit Distillation (Ireland) Act also sought to remind people that making poitín continued to be an illegal activity for the two reasons that the Government loses valuable excise duty as a result and because, if not made properly, poitín could be lethal.

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The economic impact of anti-spirits movements (Temperance societies) in the 1830 through to the 1850s and on into the 1900s and the great Irish Famine (food shortages) of 1846 were claimed to be responsible for decimating the illicit market throughout most of the 19th and early 20th centuries (McConvery, 2016). In 1850 the first blended whisky comes into production when Andrew Usher mixed traditional pot still whiskey with that of a new batch produced in a Coffey still. Usher met stubborn resistance from traditional Irish distillers, many of whom claimed that this new blend was not whisky at all. Still, his company became the first to produce and mass-market a bottled blended scotch, and even became a popular import in the U.S. after finding distribution with Nicholas & Co. in 1853 (Burnett, 1999).

Intermittently poitín did gain some popularity again during the First World War but unfortunately had been on a steady decline throughout the 20th century. Within this period and right up to the modern day the scale of illegal poitín production has always been very difficult to ascertain (Bord Bia, 2008). Illegal poitín can be found in certain areas of Ireland, the producers are naturally extremely secretive and the odd bottle will be kept in some country houses for medicinal purposes, which includes treating livestock (Townsend, 1997).

1.3 Legally produced poitín - Geographical Indicative (GI) status

Bunratty businessman Oliver Dillion (a native of Cappaghmore, Co. Limerick) was granted permission by the Revenue Commissioners in 1989 to distil poitín only for the export market and for duty-free outlets in Ireland as a tourist oriented product (Irish Times 1997; Mulryan, 2002). The grant to market legal poitín within Ireland was changed in March 1997 when the Irish Government gave permission to United Distillers, the spirits division of Guinness Plc to produce and sell 'Hacker Poitín' manufactured at the Cooley Distillery in Co. Louth (Irish Times, 1997).

On the 20th May 2008 under Regulation No (EC) 110/2008, Irish Poteen and Irish Poitín were accorded (GI) Geographical Indicative Status by the EU Council and Parliament (Geographical Indication, 2008). In 2015 in consultation with producers and stakeholders the Irish Government adopted the Technical file which sets out the specifications for which Irish Poteen, Irish Poitín must comply. The outlines the production and distillation methods, allowable base materials (cereals, grain, whey, sugar beet, molasses and potatoes), use of flavourings and infusions and the limited storage period required in casks (Food Industry Development Division, 2015). Some of the major elements include;

1. **Name** [Irish Poteen / Irish Poitín] **and category** [distilled on island of Ireland including Northern Ireland] **of the spirit.**
2. **Spirit description** [a traditional Irish distilled beverage with no definitive official date of production] **including principal organoleptic characteristics** [alcohol content 40-90% abv, clean, clear spirit that is light, smooth and robust in character, retaining the flavours and aromas from the original raw materials used and the production process which can include raw cereal, cooked grain, fruity esters and spice].
3. **Definition of geographical area concerned** [Production of "Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín" must take place in the geographical area of Ireland].
4. **Method for obtaining the spirit drink** [Processes specific to the most widely-used ingredients include brewing, fermentation, distillation and bottling, traditional ingredients cereals, potatoes and sweet beet molasses are permitted, Macerations and infusions are permitted with indigenous Irish ingredients (fruits,

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spices, berries, herbs, naturally occurring plant materials), flavourings allowed they must be consistent with indigenous Irish ingredients].

5. **Details bearing out the link with the Geographical environment or the geographical origin** [history and reputation, production process – ingredients and stills, human factors - experience and skill].
6. **Supplemental information** [Spirit drinks must not be labelled, packaged, sold, advertised or promoted in such a way to suggest they are "Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín" unless they meet the relevant requirements set out in the technical file].
7. **Labelling requirements [Label and marketing** materials must be clear, not overlaid or interrupted with pictorial matter, not used in conjunction with any other words and bear the name "Irish Poitín" or "Irish Poteen" / **Flavoured Poteen's and Poitín's from macerations or infusions**, an additional line stating the ingredient used, "*Made from an infusion of*…" , Flavoured Irish Poitín/Irish Poteen must be labelled as '*Flavoured Irish Poitín*" or '*Flavoured Irish Poteen*" and may reference the flavouring used, "Flavoured with…" / Irish Poteen/**Irish Poitín that has been stored** for a period not exceeding 10 weeks after production shall indicate this on the rear label and shall be labelled "Stored/held in wood for .... weeks". There shall be no reference to casks, maturation or ageing on labels, presentation, marketing/promotional or packaging material. The mix of raw materials used must be included on the label / **The phonetic spelling 'Irish Potcheen'** may be used to aid consumers with the pronunciation of the product, as long as it is in addition to the sales denomination / **Irish Poteen, Irish Poitín with an abv of over 70%** requires additional information on labels to advise consumers of the strength of the product.

Adapted from the Technical file setting out the specification which Irish Poteen, Irish Poitín must comply (Food Industry Development Division, 2015).

Figure 9: Small selection of legal Poitín currently produced in Ireland



(Ethan Bentley, 2012)

2. Poitín in the modern era

For over 500 years our ancestors have been enthusing and writing about the benefits of aqua vitae which was the pre-cursor to poitín Dubliner and alchemist to Phillip II of Spain Richard Stanihurst (1577-1618) promoted the benefits of consuming Aqua Vitae maintaining that it 'sloeth age, strengtheneth youth, helpeth digestion, abandoneth melancholy, relisheth the hart, lighteneth the mind and quickeneth the spirites, a true soveraigne liquor, if it be orderly taken' (Mulryan, 2002). In a lecture presented recently by Dr Malachy McCann (Senior Lecturer in organic chemistry) of NUI Maynooth entitled *Poteen, Potions and Poisons* he suggests that a little bit of poitin is good for what ails you, it can deliver glucose due to the number of sources used to produce it including barley, potatoes and molasses and it is also a powerful disinfectant and can be used in a poultice or as an excellent antiseptic and solvent which can used to extract medicinal substances from plants (Ahlstrom, 2007).

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2.1 Poitín's contribution towards the renaissance for Irish Spirits

Poitín continues to gain international success has been relaunched in recent years by a growing number of high-end distillers O' Gallchoir cited in Sweeney (2013) believes that it's the right time to get into the poitín business, people – locals and tourists are fascinated by poitín, some visitors have never heard of it so they become very intrigued by it. Dave Mulligan and Cara Humphrey owners of 'Ban Poitín' (which is made with malted barley, potatoes and sugar beet) has found a home in some of London's most exclusive drinking bars and retail establishments including the London Cocktail Club and Selfridges are among those with an interest in this new commercial product with an underground edgy history (O'Connor, 2015). Coomara poitín became the first poitín to be sold in supermarkets in Ireland in 2013 with the brand developers Gary Gartland and Bronagh Conlon immediately setting their sights for global exports with the support of Bord Bia (Hospitality Ireland, 2013).

Walsh (2015) suggests that poitín has certainly come a long way from its less than salubrious origins, these days you could practically call it posh, as well as legal and trendy. Alastair Higgins of the Celtic Whiskey Shop on Dublin's Dawson Street, an award winning supplier of premium spirits currently sells several types of poitín, citing lots of reasons why people enjoy it which include its appeal to the neutral tasting vodka drinkers requiring a little more fire and strength. Higgins also attributes the rise and interest in poitín to the increasing popularity of distillery tourism in Ireland (Marcus, 2013). Others poitín's would be closer to a raw whiskey, which is unaged good for sipping straight like the Italians enjoy grappa, after a meal with a coffee (Higgins cited in Walsh, 2015). Upscale versions of poitín can also reach nearly €50 a bottle, a price which is dramatically more than paid for a blended whiskey but less than most prices paid single malts (Higgins cited in Marcus, 2013).

In recent years the annual Irish Whiskey Awards held on the eve of Whiskey Live held in Dublin recognises excellence in poitín making with its '*Best Irish Poitin'* award where entries are subjected to blind tastings and sensory evaluations of their poitín's. Jack Teeling (founder of the Teeling Whiskey Company) a past winner of this award stated that they are committed to delivering high quality poitín for discerning consumers around the world." (Teeling Whiskey, 2014). Poitín producers in recent years have also developed comprehensive tasting guides to support the knowledge and appreciation of their products for modern consumers and connoisseurs, owners of Ban and Glendalough poitín offer this consumers the following guide to their brands;

> ***Ban* poitín *tasting note:*** *Big and bold flavours, leather, tobacco & malt with green agricultural flavours lead into a sweetened lasting finish. Food pairing: match with big meaty flavours to compliment the liquid. Think slow cooked BBQ food.* (Great Irish Beverages, 2016)

> ***Glendalough (Mountain Strength)* poitín *tasting note****: Aroma: slight in nature with faint Riesling fragrance, oak, berried fruit, gooseberries and blackcurrants are in there, a slight zest of orange and blueberry sweetness comes through in the Sherry Cask Finish. Taste: creamy and mellow, trace of lychees, hints of black, cracked pepper, especially so in the Mountain Strength. Some dried fruits show up in all three poitíns, with dried apricots featuring in the Sherry Cask Finish. Touches of vanilla and toasty oak throughout also. Finish: good length, lingers with warmth and sweetness, slightly salty, spicier in the Mountain Strength, along with dried fruit and berry notes*

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throughout the range, but even more so with the Sherry Cask Finish that also holds more vanilla from the extra time with the oak. (Glendalough Distillery, 2016)

Higgins cited in Marcus (2013) also highlights that aficionados have tasted and enjoy the new distilled versions of poitín, the intense fruity character is quite interesting and they are now looking at poitín as a way to take that taste home.

2.2 Cocktails and mixed drinks

Poitín has also been given a new lease of life as an ideal cocktail ingredient with enterprising bartenders and mixologists in Ireland and beyond figuring out new ways to mix its unique flavour (Sweeney, 2013). According to Irish mixologist Aaron Wall, it offers unrivalled scope as a cocktail base with its delicate uplifting flavours like lemon, lime, fresh herbs and spices (Walsh, 2015). Tom O'Brien Bar Manager of Exchequer Bar, Dublin agrees and adds that Irish drinkers are becoming more receptive to the idea of ordering poitín; everybody has a story about it. Poitín has more flavour than whiskey, people can taste the sweetness, the cracked pepper and the Irish oak finish, you're looking for a good mouth feel and a nice sweet flavour (Walsh 2015; Sweeney, 2013). The success and interest of poitín inspired cocktail recipes is also evident across the visual media in a recent episode of the Channel 4 programme 'Sunday Brunch' the show featured cocktail recipes based on poitín which included 'Lent Breaker', 'Hermit's Reward' and 'The Sun Tavern's Mountain Dew' (Channel4.com, 2016).

Classic mixed drink recipes are being adapted to include poitín; contemporary cocktail recipes are incorporating poitín as the base spirit exposing modern day consumers to its bigger flavours. O'Gallachoir as cited by Marcus (2013) maintains that it can also stand up to added flavors, like an apple-and-cinnamon infusion, or even a fragrant touch of lavender. He himself is fond of a cocktail called a "Poitín Kick," an adaptation of a Moscow Mule, which combines vodka with ginger ale and lime. Some of the top hospitality establishments including award winning cocktail bars are now actively using poitín as the base to recipes (see also Appendice I – Poitín Cocktail Recipes).

3. Culture, literature and the visual arts

Some of Ireland's strongest cultural traditions include poitín for the 'wetting of the Shamrock' which can be dated back to 1681, a custom of drinking 'Patricks Pot' (Pota Pádraig) and the first reference to wearing of the green on the feast of St. Patrick. An English observer noted that many wore green crosses in their headgear and very few were found sober that night, a plausible reason why the Irish word for a hangover is *poit* (O'Donaill, 1977).Poitín continues to inspire filmmakers, music producers, literary giants and entrepreneurs right up to the present day. The Irish critic Sinead Sturgeon maintains that illegality of poitín has featured prominently throughout Irish poetry and prose especially across the nineteenth century, she points to the works of Maria Edgeworth and William Carlton as examples of the figurative use of the word in literature (Sturgeon, nd). Darren Shan's book 'The Lake of souls' refers to the character Spits Abrams brewing his own poitín in Frank McCourt's book 'Tis' also remembers Angela his mother recalling a

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visit from her brother Malachy who brought poitín purchased in the countryside which they consumed together (Shan, 2009 ; McCourt, 2000).

Poitín has also featured throughout the musical, visual and dramatic artistic fields over the years, Mac Dara Ó Curraidhín 1998 one hour documentary film entitled 'Déantús an Phoitín/Poteen Making' was the first film to be made entirely in Irish. The film told the story of an illegal poitín distiller played by Cyril Cusack in Connemara. In the BBC television drama, Ballykissangel filmed in Avoca and Enniskerry in County Wicklow, Paul Dooley in series five entitled 'The Outsiders' is sentenced to 50 hours of community service for serving poitín made by Uncle Minto, Donal, and Liam. Traditional Irish folk songs like Johnny McEvoy hit 'The Hills of Connemara' humorously illustrates the cat and mouse games of diversion and detection between poitín makers and the authorities through the centuries. The Dubliners 'Rare Old Mountain Dew', also deals with the subject of poitín (see also appendice III). The song 'McIlhatton' also written by Bobby Sands and performed by artists like Christy Moore, Planxty and Damien Dempsey is about a famous distiller of illegally made poitín.

4. Conclusion

Poitín is Ireland's most ancient spirit distilled in rural locations for many centuries, its dark and chequered history continues to intrigue tourists and people alike. This drink which preserved many rural communities and saved them from falling into poverty, driven underground for over 300 years is making a significant comeback. Poitín was demonised for so long by the Church, corrupted by the licensed whiskey distillers and actively witch hunted by the excise and tax men, many people gave their lives to protect this beverage. Everyone has a story or song to tell surrounding poitín which in part probably explains why it is still around today. Although a very small amount of individuals continue to produce it illegally, legally produced poitín today enjoys official government recognition and regulation in Ireland, poitín was also accorded the Geographical Indicative Status by the EU Council and Parliament to protect its name and heritage as a product of Ireland. The future looks bring for poitín it has given a new lease of life by a new breed of Irish and international creatives including some of the world's top mixologists and chefs. It continues to gain international awards and a growing interest by high-end and small independent craft distillers eager to share a piece of the new golden era for poitín and Irish distilled spirits, go get out and taste this ancient beverage and to share its unique past together, Slainte.

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List of appendices

Appendice I - Poitín cocktail recipes

Listed below is just a short selection of award winning cocktail recipes and their respective locations;

1661 Auld Fashioned (Shebeen Bar, London)
Ingredients: 60 ml Cooley poitín, 4 ml lavender syrup, 3 dashes of Angostura Bitters.
Method: Stir ingredients together and serve on the rocks.

Red Cask (VCC, Dublin)
Glendalough Sherry Cask poitín, Kummel, sweet cider, oak aged red wine vinegar and fresh citrus, with an apple fan and fresh mint sprig .

Red Irish Summer (Dylan Bar, Dylan Hotel, Dublin)
Ingredients: 50 ml Glendalough poitín, 20 ml cherry liqueur , 10 ml freshly squeezed lime juice, 5 ml basil syrup, 20 ml syrup, 6 cherries, 6 basil leaves. **Method:** Muddle the fresh cherries and basil leaves together in a cocktail shaker; add the rest of the ingredients and ice cubes. Shake vigorously. Double strain and serve in chilled Martini glass. Garnish with a fresh cherry on the glass.

Banshee (The Sun Tavern Cocktail Bar, London)
Ingredients: Bán poitín, Vulson white rhino rye, Yellow Chartreuse, homemade lime cordial & lime juice.

Sloeflower Sour (VCC, Dublin)
Glendalough Premium poitín, sloe berry, cranberry and elderflower, egg whites, with an orange coin and a fresh mint sprig.

Jack Rose (W. J Kavanagh's Gastro Pub, Dublin)
Ingredients: ½ lemon, 10 ml grenadine, 35 ml Teeling poitín, 5 ml apple purée. **Method:** Squeeze the lemon juice into a cocktail shaker, add the grenadine, poitín and apple purée and fresh ice, shake vigorously and strain into an old fashioned glass with crushed ice. Garnish with a wedge of fresh apple.

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Weathered Storm (VCC, Dublin)
Glendalough premium poitin, raspberry syrup, plum bitters, fresh citrus, Fentimans Dandelion & Burdock top, with a raspberry skewer and a fresh mint sprig .

St. Kevin's Garden (Glendalough Distillery)
Ingredients: 50 ml Glendalough poitín, 10 ml lemon juice, 20 ml honey, 4 mint leaves, 2 thyme sprigs, 2 blackberries.
Method: Shake all ingredients with ice and strain into a tall flute glass, garnish with fresh blackberry and lemon & lime peel.

Figure 10: Jack Rose Cocktail (Teeling's Poitín).



Figure 11: St. Kevin's Garden (Glendalough Poitín).



Wine and Dry (VCC, Dublin)
Glendalough sherry cask poitín, Kamm & Sons ginseng spirit, VCC cola-infused tonic, absinthe bitters, lemon oils.

Newbridge Sour (VCC, Dublin)
Glendalough premium poitín, Cynar sweet vermouth, vine tomatoes, Mozart black chocolate liqueur, black pepper, fresh citrus, gomme syrup, egg whites, fresh cherry tomato.

Goosebumps (VCC, Dublin)
Glendalough sherry cask poitín, Cawston Press cloudy apple juice, gooseberry jam, fresh citrus, with an apple fan and cherry.

Pear & Mary (VCC, Dublin)
Glendalough sherry cask poitín, Poire Williams, VCC orchard syrup, fresh citrus, Boston bitters, egg whites, with a fresh sprig of thyme.

Shepherds Delight (VCC, Dublin)
Glendalough sherry cask poitín, gooseberry jam, VCC cranberry bitters, goat's milk, with dehydrated rocket leaves.

Pale & Crow (VCC, Dublin)
Glendalough premium poitín, vanilla liqueur, plum bitters, Marigold infused IPA reduction, with lemon oils and a fresh rosemary sprig.

Appendice II - Alchemical and Distilling Apparatus - The Art of Distillation (John French, 1651)

This book is a detailed handbook of knowledge and practice at the time, said to be *possibly the earliest definitive book on distillation*, by John French, an English physician who lived in the 17th Century. This book was the first English translation by John French of the text. **He was concerned about the** glut of chemical books, but a scarcity of chemical truths. He believed that nature and art afford a variety of spagyrical preparations, but they had yet been only partially undiscovered and partially dispersed in many books in diverse languages, and partially reserved in private men's hands. John French wishes to develop a general treatise on distillation for England

Appendice III - The Rare Old Mountain Dew (written by Samuel Lover, performed by 'The Dubliners')

Let the grasses grow
and the waters flow in a free and easy way
But give me enough of the rare old stuff
that's made near Galway Bay
Come gangers all from Donegal,

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Sligo and Leitrim too
Oh, we'll give 'em a slip
and we'll take a sip of the rare old mountain dew

thiddle i ay di diddle dum thiddle i ay di diddle dum
thiddle i ay di diddle dum rum a dum dey
thiddle i ay di diddle dum thiddle i ay di diddle dum
thiddle i ay di diddle dum rum a dum dey

There's a neat little still at the foot of the hill,
where the smoke curls up to the sky
By a whiff of the smell you can plainly tell,
that there's poitín, *boys, close by*
For it fills the air with a perfume rare,
and betwixt both me and you
As home we roll, we can drink a bowl,
or a bucketful of mountain dew

thiddle i ay di diddle dum thiddle i ay di diddle dum
thiddle i ay di diddle dum rum a dum dey
thiddle i ay di diddle dum thiddle i ay di diddle dum
thiddle i ay di diddle dum rum a dum dey

Now learned men as use the pen,
have writ the praises high
Of the sweet poitín, *from Ireland green,*
distilled from wheat and rye
Away with yer pills, it'll cure all ills,
be ye Pagan, Christian or Jew
So take off your coat
and grease your throat with a bucketful of mountain dew

thiddle i ay di diddle dum thiddle i ay di diddle dum
thiddle i ay di diddle dum rum a dum dey
thiddle i ay di diddle dum thiddle i ay di diddle dum
thiddle i ay di diddle dum rum a dum dey

Appendice IV – Poitín production and shebeens

The word poitín stems from the Irish Gaelic word "pota" for pot, this referred to the small batch copper pot still used by poitín distillers, it was often made by village widows who sold it in unlicensed taverns referred to as ‘shebeens’ (Foster, 2015). The key ingredients for making poitín, between 1780 and 1822 were potatoes, sugar and yeast, very different to the late 20th century when distillers switched to using treacle, corn and potatoes which led to deteriorating quality and character of poitín (McGuffin, 1978). McGuffin (1978) informs us also that poitín was generally produced in rural areas away from the interference of the law. A wash was created and fermented before the distillation began. Stills were often set up on land boundaries so the issue of ownership could be disputed. Prior to the introduction of bottled gas, the fire to heat the wash was provided by turf. Smoke was a giveaway for the police, so windy, broken weather was chosen to disperse the smoke. The still was heated and attended to for several days to allow the runs to go through. He adds that the old style of poitín distilling was from a malted barley base for the mash, the same as Single Malt Whiskey or Pure Pot Still Whiskey distilled in Ireland (McGuffin, 1978). The quality of poitín is highly variable, depending on the skill of the distiller and the quality of their equipment. Reputations are built on the quality of the distiller's poitín, and many families became known for their distilling expertise, where a bad batch could put a distiller out of business overnight (McGuffin, 1978; Townsend, 1997; Maguire, 2014).

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