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Advertising Gastronomic Identity in an Epicurean World: the Case for “Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey”

Brian Murphy (Institute of Technology, Tallaght)

Introduction

In March 2016, *The Irish Times* reported that an “Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey” bottled one hundred years earlier in 1916 was due to fetch in the region of €15,000 at an auction to be held by Irish Auctioneers, Adams (Pope, 2016). There are a number of reasons why this single bottle of whiskey might achieve such a hefty price. Rarity and its centenary year of incarnation clearly play an important part but in tandem with these attributes there are other less obvious aspects at play. Firstly, the bottle is surrounded by a legend and a story that endows distiller Richard Allman, and hence the whiskey itself, with a unique and authentic pedigree:

Richard Allman, the owner of the Bandon Distillery, was a liberal MP during the years of Charles Stewart Parnell’s Home Rule movement and, legend has it, owed his whiskey fortune to the blessing of a Catholic priest. In 1820 a Fr. Collins was pursued by an Orange mob and given sanctuary for three days by the Allman family.

To thank the woman of the house for her kindness he prayed “that your children may make riches out of water”. Six years later her son James C. Allman converted a mill in Bandon and made his fortune from the water of life.

(Pope, 2016)

Secondly, the bottle in question is a rare unopened example of an “Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey” which means it was made using a very particular Irish distillation method incorporating malted and un-malted barley that was unique to the Ireland of the time. It is precisely because of the whiskey’s unique combination of place, method and subsequent story that such a bottle achieves such exalted status. This paper draws on the success of such attributes and their strong sense of gastronomic identity to argue that these uniquely Irish qualities are exactly what the Irish whiskey sector must promote if it is to meet the provenance demands of an increasingly gastro-aware society.

Irish Whiskey has had a turbulent time throughout much of the last one hundred years. At its height, the country was home to 88 licensed distilleries and the world leader for whiskey production (Irish Whiskey Association, 2014, p.7). Due to what was in essence a perfect combination of misfortune and misjudgement during the 20th century, the island would ultimately play host to just two distilleries by the early 1980s. Recently the sector has shown

signs of a phoenix-like recovery and Irish Whiskey is now the fastest-growing premium spirit category in the world. As society becomes ever more gastro-aware, this paper explores how advertisements can successfully portray the unique sense of both place and story that will allow the Irish Whiskey category to regain the global distinction that it once held at the turn of the 20th century. Using a case study approach, it suggests that the uniquely Irish concept that is “Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey” has the ability to fulfil the enhanced gastronomic identity demands of future drinkers. Taking the Irish whiskey sector generally and the case of Pernod Ricard in particular, the paper investigates how modern distillers are beginning to use strong story elements particularly around “place and method” to advertise their premium ranges. Following the lead of other internationally traded delimited place-based drinks such as Cognac, Single Malt Scotch or even Champagne, it is argued that Irish whiskey needs to rise above the notion of its generic national nomenclature to claim a more unique *terroir*-based identity in an increasingly competitive premium drinks market.

The arrival of a gastro-aware advertising audience

It is clear that in recent decades Ireland itself has developed a more gastro-aware society and is therefore in a much better position to fulfil the premiumisation demands of international audiences. In the past, Irish food and drink intake was limited both in terms of choice and opportunity.

Religion often determined what and when people ate and drank. Few above the age of forty can forget the necessity for abstinence during the Lenten period. Pre-Celtic Tiger entertaining outside the home was rather limited and, when it did occur, frequently involved just the immediate family visiting a local hotel to celebrate an event such as a communion or wedding. In *The Essential Dublin* (1972), Terry Kellegher described gastronomic culture in Ireland 40 years ago. He said of restaurants that there were 'too few for a cosmopolitan city' and described a pub meal experience during that period as follows:

Two pieces of yesterday's lightly margarine bread wilting at the edges, enveloping a tiny piece of ham or processed cheese, and served with a cup of something only distantly related to coffee, is served at lunchtime to the mainly male clientele.

(Kellegher, 1972, p.64)

Ireland has thankfully moved on from the impoverished fare described by Kellegher to a new level of gastronomic awareness. The increasing number of Irish Michelin awards and celebrity chefs attest to this. The country has shown demonstrable expertise in the exportation of food and drink which is now worth in the region of €10 billion to the Irish economy. There is also an ever-increasing presence of artisanal food and drink businesses on the island. There are currently over 63 independent craft brewers making beer and cider in Ireland (Taylor, 2015) and if all current planned distillery

projects go ahead, the country will soon host 15 operating distilleries (Irish Whiskey Association , 2014, p.5).

A returning diaspora during the Celtic Tiger period coupled with increased foreign travel led to the social conditions necessary for this real gastronomic culture in Ireland to be developed. Part of this food and drink narrative has resulted in the emergence of a gastronomic discourse that now occupies a large part of print, TV and indeed social media platforms. Modern gastronomes voraciously consume these media in an attempt to enhance gastronomic knowledge. Many cooking enthusiasts crave the skills and knowledge previously the preserve of the professional chef or sommelier. Applications for private education courses in the food and drink sector have soared. Whiskey clubs, private wine courses and corporate team-building cocktail days have emerged. There are numerous examples showing how the home cook and the culinary professional are starting to merge. Popular programmes such as *Master Chef* or *The Great Irish Bake Off* are a case in point. One popular Irish food business in Dublin has been exploiting these trends by running a successful butcher's course for the general public that involves skills tuition followed by a meal and a glass of wine (JamesWhelanButchers.com, 2016). Such programmes typify the birth of a new epicurean agenda. Both domestically and internationally the Irish nation has arrived at a place where gastronomic expectations are now very

high. Advertisers should be aware that the modern consumer seeks Irish products that express a substantial level of gastronomic identity through what Amy Trubek (2008, p.115) refers to as the “Integrity of Somewhereness”. Trubek’s definition suggests that some modern consumers are no longer impressed by generic products that lack provenance. On the international stage Ireland is already synonymous with iconic drinks such as Guinness and Irish Whiskey. The notion of “integrity of somewhereness” is dependent on context and to export markets, such drinks already offer a sense of the “local”, if we assume “local” to mean the island of Ireland as a whole. Such ideas are reflected in the prominence of the quite broad designation “Irish Whiskey” prominently displayed on the majority of whiskeys produced here today. As international spirit shelves become increasingly congested, however, product identity becomes more commensurately important. Irish spirits may now require the enhanced elements of place integrity that have long been attributed to others such as Cognac and Single Malt Scotch. Well-known drinks writer Tomás Clancy has been advocating such an approach for many years and refers to it as his “Irish AC proposal”:

It would allow a generation of Irish people to reconnect with the variety, diversity and generosity of our own soils, our lands...Many consumers, in the EU and across Ireland, can tell you about Parma Ham, the slopes of Burgundy and the AC cheeses of Northern Italy, but do not comprehend the

complexity of Meath, Kilkenny or Wexford soils, slopes or produce. Yet it is there to taste in unprotected products from Gubbeen Cheese to Air Dried Connemara Lamb.

(Clancy, 2010)

The role of premiumisation in advertising campaigns

In recent years a number of whiskey companies have shown considerable interest in exploiting heritage links to place and story to help “premiumise” and thus distinguish their product from more proprietary brands. We have had the 2009 advertising campaign from Johnnie Walker fronted by actor Robert Carlyle entitled: *The man who walked around the world*. Part of this campaign (Figure 1) involved a six-minute short film, shot in one continuous take, and depicted Carlyle recounting the history of the Johnnie Walker brand while walking through the highlands of Scotland.



Figure 1 Johnny Walker (Eatmedaily.com, 2015)

Others such as the 2013 Tullamore Dew *Parting Glass* campaign used music, in the form of the traditional Irish song *The Parting Glass*, and story, in terms of a mock Irish wake, to evoke a sense of authentic heritage around their product (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Tullamore Dew (Theworldsbestever.com, 2015)

By introducing irreverent humour into the mix brands that have been traditionally focused on an older demographic can attract a younger audience. In the Tullamore Dew campaign, what appeared to be a very sombre traditional wake scene, in truth, emerges as an illustration of a typical stag party scene where the future groom is humorously bidding farewell to his single life and single friends before his wedding day.

The Jameson's *Legendary tales of John Jameson* advertising campaign (Figure 3) illustrates a similar use of humour, story and heritage to enhance premiumisation.



Figure 3 *Legendary Tales of Jameson* (Elliot, 2009)

The campaign uses significant historical events to create a fictional period tale detailing the heroic exploits of its protagonist, John Jameson. According to Passariello and Colchester (2011):

Alcoholic-drink makers have traditionally used their ads to convey a party vibe, as in the Budweiser tag line "King of Good Times." But to peddle premium spirits to a younger, hipper crowd, some brands have thrown tradition into the mix, oscillating between humour and a message focused more on heritage. A case in point is the Jameson Tall Tales campaign.

In a similar way to the Tullamore Dew *Parting Glass* campaign, the article goes on to cite Mark Figliulo who is keen to emphasise the importance of striking a balance between history and humour to attract a younger demographic. The very name of the campaign series suggests that Jameson

does not want to play up the history aspect of the campaign to the detriment of its more fun approach.

“The risk of being too much in heritage is boring the hell out of people,” says Mark Figliulo, chairman and chief creative officer of TBWA\Chiat\Day New York, a unit of Omnicom Group Inc., which created the new Jameson commercial. “We don't want to say our whiskey is for sitting around and discussing the problems of the world.” Playing up history is one of the techniques marketers use to enhance a brand's aura and justify premium prices.

(Passariello and Colchester (2011))

The rich story of Irish Pot Still Whiskey: An advertising opportunity

Many believe that the origins of all whiskey lie buried deep in the soil and history of Ireland. Old Celtic ruins near Cashel in Tipperary include what are reputed to be the remnants of Bronze Age distillation equipment and ‘around the end of the 12th century, when the English invaded Ireland, apparently they discovered the inhabitants drinking uisge beatha....which became corrupted to a more anglicized ‘whiskybae’ eventually shortened to ‘uishigi’ or ‘whiski’ (Ridley and Smith, 2014). In 1823, Ireland had no less than 86 distilleries in operation (Department of Agriculture, 2014). However, a number of factors led to the demise of the sector. Chief among these was a refusal on the part of Irish whiskey distillers to adopt the newly

patented continuous distillation method introduced by a former tax inspector turned distiller, Aeneas Coffey, in 1830, which efficiently produced substantial amounts of raw neutrally flavoured spirit at minimal cost. Ireland's major traditional pot distillers claimed that the Coffey Still whiskey lacked the character and depth that Irish Whiskey had become renowned for throughout the world. This original "Pot Still" style of whiskey was made by a uniquely Irish process that used both raw and malted barley in the mash bill which ultimately provided a dense flavour profile dominated by a unique creamy mouth-feel and spicy flavour. The main distillers in Dublin at the time, John Jameson, William Jameson, John Power and George Roe rejected the neutral spirits proposed by Coffey. In fact they referred to the output of these continuous stills using the pejorative term "silent spirits", meaning lacking in taste and character.

Coffey's new technology, on the other hand, was embraced by the Scottish and was a considerable contributing factor in their international success (Mulryan, 2002, p.32). Other factors that contributed to the decline in Irish whiskey included the diversion of raw materials to support the Allies during World War 1, the prohibition in the United States 1919-1933, and a devastating 1932 trade war with our former landlords and trading partners, Great Britain, which led to our exclusion from 25% of world markets. By 1953 there were only 6 distilleries operating in Ireland. This was ultimately

reduced further when Jameson, Powers and Cork Distilleries merged to form Irish Distillers in 1966 and all production was centralised in the Midleton Plant in Cork. This ultimately left just two distilleries operating on the island, New Middleton and Bushmills. The 1975 modernisation of the Midleton distillery by Irish Distillers and its 1988 takeover by French giant Pernod Ricard was a key turning point and led to heavy investment in Irish spirits once more and a new renaissance in Irish whiskey has since emerged. This time however the focus moved away from the original authentic Irish pot style of whiskey to the more neutral smooth lightly flavoured profile of Jameson. It can be argued that it is precisely because of this near mono-structure approach to the whiskey industry in Ireland during most of the last 30 years that Irish Whiskey, though very successful, now lacks a certain amount of gastronomic identity.

The Jameson brand is owned by Pernod Ricard. This multi-billion euro international drinks company was founded in 1975 by Paul Ricard and Jean Hémard. It currently has over 18,000 employees and operates in 85 countries with annual sales in excess of 8 billion euro. In 1988, the company acquired Irish Distillers Ltd and it was then that the push for Irish Whiskey's rebirth truly began. Strong advertising campaigns down through the years such as the *Rush Hour* campaign in 2000 and the *Beyond the Obvious* campaign in 2005 proved very successful and led to a situation

where Jameson's sales increased from 500,000 cases in 1996 to 5 million cases in 2015 (Hotel and Restaurant Times, 2015). Until relatively recently, Pernod Ricard has focused on the idea of selling Irish Whiskey as a drink that was almost the complete opposite of Single Malt Scotch. This was essentially its point of differentiation, as is pointed out by O'Connor:

After their 1988 purchase of IDL Pernod Ricard launched a massive campaign to put bottles of Jameson on global bar shelves with a very simple message about what made Irish different to Scotch: It's unpeated. It's triple distilled. It's sweet, it's beguiling and all the intimidating parts have been removed.

(O'Connor, 2015, p.214)

O'Connor claims that such a campaign was factually incorrect in its description of Jameson whiskey in that it's not truly triple distilled; that it is, in fact, a blended product and therefore not a pure Irish pot still. He admits, nonetheless, Pernod Ricard's undoubted success in ultimately saving the Irish whiskey category from extinction. However, this paper contends that for the continued success of the Irish Whiskey category to be secured, the product needs to both enhance and convey, through advertisement, a new set of more *terroir*-based attributes based upon the revival of the Irish Pot Still style that once dominated world markets. Happily we have examples of advertising campaigns that are already moving in this direction and should continue to do so in the future.

Previously mentioned examples such as the Johnnie Walker *Man who Walked around the World* campaign, the Tullamore Dew *Parting Glass* campaign and the Jameson *Legendary Tales* campaign all point to a successful blend of history and storytelling that allows considerable differentiation in a very crowded premium spirits market, while maintaining the bedrock of authenticity that the whiskey drinker demands. Despite the obvious success of these campaigns, consideration must now be given to additional authentic points of differentiation as consumers demand further elements of premiumisation. The “Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey” story offers an interesting opportunity in this context. While it fulfils the existing requirement for providing unique place-based points of differentiation it also introduces a new “traditional method of production”. This uniquely Irish method of using both malted and unmalted barley gives the whiskey a unique sensorial profile that can be clearly identified among a plethora of other competitor products. Champagne is another product category that has similar “method” points of differentiation. By designation it can only be made using the traditional *Méthode Champenoise* process. As with Irish Pot Still this method imparts to the final wine a unique taste and flavour profile that has contributed to the product being clearly defined among an array of other international sparkling wine drinks. In the case of Champagne this unique process is formally linked to place and enshrined in European *appellation contrôlée* law. In 2014, after much work by the newly formed

Irish Whiskey Association, the concept of “Irish Pot Still Whiskey” was also given substantial protection under EU policies with the submission by the Department of Agriculture in October 2014 of a technical file setting out the specifications with which Irish Whiskey must comply (Irish Whiskey Association, 2014, p.29). Those specifications include the following explanation of Irish Pot Still whiskey:

“Pot Still Irish Whiskey/Irish Pot Still Whiskey” is made from natural raw materials, currently non-peated malted barley and includes un-malted barley and other un-malted cereals, water and yeast. Other natural enzymes may also be used at the brewing and fermentation stages. The un-malted barley is an essential ingredient of “Pot Still Irish Whiskey/Irish Pot Still Whiskey” as it gives both a distinctive spicy flavour to the whiskey and influences the texture by giving the whiskey a distinct creamy mouth feel.

(Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, 2014)

Advertising a single point of origin advantage

For many gastronomic goods, a relatively narrowly defined single point of origin goes hand in hand with the concept of *terroir* and ultimately quality. Up to now this concept has not typically been associated with Irish Whiskey other than at a national identity level. The idea of single point of origin finds a more natural bedfellow in Scottish Single Malt where individual whiskies are associated not only with Scotland, the nation, but also with regions

within Scotland such as The Highlands, Islay or Speyside and more definitively with single distilleries located in these areas. The same is true of other well-known drinks categories such as Cognac and the previously mentioned Champagne, where both specific sites and methods are held out as key points of authenticity and differentiation. It is the combination of these uniquely specific sites and processes that provide the rich material for advertising creatives to exploit in order to fulfil the desires of more discerning palates. Once such points of differentiation are clearly established, the possibilities for exploitation through story are clear. In fact, the notion of a premium drink being tied to a single *terroir*, a term which can encompass both place and method, is quite common across the entire quality drinks spectrum. We have high quality Single Quinta wines from Portugal, Einzellage wines from Germany and site-specific Grand Champagne Cognacs as well as numerous individually designated sites in French wine regions such as the Premier Cru vineyards of Bordeaux or the Grand Cru sites in Burgundy. One of the most notable casualties of Irish whiskey identity during the last 20 years is its own loss of uniqueness due to the previously mentioned mono-structure imposed. In fact, because of the legal requirement for Irish whiskey to be aged for a minimum of three years, even still, the majority of new independent brands are all distillates from one distillery - Cooley. According to whiskey writer Fionnán O'Connor cited in a recent article:

This is an unspoken truth of the modern Irish Whiskey market. Despite shelves groaning with the weight of new independent whiskey brands over the past few years, (a recently announced) Dingle bottling will be the first genuinely new single malt made in Ireland in the past 25 years.

(Quinn, 2015)

Considerable advertising opportunities now exist for the development of a category of Irish whiskey based upon both its single point of origin and its traditional pot still production method. With the recent emphasis on the promotion of its own Irish Single Pot Still range, Pernod Ricard are already moving in this direction and it is likely that others will follow. Campaigns surrounding the concept of Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey offer a number of key points of differentiation that appear attractive to the whiskey consumer seeking a premium product. Firstly, they offer the idea of authentic exclusivity based on the fact that the product comes from a single defined location. Secondly, they introduce a product that is manufactured in a uniquely Irish way by using a proportion of un-malted green barley to impart a unique creamy mouth-feel and spicy taste. In addition, they introduce heritage attributes because the product reflects the authentic revival of a particularly Irish style of whiskey that once dominated world markets.

Through its dedicated web site and its advertisements Pernod Ricard have led the way in ensuring key points of place and method differentiation continue to be emphasised in the competitive ultra-premium spirits market. This is best captured in one of their recent press campaigns pictured in Figure 4 below:



Figure 4 Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey (*Sunday Independent*, 2016, p.29)

Both place and method elements are clearly emphasised in this campaign in the four handwritten notes printed in the advert that point to the Middleton Single Pot Still Logo. These notes can be categorised as unique determinants of both. As such, the advertising campaign helps emphasise Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey's fulfilment of the requirements of our more gastro-aware society.

Place examples in Figure 4:

From grain to glass in one distillery.

A tradition preserved at a single address.

A whiskey making style practised only in Ireland for over 300 years.

Method examples in Figure 4:

Triple distilled in copper pot stills for smoothness.

A unique combination of malted and un-malted barley adds the spiciness and creamy mouth-feel.

It is because of these unique qualities that Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey offers potential advertisers such a variety of important themes to explore including authenticity, history, story, process integrity, legal authentication, exclusivity and provenance. Enhancing this premium end of the market with the story of “place and method” will also provide a halo effect when it comes to Ireland’s more successful generic blended products such as Jameson. Such whiskies continue to be the mainstay of the sector and make up the vast amount of Irish whiskey consumption both domestically and abroad. However in the same way that the Scottish Single Malt whiskey category supports the image of the more dominant and successful blended Scotch offering there also needs to be room for *terroir* focused whiskies in Ireland.

It is likely that other whiskey producers in the near future will also start advertising campaigns based around “place and method” attributes in competition with Pernod Ricard’s Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey range. Because of Irish whiskey’s three year maturation rule the new wave of independent distillers, for the most part, still depend on others to produce their current saleable stock. As they switch to producing and promoting their own unique spirits many of these same distilleries will soon be free to express a more intimate relationship with their own individual *terroir*. This might be reflected in the choice of water used, the provenance of their barley or even more innovative *terroir* aspects such as using local turf in the malting process. Thus, according to Fionnán O’ Connor, ‘the real boom in Irish Whiskey is yet to come’ (Quinn, 2015).

Conclusion

In recent years the lion’s share of Irish whiskey sales has fallen to more generic Irish whiskey products such as Jameson. However, a newly emerged gastro-aware consumer now seeks a more complex whiskey that offers a truly defined sense of place-integrity. The Irish Whiskey Technical file of 2014 has allowed the key points of differentiation of “place and method” to become legally established, thus paving the way for future exploitation. Pernod Ricard’s enthusiastic promotion of their Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey range provides an excellent example of how these “place and

method” requirements are being met and bodes very well for the future of *terroir*-based Irish whiskies generally. Once the sector recognises the premiumisation benefits that can come from the exploitation of “place and method” through story it is very likely that more of them will consider advertising campaigns that incorporate other *terroir* aspects such as sourcing local barley, water and barrels that will further enhance the product’s place and process story. Tomás Clancy recently suggested that:

Pretty soon those that are selling their own (whiskey) are going to start shouting about it. My prediction is the minute distilleries are selling their own whiskey produced in their own locality, from their own water and so forth, we will see *terroir* talk begin.

(Clancy, 2016)

As an increasing number of independent distillers emerge in Ireland and start producing and promoting their own unique whiskies they too will begin to define their own individual *terroir*. When the changes predicted by O’Connor and Clancy begin to emerge it will then be up to advertisers to decide how best to express the originality of Irish *terroir* to their more gastro-aware audiences. Pernod Ricard have provided us with an important example of a first adopter view of how a unique “place and method” specific gastro identity might be used to best effect. They appear to be the first major force in the exploitation of “place and method” story in Ireland. There will

undoubtedly be other examples of distilleries emerging that will recognise and exploit similar points of differentiation which could potentially provide a substantial counterfoil to the dominant market player, Scottish Single Malt. These newer distilleries will face the considerable challenge of developing innovative ways of transmitting that unique *terroir* message while still maintaining the strong links with heritage and story that the Irish Whiskey category demands. The benefits of such an approach are clear for all to see and will ultimately allow the Irish Single Pot Still category, which lay dormant for so much of the last century, to once again play a major role in how Irish whiskey is perceived on international markets in the new millennium.

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