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## Pure Genius: Guinness Consumption and Irish Identity

As an Irish person and as a member of the diasporic space myself, and, it needs to be noted, as a Guinness drinker—I have often asked myself, “Just what is the attachment to Guinness drinking for me or for any other Irish person living in Ireland or outside?” This is not an idle question. The act of consuming that distinctive national product Guinness is intimately bound up with Irish identity. Further, the role that Guinness and its marketing and advertising producers play in evoking Irishness and in-group membership as a strategy constitutes a complex and commercially potent element of Irish identity worldwide.

In the late 1990s, I undertook a project of comparing the consumption of Guinness as an advertising text by Irish consumers living in Ireland with the meanings given to such texts by Irish immigrants living in London and New York. The findings make it clear that Guinness, its advertising, and the rituals and myths that surround it, play a part in the imagining of a place immigrants call “home.” As it creates a Guinness of its imagination, the audience effectively moves the product outside the pub space and outside the text, and in doing so, gives the process of consumption new dimensions, values, and uses. The reader of the text or the consumer of the product is not simply responding to the textual content or the market-led strategies employed by the producer; rather, he or she is usually employing numerous intellectual strategies to read, consume, usurp, critique, and play with these messages.

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The story begins with drinking Guinness in a pub.

For Irish people, this act seems to be an extremely important part of their day, their week, their social life, the meditative life, and their ideologically shaped life. The interviews that follow were all conducted in pubs, to ensure that the talk surrounding the consumption was as authentic as possible. I spoke to groups and individual Irish consumers in Dublin and Waterford, and to first-generation Irish immigrants in London, and in Manhattan and Queens. The

interviewees were of mixed backgrounds, both professional and working class. They were of mixed ages, and of both urban and rural origins.

During the course of the interviews, respondents were asked to talk about their associations with the product and were shown samples of electronic advertising from as early as 1928 to as late as 1997 for the Irish, United Kingdom, and United States advertising campaigns. They were asked to comment on the advertisements and to give their own analysis of whom they thought the advertisements targeted, what they thought about the images and marketing techniques used, how the advertisements linked with their own feelings of being Irish (or not), and how this was linked with the ritual act of consumption of the product in the pub space. I asked these groups what men think and what women think when they think about Guinness. I learned how these varied groups consumed the product, how they read the advertisement, and how they made sense and meaning of the world around them while they drank. They also shared stories about Guinness as an element in their lives as they grew up—ranging from a tonic for a sick child, to a drink for a nursing mother, to a trigger for a memory of a parent or relative. Respondents were pleased to have a chance to discuss this important, but often unexamined, aspect of their lives; each person to whom I spoke was happy to give more of his or her time than I requested.

All interviewees acknowledged that Guinness is a challenging product. Drinkers described Guinness as a drink for which one must acquire a taste. They also frequently described the quest for the elusive “perfect pint,” a quest that required immense discernment on the part of the consumer—to the point that certain pubs would be earmarked as “good Guinness pubs” for all the right technical reasons. This was a recurring theme, one that arose in all groups at all locations.

So I challenged the drinkers to explain their judgments. Many brand-loyal drinkers employed such tactics as checking how the product was stored, knowing the length of the lines from cool room to tap, and ensuring that the lines were regularly cleaned. They noted that, if the pint was poured in a new pub, they had other devices for quality checks. One respondent described how she would scan an unfamiliar pub to see if many patrons were drinking pints of Guinness; if there were, she took it as a signal that the pint was probably “a good one.” If only a few pints were in evidence, she would examine the pint itself from a distance, and if still not reassured she would ask another drinker, “Is it a good pint in here?”

Drinkers described being put off by how the pint was served and presented: for example, the head must be the correct size, color, and consistency. In fact, some drinkers were so discerning that they had preferences as to which of the

bar staff actually pulled the pint. On receipt of a less-than-perfect pint, most agreed that they would not hesitate to return it to the bar. A bad pint could be a flat pint, or a pint with a “bad” head, or a pint with a “bishop’s collar” (too much head). They demonstrated a high level of consumer assertiveness, indicating a strong sense of consumer sovereignty.<sup>1</sup> Their consumer intelligence suggested a high degree of involvement and engagement with the product. This attentiveness recurred throughout all groups.

But why all this work to ensure a good pint? Why stick with a product that, on first taste, is often unpleasant? Why chase what is often perceived to be an elusive pint? Why work so hard at establishing where and when you will find this product acceptable? Why order a drink that takes several minutes to arrive if it is to be served properly? Why this delayed gratification? Why persevere?

Clearly, among the main reasons for persevering with the consumption of Guinness are the myths surrounding the product, the rituals that reinforce these myths, and the ensuing sense of tradition and membership that results from all of these combining factors. Each group gave explicit examples of situations where in-group membership was the overriding factor in the decision to consume the product. Peter, quoted below, offers an example of overt group pressure:

I actually started drinking Guinness when I went down the country—that’s why I associate it with country pubs. One particular day we were there with a lot of the family and we went in, all the young fellas, and there was about four choices there, and six of them ordered Guinness—and that was about it. “You’re having a pint of Guinness,”—so I started drinking Guinness. . . . They told me I wasn’t allowed to drink a pint of jungle juice [a foreign beer or lager] in their company.<sup>2</sup>

1. John Whale, quoted in Graham Murdock, “Large Corporations and the Control of the Communications Industries,” in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woolcott (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 118–50.

2. Interview, 23 August 1996, The Step Inn, south Dublin (professional group). Other interviews included in the research of this article, but not quoted with attribution, are as follows: 22 August 1996, The Clonsilla Inn, north Dublin (working-class group); 10 November 1996, The Parkway Inn, north London (mixed working-class and professional group, first generation); 12 November 1996, The Bedford Inn, south London (working-class group, second generation); 21 March 1997, McCormack’s Bar, New York (professional group); 21 March 1997, The Starting Gate, Queens (working-class group); 23 March, 1997, Cryann’s Bar, New York (chiefly brief interviews with mixed-generation members of the Jersey Irish-American Club); 19–23 March 1997, various locations in Manhattan and Queens, New York (chiefly among bar and restaurant employees); 23 April 1998, Institute of Education, University of London (professional group, second generation); 24 April 1998, Institute of Education, University of London (professional group, first generation).

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This example of peer pressure and the desire to belong to a group contrasts with the more subtle needs coming into play when individuals described situations where their decision to drink Guinness was directly linked to the fact that they were away from home, either working or on holiday. Whether in France, Germany, or Japan, all groups gave examples of situations when they, or someone they knew, were abroad and opted for Guinness in a pub even though they knew they would not get the “perfect pint.” In fact, some of these overseas consumers were not particularly brand-loyal at home—but on the Continent or in Japan, they ordered Guinness. They ordered Guinness in order to feel closer to home or in order to say “I’m Irish” and use the product as a badge of identity—in other words, to feel like they belonged to a group. In a more complex situation, one respondent described her father’s efforts to secure membership in a local pub in Ireland. This pub was recognized as one that served a particularly good pint and was used mainly by local farmers. In order to gain access, and to hide the fact that he was not a farmer, the father went so far as to buy a pair of Wellingtons, which he then scuffed-up with mud for authenticity.

Such actions suggest a great need to feel membership or community, and demonstrate that we will go to great lengths to secure it, both consciously and unconsciously. It also suggests that the act of drinking Guinness almost demands that you somehow be a member of a club before you start consuming it. Peer pressure is a lifelong phenomenon. David Buckingham cites findings where children reported watching *Eastenders* in order to avoid feeling left out of playground conversations.<sup>3</sup> The need for membership motivates acts of consumption among all ages, gender, and social groups. Guinness consumption offers qualities that consumers perceive as conferring membership in a community or club that has been constructed and reconstructed over time—a community that has a history, a tradition, a set of rituals and myths to support it. Or, at bottom, an identity.

During the interviews, it became clear that surrounding the consumption of the product—and, sometimes, in lieu of it—many rituals and myths were described and recognized by the consumers and nonconsumers alike. Such rituals and myths surrounding Guinness provide the product with a bedrock of historicity and continuity—functioning in the same way as a Durkheimian “collective consciousness.”<sup>4</sup> The mythic underpinnings of Guinness consumption provide the product with many extra dimensions, giving it solidity and function in peoples’ imaginations. In addition, these associations give the consumer a sense of ownership and tradition, thereby enabling him or her to develop a deeper relationship with the product.

3. David Buckingham, *Public Secrets, Eastenders and its Audience*. (London: BFI, 1987), p. 162.

4. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (London: Macmillan: 1984), pp. 1–8.

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The myths surrounding the product itself emerged in most of the interviews. Each group told similar stories about the company and about the product. Guinness Brewing seemed to enjoy a tremendous sense of historical myth. It was reported as “the biggest brewery in Ireland,” with a great sense of pride accompanying the statement—as if someone in the family was responsible for this fact. It was described as “a great employer,” a place to go for “a solid career with a good pension,” and “a job for life.” These comments were primarily made by the nonprofessional groups.

Even nonconsumers of the product have a relationship to the “text” that is Guinness, and give the product a reading of their own. Like the consumers, these nonconsumers have a history of contact with the beverage, and thus it signifies certain things to them: signs of historicity, familial involvement such as a father who drank it, Irishness, and so on. Buckingham suggests that a media product can become “a part of the texture of many peoples daily lives, about whose ‘effects’ we can only begin to speculate.”<sup>5</sup> Guinness enters the texture of the daily lives of many Irish people. Even if they do not drink it, they are nonetheless aware of it, they have knowledge of it, and they know the myths and rituals and rules that surround the drink.

A particular myth that the Guinness company has exploited in various markets for a long time remains potent. Every group, when asked to write a slogan linked with the advertising of the product, reiterated that “Guinness is good for you.” Despite numerous reports that Guinness is no longer allowed make such an unsubstantiated claim, there seems to be a whole reference library of myth to support this belief. Many respondents shared beliefs about the intrinsic healthy aspect of Guinness: how when ill, or in need of a tonic as children, Guinness would be recommended by the family doctor; how it was given in addition to milk in a child’s bottle; how it was heated and force-fed to older children. Even the most cynical offered claims that the drink was “full of iron,” “made from natural ingredients and therefore good for you,” “full of nutrition,” or “low in calories.”

These myths, whether intentionally generated by the producer as Barthes would suggest, or generated by the consuming audience in the social space, or by a combination of the two, serve to inject the product with a life.<sup>6</sup> By assigning it a social history, Guinness has absorbed a value that no advertising campaign could achieve. It is woven into the fabric of the community and embedded in the daily lives of the consumers and others.

In many respondents’ lives, Guinness plays a large part in the act of recollection of their “family stories.” Nietzsche describes tradition as “a higher

5. Buckingham, p. 117.

6. See Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 109–59.

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authority, which one obeys, not because it commands what is useful to us but because it commands.”<sup>7</sup> It may be useful to bear his characterization in mind when seeking to understand Guinness’s imbrication into Irish identity and social memory. The tradition of consuming the product was communicated many times in the interviews. Respondents often remembered grandfathers who drank a pint of Guinness every night, or a grandmother who always had a bottle of Guinness in a cupboard in case of illness. One respondent linked the product with childhood memories of going with a favorite uncle to a Dublin pub on a Sunday afternoon and being spoiled with lemonade and crisps. Another, when asked to free-associate with the product, said it reminded her of dead relatives—nothing macabre, just a nice link with a memory of a loved grandfather. The drinking of Guinness plays a major role in the lived experience of the respondents. One group of professionals in Waterford remarked that the product enjoyed such a place in the traditions of the country that it could stand alone without the support of advertising:

JOHN: I don’t think that they [Guinness] need to spend too much on advertising on the Irish market.

MICK: It sells itself.

JOHN: It’s a drink that’s handed down from generation to generation.

BM: Inherited?

JOHN: It’s inherited, yeah.<sup>8</sup>

When Guinness drinkers report a sense of tradition and of inheritance of an imagined cultural value, their perceptions have been brought about through many factors: knowledge, experience, social history, and personal exposure. However, these are not the only elements in the story. Combined with the product and the rituals, myths, and traditions surrounding and supporting it, the consumption of the product is also inextricably linked with the consumption of its advertisements.

How the consumer reads, misreads, uses, and plays with the text of the Guinness advertisement adds to the multifactoral status of the relationships between the product, the process of consumption, and the audience. Speaking of television, David Buckingham remarks that “the ways in which viewers make sense of television are dependent, not merely upon texts, but also on the knowledge which they bring to them.”<sup>9</sup> The viewer makes sense of Guinness advertising texts in the same way; the advertisements can be read and made sense of, played with, ignored, misunderstood, and so on, but the audience always brings

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, “Daybreak” in *A Nietzsche Reader*, ed. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 87.

8. Interview, 29 August 1996, The Grand Hotel, Tramore, County Waterford (professional group).

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more to the text than the textual meaning itself. No matter what the audience does with the text, they are using this supplementary and textual layer of meaning in order to add an extra dimension to the multifaceted entity that is the product. By layering up meanings taken from the text with talk and other activities, and by adding that to the other layers of personal memories, established myths, family traditions, and beliefs surrounding the product, the audience comes to possess a complex entity that says "Guinness."

In order to explore what sense the audience makes of the advertising texts, I included excerpts from a discussion that surrounded a 1994 advertisement that had been screened in Ireland. The title of the advertisement "Anticipation" refers to the time it takes for a pint of Guinness to be poured. The television commercial consists of an actor dancing around a giant-sized pint of Guinness, which is slowly, slowly, slowly being filled by a barman. The guy dancing round the pint is Joe McKinney. Pérez Prado's "Guaglione" (1993) is used as the background music in this popular television commercial. Incidentally, "Guaglione" again entered the music charts in Ireland following its use in this advertisement. One respondent describes his reaction to this campaign and describes the concern and energy he put into locating the meaning of this particular text:

PAUL: Well it created something—it created a sense of something that was different, entirely unique—now, it's nothing to do with the image, it's just that it was very unusual, and I remember at the time we were abroad and we came over to Ireland and we saw these ads—not on television, on the billboards—snap shots—and we hadn't a clue what it was all about. Not a clue. And then you got a sense of "this has to stop"—it was almost a real . . . discussion—that Guinness had created something that everybody, everybody was wondering and talking about.

Clearly this advertisement had successfully interpolated the respondent. He was abroad, had returned to Ireland for a visit, and found himself wanting and needing to know about this television commercial. It became part of his lived and real experience: "it was almost a real . . . discussion." This conversation continued:

PETER: Yeah, and on the screen savers and all the rest. . . .  
 KATE: And on the 'Net'.  
 PETER: So it really took it out of being just an ad, into "Hey, that's got something."  
 TOMMY: Even in the nightclubs when the music came on . . . [people would] stick the stool on the floor and be dancing around with the jar.

9. Buckingham, p. 202.

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PETER: At barbecues there were competitions to see who could do the ad dance the best, and there were prizes.<sup>10</sup>

Here, the consumers played with the text and, more interesting, took it out of its preferred place of viewing. Just as Ang and Bausinger describe the reader doing different things with and around the text, so this advertisement was talked about, mused over, used in other forms, like screen savers, and, finally, moved away from the electronic space completely and was ritualized at night-clubs and barbecues.<sup>11</sup> It, too, became part of the consumers' lived experience, adding another layer of meaning to an already complex set of meanings.

Another, older advertisement, "The Island," produced by the Arks Advertising Agency of Dublin in 1977, evoked different reactions. This advertisement is set on an island off the west coast of Ireland. It first shows a currach carrying a keg of Guinness, then cuts to a traditional pub with all the men sitting in the shadow of a ticking clock waiting for the keg to arrive. Like the previous advertisement, the emphasis is on anticipation. Its imagery, unlike that of the previous advertisement, is highly traditional. The advertisement uses Irish language throughout.

PAT: It's brilliant.

BM: What makes it so brilliant?

PAT: Just the whole scene. It's kind of timeless. They are spending the afternoon in the pub and they are not under any pressure to do anything, it's very relaxed, just waiting for the Guinness to come over. [To Mike] Again what you were saying earlier, about waiting for the pint.

PAT: And they're actually *waiting* for the pint to come over.

BM: What about the use of Irish?

PAT: That's why I associate Guinness with Ireland, with Irish—an Irish product.

BM: Do you think it's a risk, actually using Irish language for a nationwide campaign?

PAT: No, I think it was nice to have Irish.

MIKE: Yeah, everybody does.

PAT: And it's humorous as well—the "*Arís*" [again!] at the end.

JIM: I mean, everyone would know it, and people like to know Irish. Every person, every Irish person would like to. I'd love to. I don't know any Irish person who wouldn't like to know Irish.<sup>12</sup>

10. Interview, 23 August 1996, The Step Inn, south Dublin (professional group).

11. See Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1985) and Herbert Bausinger, "Media, technology and daily life" in *Media, Culture and Society* 6, 4 (1984), 343–45.

12. Interview, 29 August 1996, The Grand Hotel, Tramore, County Waterford (professional group).

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The respondents clearly like the advertisement and identify with the ritual surrounding its consumption as portrayed in this text. They identify with the images of “spending the afternoon in the pub” and of not being “under any pressure to do anything.” They also identify with “the act of waiting for a pint,” which Guinness’s advertising agency believes is the signature of the product. Trevor Jacobs, an advertising manager with the Arks firm of Dublin, explained to me that,

... the behavior of the product in particular and the expectation of the product is something that is particularly Irish. ... The whole idea of waiting for your pint, the whole concept of the thing is about waiting for your pint.<sup>13</sup>

The ritual of the pause between ordering and receiving your pint, and the importance of that time alone, repeatedly came up in comments about this advertisement. The Irish viewers also express strong positive feelings about the use of the Irish language in the text.

To follow up on this link between the product and “Ireland,” I asked respondents from other groups, “If Guinness were a place, where would it be?” The responses show a definite imagining of the product as a place people associate with Ireland and Irishness, inextricably bound together.

BM: If Guinness were a place, where would it be?

LINDA: Like the ad, the currach, in Connemara—yeah, rural. ...

JOHN: I’d think of Dublin, the Liffey.

BM: Would you? Why?

JOHN: Well, it was always very, very well associated with Dublin and the Liffey. Like they used to say they take the water from the Liffey and that’s what gives it the flavor. [group laughter]

Other respondents from the same group continued to speculate on the “place” of Guinness:

KEITH: Somewhere isolated anyway ... you go in and you have the first pint by yourself ... and then you join the lads. You would see that happen, you know; it’s the relaxation of being by yourself and having a pint of Guinness. I think a lot of the ad campaigns are trying to put across as well—but it doesn’t work like that ...

GILLIE: Guinness ads always give you the feeling that it’s the answer to everything ... it would sort all problems out, if you had a pint in front of you. Yeah.

I then asked, “Does it have to be a place in Ireland?” Linda, a working-class pub patron in Waterford responded, replied, “Well you say Dublin, but I think

13. Interview, 23 September 1997, Arks Advertising Agency, Dublin.

14. Interview 28 August 1996, The Grand Hotel, Tramore, County Waterford (working-class group).

it's Donegal or someplace like that—you know with the—what is it? The gorse.”<sup>14</sup>

These comments raise several pertinent points. The overriding theme is that Guinness has a place in the imagination. It can even represent a place that people go to, one that feels intrinsically Irish. Whether Connemara in the West, or Donegal, amid the gorse, or Dublin and its River Liffey, where the mythical water supply for Guinness originates—and where, thus, one could argue that the consumer is metaphorically consuming the very essence of the country—that place in the imagination still most markedly a place in Ireland.

The excerpt above touches on another dimension of Guinness's proffered membership in Irishness: the fact that it is explicitly a membership in male Irishness. As one respondent says, “You join the lads.” This is a highly masculine ritual—to have the freedom within the pub space to have a pint alone and then, if you wish, to “join the lads.”

Membership is a central theme in a commercial titled “The First Pint” developed by Arks Advertising in Dublin in 1970, and, as such, it merits our close attention. The black-and-white advertisement depicts a group of men standing at a bar drinking Guinness. The men are all encouraging one another to approach the “nerd” in the snug who is drinking something else. He is approached, given a pint of Guinness and, on the first sip, announces, somewhat tentatively, “I like it.” On the second sip he gives a more vehement “I like it.” On the third sip he shouts a celebratory “I like it!!!” The advertisement closes with a final quip from the initiator of the “conversion,” who observes, “Who knows, Brendan—maybe you'll be getting married next,” thereby implying that as a Guinness drinker he has become a member of a new, more acceptable group, no longer in the margins.

Each group that I showed this advertisement to resisted what Stuart Hall would describe as the advertisers' “preferred reading” of the text.<sup>15</sup> All insisted that it would be very unusual to enjoy your first pint—again, raising the paradox of loyally consuming a product that is distasteful on initial consumption. This commercial evoked another very different reading from one respondent, Jim, a professional in Waterford. He remarked, “I haven't seen that ad before and I'm disgusted . . . I hate it, peer group pressure, I hate it succeeding. That ad was very negative. . . .”<sup>16</sup> Regardless of Jim's negative reading, he identified an important element at work in this commercial: membership and the pressure to belong to the in-group instead of residing in the out-group or the marginal space.

15. Stuart Hall, “Encoding and Decoding in the television message,” in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies* (London: Hutchinson: 1980), pp. 128–38.

16. Interview, 29 August 1996, The Grand Hotel, Tramore, County Waterford (professional group).

Trevor Jacobs of the Arks agency stated that the marketing teams had not taken this factor of “appealing to a need for in-group membership” into account when planning a strategy. Indeed, he asserted that Arks had never consciously incorporated such elements of appeal into their campaigns.<sup>17</sup> However, the audience clearly seems conscious that drinking Guinness can support a notion of membership in a group that bears badges of Irish identity. Similarly, the immigrant audience, while striving to resist the new space that migrants occupy in the margins of their host society, can be found to use the consumption of Guinness and the pub space as a membership label and to provide a sort of “club-hut”—to borrow a term from mountaineering—that which both nurtures and protects their fragile identity in their new diasporic space.

In *Banal Nationalism*, Michael Billig suggests that the sense of a link between the people and the homeland can be seen clearly in the diasporic consciousness of peoples; such a consciousness claims the need to be situated within, and have control over, “a special section of the globe.” Building on this, Billig states that “around the world, nation states use the same basic categories for their ‘country’ and their ‘people’. This is part of the universal code of nationality: the particular nation is affirmed within a general code.”<sup>18</sup> Can such a process can also be relevant in analyzing a marketing and advertising campaign? Does Guinness advertising include rhetorical referencing in its advertising in order to interpolate the audience and to allow them to utilize the text as a reinforcer of their “imaginings” of a community or nation?

Guinness, through its advertising agency, declares that it has not intentionally incorporated such rhetoric in order to communicate such appeal. The audience for Guinness advertising actively adds meaning to a text, reading meaning that has not been intentionally placed there. Yet textual analysis reveals that rhetorical referencing to national identity and in-group membership does, in fact, feature in the advertising text.<sup>19</sup> Consumers do use those rhetorical references derived from the advertisements and from other places in order to mark themselves as Irish and in order to link the product with “home.”

Apart from the evidence of Billig’s “banal imagining” taking place among the groups, it was evident from the research that the consumers’ associations and identifications with the product were influenced by many factors. The respondents made reference to imagery and language directly linked with Guinness campaigns, but they also used references that were not text-based.

17. Interview, 23 September 1997, Arks Advertising Agency, Dublin.

18. Michael Billig. *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 76.

19. Brenda Murphy, “The Guinness (Irl) and Guinness (UK) Advertising Campaigns: 1928–1993: A Diachronic, Synchronic and Comparative Study,” (M.A. Thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 1993).

When I began each interview, I asked respondents to write down words they associated with Guinness followed by any advertising slogans they could remember. They remembered slogans for me, they listed words in association with the product, and they discussed why they had written what they had. We watched Irish advertisements dating from 1969 to the present, and English advertisements from as early as 1928. In keeping with theories offered by the British school of Cultural Studies, the texts were read in many ways. They were read according to their intended message—"Go out and have a Guinness"—and they were read actively. They were criticized, misread, and opposed.

Each group was asked to write the first words that came to mind when it thought of Guinness. In this free-association exercise, each group included words like "black," "dark," "creamy," "rich," "thick," "smooth," "cold," "velvet," and "pint." All these words were used to describe the product, and were among the first words to be written on each respondent's lists. These words were not simply descriptors of the product, but words that Guinness the advertiser would very much want people to associate with the product—virtual lexicons of positive values.

Later words on each respondent's list moved from description of the product to the individual's associations with the product and their connotative or signified value of it as a sign. Interestingly, this sequence—beginning with denotative words and moving on to connotative words—had not been suggested to the groups, but almost all lists took this order. These connotative associations included "refreshing," "relaxing," "friends," "no hangover," "oysters," "fun," "food," "expensive," "chat," "tradition," "blackcurrant" (a reference to a cordial sometimes added to half-pints of Guinness), "Rose of Tralee," "night life," "trendy people," and "the time I have to wait." Some of the connotative associations deal specifically with Irishness, such as "The Rose of Tralee" and "tradition." The other words on the list all had positive values, although "expensive" could be read as a negative or a positive. The words given above appeared among all the groups. Notably, Irish respondents living abroad often gave alternative names for the product, including: "quare-stuff," "diesel," "holy water," "muck," and "liquid engineering," the last being a term that originated in an early advertisement for motor oil. Again, these terms bear strong Irish associations.

When connections were made between the product and Ireland, the language used by the two groups—the Irish consumers in Ireland and the Irish abroad—differed markedly. Among the Irish respondents at home, references to Ireland were minimal and often consisted of factual statements like "it was the

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biggest brewery in Ireland.” The Irish immigrants in London and New York, on the other hand, included at least one reference to Ireland, if not two or three associations on the subject. Words and expressions included “Ireland,” “Liffey,” “Dublin,” “shamrock,” “*fleadh*,” “home,” “Mulligan’s, Poolbeg St.” (a Dublin pub celebrated for its good pint), “national drink of Ireland,” “good publicity for Ireland worldwide,” “longing for a good pint at home,” “being Irish,” “The Chieftains,” “GAA,” “harp” (the icon, not the instrument), and the Irish sentence “*Tá siad ag teacht*” (“They are coming”), a slogan used in a Guinness campaign of the 1970s. The word that recurred most often among the respondents abroad was “home.”

These lists make it clear that Guinness occupies a place in the imagination of all the respondents and is very much a part of their lived experience. It is remembered as a home tonic, first boiled and then given to a sickly child, and it is signifier to a cherished memory of a parent or relative, for whom Guinness was a valued part of their life. It is also clear that there is an identifiable link between the discourse surrounding the consumption of the product and the imagining of a place called “home,” particularly among the immigrant groups. Irish drinkers—male and female, professionals and working class, young and old—linked Guinness with Ireland. They remembered the traditions, rituals, and myths of Guinness. Drinking the product helped them to develop a sense of belonging—and in some manner, bridged the space between the place they were living in and a place they called “home.”

THE UNIVERSITY OF MALTA