

F. Sot Fitzgerald's *Spirit Review:*

Lomza Beer

Also known as Lomza Beer, Export Lomza

Living in Williamsburg's Northside, one is confronted by an undeniable fact- there are Polish people everywhere. My neighbors upstairs are Polish, as is my landlord, the cashiers at Tops grocery store, the bakers down the road, and damn near everyone else. Which is a good thing. For wherever one finds concentrations of immigrants, one finds their food and drink.

On the Northside one can stuff his belly with all sorts of wonderful Polish foods. There are a couple butcher shops carrying numerous splendid varieties of kielbasa and beef and pork jerkies. Then there's the array of light and dark breads and sugary sweets of the Northside bakeries.

But when it comes to beverages- well, the choices aren't so swell. While the Polish have turned out a few good vodkas, otherwise their distilling and brewing is at best mediocre and often quite awful. They have cooked up some passable pilsners and lagers. Ockocim, for example, comes in a few versions, including a Budweiser-like lager, and a mind-rattling malt liquor. Then there's Lech, which professes to be the "Official beer of the Polish Olympic Team" and tastes much like the unremarkable Lowenbrau.

And these are the best of the bunch. Turning to the subject of this review- Lomza, one finds everything wrong in Polish brewing- filthy water, bitter grains, and no sense of the limits to the human palate's tolerance for the foul. With absolute honesty I can confess there is nothing good what so ever about Lomza beer.

Lomza is egregious- outstandingly bad. Like Schaeffer, Red, White, and Blue, or maybe Cook's or Drewery's, it is thin, watery yellow, and gritty. The taste is reminiscent of drinking from a burst, rusty city waterpipe. In fact, if memory serves, I can actually stomach multiple cans of Schaeffer (assuredly nothing to brag of), but Lomza choked me after a few ounces.

Upon opening the can one is greeted with a forbidding stench. And the taste- well, it damn near gagged me. It is gross, really gross, and no stretch of the imagination can make my mouth declare otherwise. Each sip brings a violent reaction. The mouth says, "oh, not bad," then the tongues screams, "god damn, that's fucking silty and bitter!" The face then begins to contort terribly and the torso and arms curl forward as the stomach cringes at what's to come. Had anyone been watching me as I tasted Lomza they might have thought I was having an epileptic fit.

What more need be said? Though one gets a whole 16 ounces for a mere 99 cents, it's 99 cents wasted. No matter how desperate and poor you might find yourself, stay away from this rotten concoction.

Feb 1999

Booze

Spirits Review: Chicoutai

— F. Sot Fitzgerald

Not long ago, my darling Zelduh returned from a short journey to the Great White North. Though impressed by the clean streets and subways of Montreal and the natives elevated taste and the night life, she could only take Quebequois pretensions so long before returning to Brooklyn. Happily, she did not forget me when she went souvenir shopping. Along with a Latin version of Winnie the Pooh, she came bearing a strange liqueur named Chicoutai.

Chicoutai comes in a 15 inch tall, clear glass vessel no wider than your standard catsup bottle, and it's topped with a clear plastic knob. Though the beige label covers much of the bottle, it doesn't blot out the

translucent, dark amber liquid within. Pull the knob-top and the cork base makes a 'ploooomp' sound that almost says, 'dare ye?'

Chicoutai, Liqueur de Mures des Marais, or 'hooch made from a blackberry of the marsh' is made from cloudberry, a type of raspberry. Like schnapps, Chicoutai is to be served in 2-4 ounce servings at room temperature or warmed. Similarly, it has a colossal bouquet and a flavor that overwhelms the palate and doesn't soon leave. Unlike schnapps, it won't get you loaded. It's quite low in alcohol (only 25%), which makes it a lousy choice for the hopeless dipsomaniac. Indeed, any fool who drinks a whole bottle of this (and a bottle is but 375 milliliters) will more than likely feel the same nauseous misery he'd feel had he chugged a pint of honey. If served as an after dinner drink on a cool evening, Chicoutai will please. A sip treats you to a rush

of honey with a blackberry that steams through the sinuses. It's extraordinarily sweet, and each small nip sends a light blush over the face.

However, having served it to a few friends, it's clear that it is a one-drink drink. While each person professed to enjoy the warm feeling it gave, nobody asked for seconds. Indeed, in

COME TO WIL



writing this review I made the mistake of taking two four-ounce glasses of Chicoutai, which left me in a light sweat and staggering golem-like to the kitchen to chug a half-pint of ice water. After that I still felt the need to fan myself with my clipboard. Proceed with caution.

LIAMSBURG.



Inebriology 101: Single Malt Tasting

I'm pleased to introduce you to F. Sot Fitzgerald, recent awardee of the prestigious Dukenfield Fellowship at the New York Hangover Institute of Applied Inebriology. I hope you enjoy his report as much as he no doubt enjoyed doing the research. - Bob

I had the great pleasure a few weeks ago of attending a single malt tasting at DBA, a swell tavern at 41 First Avenue between Second and Third. The event was hosted by John Hansell, genial publisher of the Malt Advocate, a quarterly glossy that caters to whiskey sots.

Now you might be wondering, what the hell's a single malt and what makes them so damn special? Roughly put, there are two types of scotch, blended scotch and single malt scotch. Blended scotch is a mix of many different single malt scotches, and in some cases, neutral grain spirits. Call it a multi-malt, if you like. The aim of the blending, if it is a good blended scotch, is to cover up the undesirable characteristics of the individual malts and to create a whiskey with many pleasant features. Unfortunately, this is the exception to the rule. Usually the raison d'être of blending is to take a bunch of shoddy malts and white lightning and mix them into tolerable swill (e.g., John Begg, Passport).

A single malt scotch, as the name implies, is made from one distillery's malted barley. What makes single malts such a thrill is that they all (with few exceptions) are made from the same sort of barley—Golden Promise. Yet, each tastes quite different. Many things account for this: the soil the barley grew in, the harvesting age, the quantity and type of peat employed in malting, and the most guarded of single malt distillers secrets—the water and the still size. While the analogy doesn't quite fit, it is worth mention: Picasso showed us the possibilities of blue, and single malts the possibilities of Golden Promise barley.

The tasting was held in the rear of DBA, a cozy area where between nips I could peer out the back window at the cold night and toss coasters at the resident paunchy, gray cat. The evening included wee-drams of 6 different single malts, all of which were new releases on the market. I rated the scotches on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being god-awful, 5 being tolerable and 10 being beyond belief and worthy of worship.

Knappogue Castle (1990), 43% alcohol content: Clear and straw in color, much like the light American whiskey, Early Times. The scent is light

and sweet, while taste is extraordinarily feint and a bit heathery. Like the fairer American whiskey, it had hints of vanilla and wholly lacked scotch's trademark smokiness. This is not surprising, as Knappogue is not a scotch proper, but an Irish single malt whiskey. Score: 6.5. A good starter single malt whose weakness in taste makes it easy to drink by the tumbler-full.

Old Pulteney 12 Year, 43%: The color is a hint darker than Knappogue, bordering on golden. The scent is a soft blend of honey with a touch of smoke. The taste is multifaceted, with the smoky-dryness being punctuated by a spicy-salty edge. Score: 7.5. A scotch, but a light scotch whose complexities blossoms incredibly when a few drops of water are added.

Abelour 15 Year, 43%: Medium caramel color, and smelling of vanilla, caramel, and a few other things I couldn't identify. Quite complex in scent and taste, due to the fact that it is aged first in bourbon barrels then sherry casks. For all its characteristics, Abelour remained smooth and balanced. Score: 7.75.

Dalmore Cigar Malt, 43%: This undated scotch was specifically cooked up for drinking with a cigar. It's a deep orange-rust color and the scent and taste are dominated by orange-marmalade sweetness with a tiny bit of saltiness and smoke. Because this is such an unusual scotch and it was made for having with a cigar, I offer its score with great caution: Score: 7.5. No doubt some will believe this the grandest scotch they ever tasted; others, will think it a bit gimmicky and a little to liqueur-like.

Bowmore Mariner 15 year, 43%: An Islay scotch, so it is a brown-orange color and the scent and taste transport you off to an ocean coast, where salt, seaweed and brine are in the air. A swallow of this warms the entire belly without setting it ablaze and leaves you breathing out soft wisps of smoke. Quite good. Score: 8.

Bowmore Darkest, 43%: Unaged and a little overbilled, it comes off as the meek sibling of the Bowmore Mariner. I was expecting something robust and very smoky. Instead I got a drink with deep color but whose salty-smokiness is tempered by a pronounced sweetness. Score: 7.75

All told, it was a solid line-up of single malts. While none sent me into supplicating bows, all were worth trying and a few I might well purchase in the future.

—F. Sot Fitzgerald

Spirits Review: Tanqueray Malacca Gin

Booze

Aah, gin- such a wonderful liquor! Clear, dry and hinting at piney junipershrub, it is wonderful to sip straight or mixed most anytime of the year. In springtime, a greyhound (shot of gin in a highball glass, rim salted, grapefruit juice to fill) provides a fine balance between the cool and too cool. Come summer heat, a gin and tonic adorned with a slice of lime is a refreshing delight. And in the bluster of autumn and winter, a martini warms the belly. Not to be overlooked or denigrated is gin's ability to blast you into orbit. Indeed, some of the most hideous benders I've ever experienced or seen were the result of too much gin.

Now, those who have bothered to compare the tastes of two extreme gins, say, the fabulous Bombay Sapphire, and the frightful, Barton's, understand that like vodka, gin derives its greatness from its subtlety. In short, while Sapphire finishes dry and lightly hints at juniper and meadow flowers, Barton's pierces the tongue with bitterness and flushes the sinuses with a horrific alcohol ester and Pinesol-like stink.

This 'good-gin-as-subtle, bad-gin-as-heavily-flavored' standard established, we must promptly chuck it out the window to come to grips with Tanqueray Malacca Gin. It is an unusual concoction.

According to the bottle, Malacca is an "1839 recipe originally developed during the days of the Company's Far Eastern trade...[and] infused with selected botanicals from the East Indies and

Europe." Which is believable, since there is a port town in Malaya named Malacca and this gin tastes nothing like traditional dry London gin. But does Malacca gin taste like sucking on rattan (e.g., malay)? While I can't say I've ever tried, I'd venture to say, no. In which case, what the hell are these 'botanicals' anyway?

Well, I sampled Malacca straight, repeatedly, on three separate nights. Each time I took a belt of it, I was pleased and fascinated. It slides over the tongue clean and dry, and lightly breathes juniper like a good gin should. But upon swallowing, the nose picks up a very light dash of pepper and an abundant but unidentifiable nuttiness. One empty bottle and two hangovers later, I've yet to nail down this nutty flavor. Regardless, it's a very flavorful and complex gin, and well-balanced. For \$14.99 for a 750 ml bottle, which is \$2-\$5 less than regular Tanqueray and a little more than half of what you'd pay for Bombay Sapphire, I was amazed at the quality. Had I more money, I'd dash out and grab a case of it.

Malacca does have one glaring shortcoming. Contrary to the label's assertion, it shouldn't be mixed with anything fruity. Malacca and grapefruit? Malacca and lime? Hell no-the tastes collide terribly. But a Malacca martini, with a lemon twist, up? Absolutely.

—F. Sot Fitzgerald

Ed Note: We're publishing this even though we have taken note of the unfortunate Greek curse word that Tanqueray has chosen to name its delicious gin. For an interesting twist on this article, substitute the word "dick" everywhere that you see "Malacca." Enjoy.

Spirits Review Courvoisier Millennium Cognac

My first experience with a brandy, which cognac is, was like my first experience with most things: crude, wrong, and ultimately ugly. I was at the exquisite Palmer Hotel in Chicago attending the American Historians Association's annual convention. For two days I had attended panels on the study of history. The vast majority was awful- academic Pecksniffery and outright buncombe. Kept indoors by the frightful January cold, I bought a bottle of Christian Brothers brandy for ten bucks from a booze store down the block and holed up in my room to watch the Steelers and Chargers do battle.

The brandy was dreadful- syrupy, saccharin, stinky stuff that made my eyes water each time I swigged it. It tasted like cheap red wine doped up with Kamchatka vodka. Worse, after consuming the better part of the bottle, I was forcibly dragged from my room by a colleague to an exhibit on early Jewish women's history. I remember swooning again and again as I was marched past old dresses, kitchen items, and girdles.

Needless to say, my encounter with Courvoisier's Millennium was much better, indeed, delightful. I had slipped into a Spirits Expo at a swank uptown hotel in Manhattan on a press pass, and after hours of gulping down all sorts of expensive booze, I got a nip of Millennium. Hocked by a tale of smugly people as Courvoisier's hooch for the year 2000, I feared it

might be a PR stunt, like the rotten \$250 a bottle scotch I gagged on earlier. But no.

Millennium is a very good cognac. Like all brandies, it is distilled red wine aged in barrels. What differs brandy from cognac is that cognac is made in the Cognac region of France, and it is aged in barrels made from oak taken only from the forests of Limousine or Tronçais. And in my experience, cognac tends to be distilled from finer wines, which obviously import a better taste.

Anyway, after having a few belts of Millennium, I smiled and took one of their bottles and walked away from their table. Unlike the folks at Lagdronachkie scotch, who nearly tackled me when I tried to walk out of the expo with one of their fifths, the Courvoisier folks gave me no guff.

Since the expo, I've subjected Millennium to repeated tastings. I've found I like it because it is a sweet almost candy-like cognac. Regular Courvoisier is not a particularly grand cognac. It is very dry and almost lacking in taste, except for hints of thick grape, and has a slightly unpleasant alcohol ester. Millennium, on the other hand, slides over the tongue, lightly swathing it with berry and caramel. Though it warms the mouth and belly, it doesn't make you flush or sweat like schnapps. While a bottle will cost you \$30-\$40, it is well worth it. It's a splendid drink to sip at the end of the day when you're alone in a quiet place, away from the hurly burly outside.

—F. Sot Fitzgerald

Flag June
1999

New York Hangover

Review: Tequila

Of late I have been frequenting Vera Cruz on Bedford Ave. in Williamsburg. Weekdays have me at 5 PM sitting in their bar, spring sun pouring in their open facade, thumbing through Harper's, the New York Review of Books, and other periodicals, stuffing myself merrily with free chips and salsa, and guzzling two dollar Mexican beers, like Negro Modelo, and Pacifico. Let the happy music play on, the scent of beans and peppers waft, and the thin yellow beer flow! I may be trapped in Brooklyn, but my head is far, far south, plunging into a crazy, wild nightmare, complete with blackouts and strange women.

7 PM always comes before my dream is consummated. This leaves this poor boy with the grim choice—stay and to keep the dream flowing, pretending the prices aren't rocketing beyond my means (not a sensible choice); or, be a slob and go home and watch Fox's latest prime time programming ('America's Deadliest Handgun Accidents', or, be a good soldier and go home and work on my dissertation.

My solution is a cross between the rotten choices—get more beer and drink at home while watching bad TV, or, if I feel especially diligent—while plowing through old manuscripts on American education policy in the nineteenth century. Either way, I'm off to Pedro's bodega on Bedford and North 6th. There I can get from their shoddy, old beer cooler 22 ounce bottles of Tequila for \$1.79 each. Hot damn—what better way to continue my Mexican nightmare?

Now I can hear you screaming out—“Eeeewww—who wants beer that tastes like tequila! GROSS!” I agree— that would be quite foul. And, for you hardcore nativists, yes, I know, it's an Anheuser-Busch product, which means it is churned out of Missouri by a bunch of German descendants but what the hell? Why not? We're drinkers, not moralists.

If you have tasted Tostito's Lime Tortilla chips, you'll have a pretty good idea what Tequila tastes like. Just imagine the limey taste you get from the chips mixed with a glass of Budweiser that has had half its water evaporated. Yes— Tequila is altogether weird and

leaves you with the feeling that each sip you take is a crude breach of the law of nature. That said, it has a certain weird charm, much like sodomy. Well, maybe not.

Anyway, you really can't detect a tequila taste. Yes, there's a slight, slight hint of blue agave tequila, as advertised. But mostly one tastes a thick American beer and that limey Tostitos taste. Which, remarkably, is good. Nevertheless, one can't help feeling lurid sipping from this 22 ounce large mouth bottle. Hell, even the corpulent Pedro, gold chains shining, leers at me like I'm a criminal whenever I buy a bottle or two.

Still, when you can no longer afford whooping it up at the local Mexican joint, you can always turn to Tequila to finish your night. Though cooked up in St. Louis, a half dozen bottles of this along with a cheap bag of chips will leave you the next morn feeling as though you've had a delightful Mexican nightmare. And that's what it's all about, isn't it?

Recognizing that for months I have been dispensing advice on how to get soused with panache, it only seems fit that pass on how to survive the ensuing suffering. According to Johnny Viz the jovial Fireman, a regular at the Brooklyn Ale House in Williamsburg, the cure for a hangover is this: Drop an ice cube in a tall glass, add a dash of salt and a squeeze of lemon and fill the glass half way with tomato juice. Fill the glass with a cheap, foaming American beer. “But not too cheap!” Fireman Viz emphasizes. So Schaeffer and Weideman's and the other uglies of this ilk are out. Drink up.

This recipe he learned from his father

in 1967. He had just left the army and he and his father had a manly outing in northern New York where they got hideously bombed. The next morn while he lay in bed suffering, his pops handed him a glass of this stuff. Since he has used it to cure the morning misery with great success.

—F. Sot Fitzgerald



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