

An Interaction with Scotland's Most Inane Bar and Restaurant Manager, and its Aftereffects

by [Shai Afsai](#) (September 2023)



The Pub, Alberto Morrocco, 1954

At an Inverness gastro pub,
the waitress comes over to take our drink order.

"Do you have any porters or stouts?" I ask.

The waitress, who looks as though she's still in high school, is flustered by my question.

Blood rushes to her face.

"I don't know what those are," she stammers. "I'll get someone to help."

I attempt to tell her that they're styles of beer, and to not worry about it—

I can order something else—

but she's off to get the manager.

The manager appears.

He has a smug countenance, one that conveys:

I don't work in a bar and restaurant. I manage a gastro pub.

"What's the matter?" he asks.

"I was just wondering if you had any porters or stouts," I say.

"I don't know what a porter is— "

"It's similar to a stout."

"— but we don't drink stouts in Scotland."

I examine the manager more closely,

studying his eyes for some sign of a human soul.

There isn't any.

I decide not to tell the manager that just a few minutes earlier,

at a local Aldi in walking distance from this gastro pub,

I saw the supermarket shelves

stocked with several stouts brewed in the Highlands.

Instead, I point at the huge harp-shaped tap at the bar— the same tap found in pubs I visited throughout Scotland— and ask, "What's that?"

"Guinness," he says,

"That's a stout," I say.

"That's an *Irish Stout*," he declares, triumphant.

While fond of *Irish Stouts*,

I don't order a Guinness that evening.
In fact,
I haven't been able to enjoy a pint of Guinness
or of Murphy's or of Beamish
at all
since that exchange with the gastro pub manager.

Every time I take a hopeful sip,
I see the gastro pub manager's image before me,
smug-faced and dull-eyed,
and hear the gastro pub manager's voice in my head—
he sounds like a parrot trained to repeat foul words—
asserting:

That's an Irish Stout!

That's an Irish Stout!

That's an Irish Stout!

And with each repeated, triumphant assertion,
all satisfying coffee and chocolate flavor
drains from my glass.

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Shai Afsai's articles, short stories, poems, book reviews, and photographs have been published in *Anthropology Today*, *Haaretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Journal of the American Revolution*, *New English Review*, *The Providence Journal*, *Reading Religion*, *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, and *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. See more [here](#).

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