

Book and Film Reviews

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ALICE FEIRING: *The Battle for Wine and Love or How I Saved the World From Parkerization*. Harcourt, Orlando, 2008, 271 pp., ISBN 978-0-15-101286-2, \$23.00.

After reading this book, many people may not be able to look a bottle of wine in the face the same way again. Does this matter for the enjoyment of wine? Maybe. Or maybe not. But for those doing research on the economics of wine, *The Battle for Wine and Love or How I Saved the World From Parkerization* by Alice Feiring provides important insights that will inform one's perspectives about wine and the wine business.

Feiring, a wine writer and reviewer, laments the growing number of wines that taste the same to her—a taste that she dislikes immensely. For Feiring, wines must exhibit finesse,

a sense of place, of terroir. Such wines, she claims, were being replaced by a rash of “standardized” wines that were all “(b)oring fruit, fruit, fruit and oak, oak, oak. The kinds of wines I drank were disappearing like wild horses into the sunset.” And, she wondered, “...what the hell was strawberry-vanilla jam—like some Body Shop concoction—doing in my Nuits St. George?” (pp. 23–24) A preponderance of wines appearing on the market, it seems to Feiring, are geared to satisfy the tastes of reviewer Robert Parker (and to a lesser extent, those of other reviewers) in order to achieve higher scores in his *Wine Advocate* newsletter. Consumers rush to buy these higher scoring wines, increasing prices and driving profits for winemakers. As a result, an entire industry has developed to help produce wines that better meet Parker’s perceived tastes.

Feiring thus embarks on a quest to discover the exceptions to this trend. Her breezy journeys in search of wines that allow nature to take its course—the getting back to basics, natural, organic and/or biodynamically produced wines—allow us to visit the Rhone, Burgundy, Champagne, Piedmont, Rioja and other wine growing regions of Europe, as well as listen in on provocative conversations with several professors at the renowned School of Enology and Viticulture at the University of California, Davis. Along the way, we meet winemakers, vineyard owners, importers and others in the business, learning about their production philosophies and methods. The narrative is also enlivened throughout the book by amusing situations Feiring and her chums encounter on the road. While most of the wineries and winemakers are discussed using their real identities, Feiring’s companions are often referred to by more colorful monikers, such as The Skinny Food Writer, Honey-Sugar, Owl Man, Mr. Bow Tie, and Miss Knish, among others, which helps readers keep who’s who straight.

One of the best parts of the book, where Feiring finally slows her inherent but often humorous whining about the state of wine (no pun intended) and life, is towards the end when she goes out into the field despite her many ailments (repetitive stress pains from writing, an odd leg flare up) and helps pick a vintage’s grapes at Clos Roche Blanche in the Loire Valley. Here, Feiring drives home the point—an idea that is really an underlying theme throughout this book, that wine is first and primarily an agricultural product. As an agricultural product, the quality of wine is directly related to the weather, the soil, and the farming techniques used. The combination of these factors variously makes for a good, not-so-good or exceptional vintage, and thus has a significant impact on wine quality and price. (For an econometric approach to this, see Ashenfelter, 2008.¹)

Growing grapes and making (good) wine out of them, to be sure, is an art and a passion, as Feiring ably shows. However it is also a business, and Feiring’s journey seeks out many vintners who despise the duality that the business end imposes on the winemaking end. At the same time, selected evidence is cited, and names are named, of producers who have altered or are suspected of altering their techniques, both in farming and in the

¹ Several of the sources in this review are cited from a special volume of *The Economic Journal*, published in June 2008. It should be mentioned that all of the papers cited from *The Economic Journal* appeared previously as AAWE working papers.

vinification of the grapes to produce more Parker-friendly wines. Feiring rants about these and the technologies they use to manufacture wines that are the antithesis of her preferred “authentically” produced wines.

Feiring’s villains, as depicted in the book, include the consultants, technologies, machines, and production methodologies, etc. geared to guide output towards Parker’s tastes. These include, for example, using non-indigenous “designer” yeasts, oak chips, enzymes and other additives, micro-oxygenation and/or reverse osmosis that unnaturally alter the winemaking process or the wine’s composition. One particularly disconcerting example of such manipulation is shown in her description of reverse osmosis: “This [reverse osmosis] machine is a torture chamber that deconstructs the wine into water, alcohol, and sludge. The machine can also concentrate wine, reduce alcohol, restart a stopped fermentation..., and eliminate mold.” (p. 35) According to one of the machines’ distributors, these machines are now used to “...adjust alcohol on about 45 percent of the premium wine California produces.” (p. 38)

A question arises as to where to draw the line between centuries-old techniques and modern, sometimes machine-driven technologies that enable producers to develop a particular style and taste in wine. Obviously reverse osmosis is an extreme technological application. But Gergaud and Ginsburgh (2008) define technology in a much broader sense. To them, only the components of terroir are not technological. Terroir, they note, is all of the natural and non-transferable endowments that “...influence in a measurable way both the quality and the taste of a wine: soil, subsoil, slopes and exposure of vineyards.” (p. F144) This is for sure one of Feiring’s ideas of what a good wine should reflect. Everything else to Gergaud and Ginsburgh is technology, including many of the processes that are now or might have been considered traditional or authentic winemaking techniques in the past. “All the other elements [other than terroir] are either not quantifiable (the influence of social relations, for example) or can be reproduced elsewhere, taking into account adjustments due to local conditions. Clearly not all grapes grow in every region because of soil, slopes and climate but enough experimentation exists and winemakers know how this should be handled. All the rest, including the choice of grapes, is technological.” (p. F144) So what to some is natural—such as manual picking, the type of barrels used, the age of the vines and even the grapes allowed in a wine, are, for others, technological. But many of these methods are also part of the art of winemaking, and Feiring would likely approve of a number of these controllable applications as natural and authentic. Is using one method or technology to make a wine that meets mass taste better or worse than another? Where does “natural” end and “unnatural” begin? (For the record, Gergaud and Ginsburgh show that their broader definition of technology econometrically accounts for more of a wine’s quality than do natural endowments.)

In the same vein, there is considerable debate as to what natural and organic mean, and in the efficacy of biodynamic production techniques. While there are organizations that certify organically grown produce, their standards may allow a degree of chemicals or other manipulation that Feiring (a vegetarian, by the way) may not commiserate with. If

a chemist tells you that the resulting composition of two wines, one produced mostly organically and the other with a heavy dose of additives such as oak chips and designer yeasts, are exactly the same, and they taste the same, is this acceptable—or even noticeable—to the average wine consumer (or critic)? Will the knowledgeable wine drinker be able to discern any difference in blind tastings? These and other aspects of natural, organic and biodynamic science as applied to wines provide the basis for a spirited debate between Feiring and the UC Davis professors, but a somewhat less than intense exchange with Robert Parker later in the book.

A substantial economic literature now exists showing that Parker and other critics influence wine prices (see Ali et al., 2008, for a good review of this literature). At some juncture, then, when reading *The Battle for Wine and Love or How I Saved the World From Parkerization*, one begins to ask why Parker and others have the influence they do. Wine is often an intimidating product for consumers, with a mystique and language of its own. There is limited information available to guide consumers. Parker, as well as other scorers and good wine merchants, take away some of the mystery and randomness in buying wine. Parker's innovative (and subsequently copied) easy to understand 100 point scale is familiar to most people from grade school on, saving consumers time in making a selection (even though Parker urges his readers to read his verbal descriptions of each wine as well). The fact that the *Wine Advocate* accepts no advertising may further encourage Parker's cache. (See McCoy, 2005, for greater detail on Parker's influence.) But one must wonder—do wine reviewers establish consumer taste, or do they reflect consumer taste. For an economist, the question is, for example, do Parker's ratings establish consumer demand, or merely inform consumers of which wines will most likely satisfy demand that already exists? Since wine is an "experience good" whose characteristics cannot usually be determined before consumption, and an often expensive one at that, critics provide guidance that consumers can depend on, but only if over time the tastes of consumers and critics are indeed correlated. (See Ali, 2007, for more detailed discussion of the pricing of wine as an experience good.) If, for example, individuals buy several different 95 point Parker wines (at likely relatively high prices) and dislike them, will they continue to follow the points, or find other sources of information that more closely reflect their tastes? You can fool the consumer once in awhile, but not forever, and certainly not over the decades that Parker has been gaining prominence.

But what about Parker's influence on wine produced to more closely match his supposed preferences. Notice that this is not to say that Parker influences the quality of wine so much as to say he may influence the characteristics of wine—it's taste, density, color, fruitiness, oakiness, and so on. While some critics may dislike some or all of these characteristics, others may not. This does not mean that the wines are good or bad, but just that they satisfy different tastes. And, although Feiring seems to know this, she makes the case for her types of wines, and scantily acknowledges that other tastes may not be the disaster she makes them out to be.

So what does Alice Feiring have to be happy about? Well, for one thing, she seems to have found a new suitor—the search for and tribulations surrounding this aspect of her life play a small but recurring role throughout this book (and hence the book’s full title). As for the other love of her life, her style of “unparkerized” wines, they continue to be available, and, because they are not as deeply embedded on either the critics’ nor the public’s radar, they are also likely to be cheaper. Market demand for her types of more subtle, “natural” wines is apparently comparatively low, albeit with a concurrent decline in the number of producers and more limited availability, as well as implied lower profits for their producers. (An analysis of the supply and quality adjusted price for wine, differentiating between utility maximizing and profit maximizing producers is given in Morton and Podolny, 2002. It would be interesting to see if utility maximizers who continue to supply “natural” and probably more labor-intensive wines do so at higher quality adjusted prices than do more technologically-intensive profit maximizers, and if, as implied in Morton and Podolny’s paper, the more long-lived traditional producers of these more natural wines have lower marginal costs and hence lower prices—with possibly higher profits.)

This review has attempted to highlight some, but certainly not all, of the thought-provoking economic ideas that are suggested in *The Battle for Wine and Love or How I Saved the World From Parkerization*. Many of these same ideas appear similarly in Kermit Lynch’s 1988 book *Adventures on the Wine Route* and in the movie *Mondovino*. But it is important not to lose sight that Alice Feiring’s adventures are also fun to read, and make this book enjoyable and illuminating.

Stephen Chaikind
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BENJAMIN WALLACE: *The Billionaire's Vinegar: The Mystery of the World's Most Expensive Bottle of Wine*. Crown, New York 2008, 336 pp., ISBN 978-0-307-33877-8, \$24.95

On December 5, 1985, in bidding that lasted 1 minute and 39 seconds, Christie's-London sold to Malcolm Forbes a single bottle of 1787 Chateau Lafite for £105,000 (then \$155,000). Once owned by Thomas Jefferson, it was hoped the bottle would be in the Forbes Museum on Fifth Avenue by nightfall for the opening of a special exhibit devoted to America's 3rd President. Much to Malcolm Forbes's disappointment, the wine did not make it that night. Having become the most expensive bottle of wine in the world, the required cultural export license could not be procured in time!

This is the set piece that begins Benjamin Wallace's truly riveting book *Billionaire's Vinegar*. Of course, the wine was a fake. And the creator of the fake, former German *Schlager* music act manager Hardy Rodenstock, proceeded to sell millions of dollars of similar wines during the next 20 years. How the market for the fakes developed, and how billionaire William Koch caused it to unravel, forms the core of Wallace's mystery story.

Wallace's book has been optioned by a group associated with actor Will Smith and parts of it are written using flashbacks in way that really is cinematic. For anyone familiar with the wine world, the book will provide extraordinary enjoyment more or less as beach material. But this book has even greater potential to cross over to a mainstream audience than George Taber's 2005 book *Judgment of Paris* (of which two movies are being made!).

James Lassiter, one of the movie's producers told *Variety* that "for me, the movie is the unraveling of a mystery that comes down to a guy who punked the wine world." According to the Urban Dictionary, "Being punked" is "a way to describe someone ripping you off, as in HAHHAHA I punked both of you." And I think Lassiter has it just right. Quite literally everyone was punked: Marvin Shanken, who publishes the *Wine Spectator*, actually bought a half bottle of Rodenstock's wine for \$30,000. Michael Broadbent, the distinguished Christie's department head, certified the original bottle as genuine and thus set the stage for millions of dollars of sales on the private market. And Robert Parker's praise of Rodenstock in his influential *Wine Advocate* pushed Rodenstock's business into high gear.

But Hardy Rodenstock made one bad mistake when he punked William Koch. Koch, who collects everything from models of winning boats in the America's Cup (he won it with his own boat in 1992) to the gun that shot Jesse James, put his formidable resources to work unraveling the mystery. The first thing Koch's team of investigators learned is that Rodenstock's real name is Meinhard Görke, and that his biography was highly fictionalized. They also learned that the initials ThJ that were engraved on the bottles must have been put there with a modern dentist's drill, contrary to the claims of a now retired Christie's engraving expert.

The story of faked wines is far from over, however. For one thing, it remains unclear precisely how the wines Rodenstock sold were created. As Dennis Foley, who published the now defunct rare wine magazine *Rarities*, said to me in an email, “Hardy has been found near the cookie jar, but he has not actually been caught with his hand in it!” Tests on Koch’s bottles for Cesium-137, a radioactive element that did not exist in the atmosphere before the hydrogen bomb test of 1952, do not reveal any indication that the wines in his bottles are younger than the 1952 vintage. Foley speculates that Rodenstock may have simply found some older wines without labels or markings. A dentist’s drill bit is then applied and, voilà, a 1787 Lafite is created.

In some ways the most interesting aspect of this story is how people want so much to believe in things, and thus they do. That is really the take away message of the book, and Wallace has done a lovely job of presenting it.

Orley Ashenfelter
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TYLER COLMAN: *Wine Politics: How Governments, Environmentalists, Mobsters and Critics Influence the Wines We Drink*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2008, 208 pp., ISBN 978-0-52-0255210, \$27.50.

The French have a word for it: *assemblage*. It is the act of blending wine from different barrels and when it works the result is full and round, delicious. Tyler Colman (a.k.a. the internet's Dr. Vino at www.drvinoc.com) has assembled stories about the social forces that affect wine in order to round out our understanding and appreciation of this glorious product. It is a very readable revision of Colman's Ph.D. dissertation on the politics of wine and I think it's a blend that will appeal to a lot of wine enthusiasts and wine economists.

The contrasts between the Old World (France, especially Bordeaux) and the New World (California, especially Napa Valley) form the book's main axis. Alexis de Tocqueville famously noted that a distinguishing characteristic of the young United States was the unexpected vitality of its voluntary associations. Americans didn't look always to the state, he wrote, they worked together to solve collective problems. Nothing like it in France, with its strong state controls, he said.

But wine is different, Colman explains. Regional wine associations (like the groups behind the *appellation d'origine contrôlée* system) play a strong role in France while the heavy hand of the state (the French call it *dirigisme*) is seen in America's rigid regulation of wine (and alcoholic beverages in general) and the complex and cumbersome three-tier distribution system that makes it all but impossible for some wine enthusiasts to legally purchase products that are readily available just across the state line. Colman's history of the political process that brought us to this situation makes good reading.

Green power politics is part of the blend, too, as Colman contrasts the influence of environmentalists in California with the biodynamic movement in Europe. The politics of the palate—and the influence of wine multinationals and critics like Robert Parker (and Dr. Vino himself?)—rounds out the final product, Colman concludes on a upbeat note: the relationship between wine and society here in the United States is complicated, a mixture of politics and economics, wealth and power, science, tradition, religion and environmentalism and there are a lot of problems to be solved, but he's optimistic—we have more and better choices and a growing wine boom to push the process along.

It's not really surprising that I would like this book. It's called *Wine Politics* but there's a lot of wine economics here, too. The broad themes are relevant and there are plenty of interesting historical tidbits that you can work into conversation at your next wine tasting party.

Now, for example, I know why Two Buck Chuck (TBC), which costs \$1.99 in California, sells for about a dollar more here in Washington State. The complexity of the three-tier distribution system (which treats wine as an alcoholic controlled substance) is to blame. Bronco Wines, which makes TBC, can self-distribute it to Trader Joe's stores in California but has to

sell it to middlemen elsewhere. The extra distributional layer adds about a buck to Chuck's price. If you ever need a simple example to explain why the three-tier system matters, here it is.

Wine Politics is a welcome addition to the wine economist bookshelf for several reasons. First, of course, because it is interesting and informative and takes economic forces seriously as a factor in the world of wine. It is the kind of book a wine economist would want to read and gift as a gift to friends. A second reason is that this volume might signal the welcome emergence of a more serious popular wine literature, one that goes beyond personalities, ratings, and "sniff and swirl" anecdotes. The University of California Press, which published Colman's book, seems committed to serious wine books and I would like to encourage them. They recently published another book that wine economists should appreciate, *Bordeaux/Burgundy: A Vintage Rivalry* by Jean-Robert Pitte. Pitte's book presents a serious analysis of how differing domestic and international wine market forces have contributed to the differential development of these two great French wine regions. I hope there are more such volumes in the pipeline.

But it would be a mistake to think that all wine book publishers are as enlightened as UC Press. Colman's second book recently hit the bookstores. It isn't a book of wine economics or politics, however. It's called *A Year of Wine: Perfect Pairings, Great Buys and What to Sip for Each Season* and, if the book blurbs are accurate, falls more clearly into the wine book mainstream than the (hopefully) emerging wine economics fringe.

Thinking critically about *Wine Politics*, I would have appreciated a bit more depth on some of the topics (many of the chapters are strings of short blog-length entries) and I wish that there was a stronger central theme. Yes, wine is affected by many social forces. Well, so what? I think there may be deeper insights that can be mined from this vein. A long memorable finish is something I look for in a wine ... and a wine book.

Michael Veseth
University of Puget Sound

RANDALL MILLER (Director), *Bottle Shock*, Screenplay by Jody Savin and Randall Miller. Freestyle Releasing, 2008, 110 minutes.

“Wine is sunlight, held together by water.” Galileo Galilei (as quoted early in the movie by wine merchant Steven Spurrier).

In a slightly different spirit, I would note that “This film is hokum, held together by history and scenery.” That’s not intended as a pan, because hold together it does, despite its obvious flaws: I give it a “thumbs up,” or perhaps a raised glass, maybe an “87” on the Parker scale. It has much to offer to film lovers and wine lovers alike, especially those who have visited the Napa Valley or should, and I can also recommend it for its droll and insightful depiction of the infancy of California’s artisan wine industry.

The film is a largely fictionalized account of the events leading up to one Napa winery’s participation in the “Judgment of Paris” in 1976, an event well-known to readers of this journal: a blind taste test pitting renowned French wines against the best of upstart Northern California, judged by French wine professionals in Paris and resulting in victories for the California entries in the white and red categories. The focus is on Chateau Montelena, an old Napa vineyard that was acquired in 1972 by former lawyer Jim Barrett; the winery’s 1973 Chardonnay placed first in the Judgment. The broader backdrop is Napa’s emerging wine industry, propelled by immigrants and wine-loving urban refugees like Barrett and Warren Winiarski of Stag’s Leap Winery, a former lecturer in liberal arts at the University of Chicago whose 1973 Cabernet Sauvignon won among reds.

Barrett’s entrepreneurial struggles leading up to the competition form the basis for the plot, which is kicked up a notch by a dash of father/son conflict and a hottie in short-shorts who forms the leggy hypotenuse of a love triangle. Played effectively by Bill Pullman, Barrett is appropriately down-to-earth, albeit volatile and insecure about his career switch, an insecurity fueled in part by the marriage of his ex-wife to his former law partner. He works through all this by quoting Hemingway and periodically flooring his son Bo (Chris Pine) in a makeshift boxing ring; fortunately, Bo generally seems stoned enough not to feel it. Aimless party boy Bo is balanced off by Gustavo Brambila (Freddy Rodriguez), wine savant son of Mexican immigrants who helps keep Chateau Montelena afloat while developing his own vintage on the side. Add to the mix “Sam” (Rachael Taylor), a female intern from UC Davis who transfixes a gaggle of winery workers by hosing down some equipment in a sheer blouse, Daisy Dukes, and stylish cowboy boots, and voila, you’ve got entertainment! Sam first falls into Gustavo’s arms—in the movie’s most annoying line, she describes him as a “renegade who worships the sanctity of the vine”—before yielding to her greater visual congruity with Bo Barrett.

This is standard fare, barely serviceable. Fortunately, the real movie arrives early in the form of Steven Spurrier (Alan Rickman), a British wine merchant based in Paris who is persuaded by his American expat friend Maurice (an oddly twee Dennis Farina) that a contest between French and American wines, in the bicentennial year of 1976, would

create excellent publicity for Spurrier's business. Rickman hits the right sardonic notes as an amusing British prig with a faintly curled lip but a good heart and a mind that eventually is pried open. I especially enjoyed the scenes of him driving around Napa in a rented Gremlin, gulping guacamole offered by salt-of-the-earth winemakers and slowly coming to the realization that the locals were on to something.

Except for Sam and Maurice, these are all real people, but the movie plays fast and loose with many key historical matters. The head winemaker at Chateau Montelena, Mike Grgich, an immigrant with a colorful background of his own, is not a character in this film, although a fellow in Grgich's trademark beret appears fleetingly and wordlessly in a few scenes. Spurrier's business partner at the time, Patricia Gallagher, also is omitted from the film; a spirited female character probably would have been more interesting as a foil than Mr. Farina's Maurice (I half-hoped that Jim Barrett would meet Maurice and break his nose, much like John Travolta did to Mr. Farina in "Get Shorty"). And the actor who appears briefly as George Taber, the sole journalist who was at the competition, is badly miscast; having seen Taber in person recently, at an event organized by an editor of this journal, I can attest that he is a more distinguished-looking and voluble fellow today than the portly and taciturn portrayal of him 32 years younger. But it's hard to imagine an entertaining movie based on real events that showed enough fidelity to personas and details to satisfy actual participants or people with an educated interest; it would be a documentary at best and a boring documentary at worst. (That's a cautionary statement for the producers of another movie about the "Judgment" that's currently in development.)

And the movie does extremely well in integrating a key element of Napa winemaking history: a relatively new technology of production that was especially effective at preventing the incursion of oxygen during processing. The use of this technology underlies the movie's title as well as its dramatic climax, in which the entire warehouse of Barrett's Chardonnay turns a toasty (and temporary) brown, causing him to decide to return to his law job. The actual historical fact of brown wine is a matter of dispute between Jim Barrett and his winemaker at the time, Mike Grgich. However, the depiction in the movie is an important and satisfying creative link, even if the specifics, which involve an emergency consultation with a UC Davis enology professor (a surprising Brad Whitford, looking earthy), Bo and Sam's frantic car ride and breakdown that culminate in Sam baring her breasts to a cop, and the active luggage support of nearly everybody flying on a plane to Paris, lie far outside the realm of historical plausibility. I don't much care that these hijinks are historically inaccurate, because they work well in the service of dramatic tension and comic effect.

Moreover, "Bottle Shock" is a lovely movie to watch, and the filming of Napa and Sonoma is a major draw. I was entranced from the opening flyover shots of acre after acre of sun-dappled vineyards. Subsequent scenes accurately render the local beauty and climate, where clear blue skies and comfortable temperatures prevail for most of the year; I give the movie a "93" on the Parker scale as an advertisement for Napa tourism.

I especially enjoyed the depiction of Calistoga, near Chateau Montelena in the northern end, as the Valley's working class bar town. Having stayed in cheap motels in Calistoga in recent years, sharing the hot spring pools with working-class immigrant Russian and Latino families, I can vouch firsthand for the town's diverse roots. Although wealthy visitors routinely drop \$500 on a half-day spa visit there, it still retains much of the same cranky charm reflected in Eliza Dushku's tough yet delectable bar operator ("Joe" – why do these women have male names?), who responds to Spurrier's wonderment at the quality of the local wines with "What did you expect? Thunderbird?"

Speaking of cranky characters, movies about wine are now doomed to suffer comparisons with that other recent wine movie, "Sideways." The only real link between that movie and "Bottle Shock," other than wine country scenery, is an emphasis on the connection between the characteristics of wine grapes and the main characters. In "Sideways," Miles was fragile and thin-skinned like Pinot but supposedly complex and able to mature and ripen under special circumstances, which unfortunately were not in evidence in the movie. In "Bottle Shock," Jim Barrett and Sam discuss the need for wine grapes to be shocked or stressed, since "comfortable" grapes produce bad wine (Jim is a very uncomfortable grape). But in a seemingly intentional swipe against "Sideways," and in full character, Jim's reply to Sam's observation that "hardship produces enlightenment" is a curt "for a grape!"

Amusing moments like this are sufficiently ample, and the movie is bouncy enough, that I can recommend it to most movie goers, including teetotalers and those who lack an interest in the historical specifics. I doubt any of you will savor this movie like a 1973 Stag's Leap Cab, but it's likely to leave you with the pleased, languorous feeling that envelopes me after downing a bottle of a respectable, modestly priced Cab on a warm Napa evening. Indeed, after returning home from the movie in the early evening, my wife and I opened just such a bottle and spoke fondly of past and future visits to Calistoga. Now there's an idea . . .

Rob Valletta
Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco

Note: The views expressed in this review are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Federal Reserve System or its Board of Governors. I thank my wife Ellen Hanak for sharing her insights on the movie, along with California and French wines.

TADASHI AGI (writer) and SHU OKIMOTO (illustrator): *Kami no Shizuku: Les Gouttes de Dieu*, Vol. 1. Kodansha, 2005, 223 pp., ISBN 4-06-372422-0, ¥524.

This remarkable Japanese manga, a serial fiction now in its Balzacian nineteenth volume (the first five appeared this year in French from Glénat) is reaching a wide audience and having a surprising influence on the East Asian wine market.

Its basic plot follows Shizuku Kanzaki, motherless son of an eminent, lately deceased wine authority, as he contends for his father's legacy with his brother, himself a wine critic and a death's bed adoptee. That the estate includes a ¥200 million cellar of rare wine at first matters not a jot to young Shizuku, who in an admirable act of parent-irking has taken up selling at a beer conglomerate. Wine bores him, and he refuses to drink it, but this madness is clearly the upshot of unresolved papa-trauma.

The table begins to turn when a mind-bending whiff of 1982 Château Mouton Rothschild brings back a mysterious childhood memory, freaking the young man out, and recruiting him irrevocably into the fight. The grape quickly proves an inescapable companion, and not only because the inheritance, in a game devised by the father, will be settled on the one brother who can best sleuth out the names and vintages of thirteen extraordinary wines. As the quest takes off, wine starts pouring from every page, washing Shizuku into the glamorous Tokyo milieu of walnut-paneled restaurants, hushed wine bars, and elite vintothèques, waylaying him at every corner with the passion of his obsessed sire and extending Mephistophelean appeal. This looks fun, and I hope to find myself similarly burdened one day.

Yet it's not only about the top shelf. The inception of Shizuku's drinking history arrives as an unheralded Bordeaux, 2001 Château Mont-Pélat. Suggested by a perceptive sommelier, the wine blasts the father-proofing from Shizuku's skull, replacing it with a four-headed avatar of oeno-divinity. He swirls, he sniffs, he sips . . . and he abruptly sees Freddie Mercury, Brian May, John Deacon, and Roger Taylor, the rock band Queen, if you somehow don't remember. Another beer pagan bites the dust. (This experience, as other sensory hallucinations elsewhere, is deftly inked into life by illustrator Okimoto.)

The analogy hit a nerve. What there was of Château Mont-Pélat in Japan sold out on the scene's publication, in *Morning*, a Kodansha Comic omnibus selling something like a half-million a week. With the separately bound editions doing one to two million copies each, any that follows evaporates too. Suddenly everybody wants to taste this wine redolent not of spice box but black leather jock strap. A measure of the manga's lasting and somewhat frightening effect, this label from 250 acres in the Premières Côtes de Bordeaux, acquired and renovated by Despagne in 1998, still commands, if you can find it, ¥5000 in the shops or ¥3500 if you hunt online. This for a bottle the manga initially recommended as a ¥2000 bargain and that was going for €12 at home.

Shizuku thinks this wine tastes like . . . Queen!



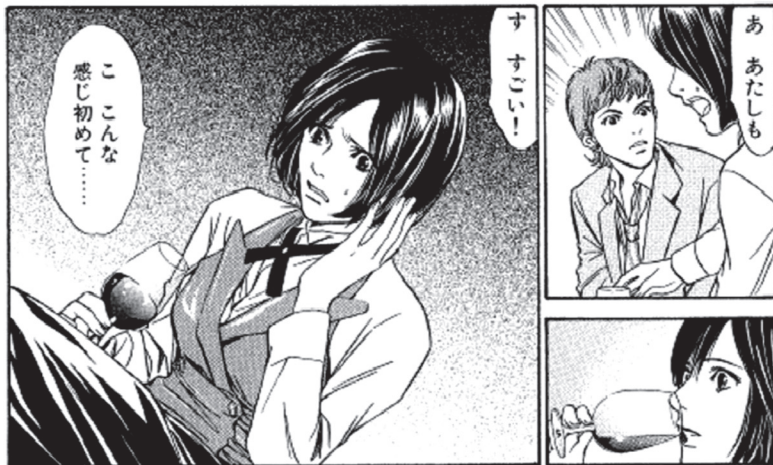
©Tadashi Agi/Shu Okimoto, Kodansha 2005

A similar thing happened in Taiwan and South Korea when the comic appeared there, with wine merchants rushing distributors for whatever they could get to meet a boom in demand for Mont-Pérat, for other wines in the book, and ultimately for any wine at all. Shrewd Despagne quickly brought another label into Japan, Les Amants du Château Mont-Pérat. Twenty-thousand bottles of this have been known to disappear in a day. Likewise, a faceless Italian table wine called Colli di Conegliano Rosso Contrada di Concenigo has also become a big seller after a cameo, as have a number of other modest wines. Even the superstars of the series, Jayer's Cros Parantoux, for example, or wines from Méo-Camuzet, Roumier, or DRC, have been affected. Though intimately known and coveted among veteran Japanese wine heads, the manga has transformed these once recondite labels into household names, as famous as Dali or Picasso. Always expensive and a bit hard to find, today, unless you're very rich, forget it! In the case of Chambolle-Musigny's Les Amoureuses, which plays a special part in the story, even being very, very rich won't help. Shizuku Kanzaki is one of the mightiest wine guys around, and he's a cartoon.

Shizuku takes Mont-Pérat over Opus One



A brilliant Burgundy opens a new world



This phenomenon points up a couple of interesting facts. One, the comic's readership is not made up of children. In Japan you must be over twenty to buy alcohol. Kid mangas do exist, of course, but illustrateds—and there are hundreds of them, with themes ranging from baseball to the *Tale of Genji*—are read by all ages here. To the good of the wine market (the savviest merchants are the first to grab new issues), *Kami no Shizuku* is in with the yuppies. Second, this book is subbing as a wine appreciation course. Shizuku's adventures bring him into ever more intense contact with wine and wine professionals. Viticulture is discussed; wine terms explained; history and geography explored; tasting analyzed; evaluation considered—all this in a fairly natural, engaging way, reliably, and with surprising detail. As Shizuku learns, the readers learn with him. Such double-dipping appeals to the economical Japanese. It also makes it easy to assuage the guilt of a pleasure read. So the manga is a bookseller's delight too. Incidentally, the *Kami no Shizuku* smash is the third such success, following upon *Sommelier*, which made California Pinot Noir Calera famous here, and *Shun no Wine*. Yet another, the still-running hit *La Sommièrière* reflects the wine school vogue among scrupulously self-improving Japanese women.

Translated by Anne-Sophie Thévenon, *Les Gouttes de Dieu* is finding a friendly welcome in France, despite the anti-alcohol flak flying there. French manga fans seem younger than the genre's broad Japanese readership, presenting the uncommon image of a subset notably blasé about the national drink having its interest revived by a book from a place where wine-drinking, serious as it is, stems from a late vintage. This is not the customary course of cultural influence. Shizuku, moreover, is not just amusing young French, he's teaching them. For the translation keeps the appendices of the original (a mini-map of Bordeaux, for example, or glosses of words like “domaine” and “terroir”) and, naturally, the didacticism of the dialogue. Booksellers seem to be finding this aspect of the book as effective a sales pitch as Japan's retailers have.

Was it this simple? Were the French themselves incapable of dropping the stuffiness and mystification of their wine world to make it interesting to disaffected college kids? Maybe so. Yet I suspect a homegrown *bande dessinée* wouldn't have worked anyway, and that Shizuku holds another advantage in France, one he doesn't possess here: his alienness. In other words, Japanese culture abroad, especially the popular kind, has the salable magic of being the type of thing your parents and regular folk detest.

Tadashi Agi is a pseudonym for brother-and-sister team Shin and Yuko Kibayashi. Brought up in an international atmosphere in Tokyo, with a grandfather who took them as children to French restaurants, something they enjoyed, and an artist mother, the Kibayashis have come by wine knowledge the slow way. To judge from the books, their preferred color is Gallic. American winemakers, says sister Yuko in a comment revealing a quaint idea of vineyard practice in France, “are only concerned with producing healthy grapes, like a factory. They don't trust in nature.”

I'm still wondering about this comment as I open and taste my own bottle of Château Mont-Pérat, a 2006, made under the tutelage of wine whisperer Michel Rolland. Like

Shizuku, I am immediately battered by the wine's bouquet: stewed prunes standing an inch over the rim. The wine is garnet, fairly deep, but for the vintage it's too translucent mid-glass, and the rim is beginning to show amber. These crow's-feet are early for a wine some critics, the Kibayashis allege, rate as highly as the first growths. Soft and lovely in the mouth, the taste also has power, prunes again, chocolate, some burned caramel. I'm reminded of a lesser Washington Merlot that's been forgotten under the stairs. Aggravating matters is a distinct walnut-skin bitterness, and where the poetry should be I find newsprint. The finish is persistent but, again, simplistic, and vaguely stinging. Is this Queen? Yes, I think it is. To the Kibayashis' credit, the wine and the image are a good match, and one with the bonus of speaking clearly to great numbers of people who might not otherwise know what wine is capable of. Does Shizuku like it, or is it just impressive? Well, he prefers the Mont-Pérat to his next taste, 2000 Opus One, and good on him. For there are times, more often when you're under twenty-five, when a juicy, well-sauced cut from Freddie and the boys surpasses anything the classical crowd can dish up.

The Kibayashis know well how to cook a success. Start with a disarming main character, a fair scoop of substance but not too much, and add plenty of salt: a good manga is a stack of Pringles and just as addictive. Still I like how they sneak in a few nourishing thoughts. Shizuku, for instance, at the story's outset, has adopted the familiar dodge of an unripened mind that fine wine is, as he says, "gotaku," in other words, "a load of crap." He means wine doesn't rate the reverence admirers give it. Setting his son the task of tracking down wines with only their "paintings in words" to go by, Shizuku's father aims to coach him past this immaturity. Word painting is a practice some wine people make fun of. But for old Mr. Kanzaki, it lies near the philosophical heart of wine's pleasure. Though he failed to teach Shizuku the skill while living, he is still trying after death, training him to read and savor the perplexities not just of wine but of that which wine, like art, is both model and key: of memory, life, and fate. Indeed, the droplets of the gods, as the title translates, are nothing short of life's own evanescent elixir. Every education should be this entertaining.

While some manga have done well in English, *Kami no Shizuku* has yet to appear in the idiom of Mr. Parker, though possibly the all-knowing *Wine Advocate* is searching this moment for a competent Japanese illustrator. I assume English manga publishers have been picturing a readership less interested in Vosne-Romanée vineyard differences than in paranormal girls in sailor suits. As attractive as super-powered schoolgirls may be, this is a pity. English-speaking wine rookies, and aficionados looking for an alternative read, would enjoy this series. Wine dealers from Loan-don to Loss Angeles would appreciate the new customers. As *Sideways* taught us, and as the people behind the new Sopranos Italian Wines have figured out, pop culture can sell a lot of vino.

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FRITZ ALLHOFF (ed.): *Wine & Philosophy: A Symposium on Thinking and Drinking*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA, 2008, 308 pp., ISBN 978-1-40-515431-4, \$19.95.

I should begin by noting that I am a public finance economist and not a philosopher. Thus my thoughts on the essays collected in *Wine & Philosophy* reflect that of an educated layperson and wine consumer, not a professional philosopher. Given that the editor's stated goal for the volume is to be engaging, however, I feel confident in being able to evaluate the editor's success in achieving that goal. While my assessment of my engagement is inherently subjective, I hope that I can be clear enough in my description of the volume's contents for you to make up your own mind. Space limitations prevent me from discussing each of the nineteen chapters, but I hope to be able to provide an accurate picture of each section nevertheless.

This edited volume is organized into six sections. The first section contains four essays and is titled "The Art & Culture of Wine" and does not deal directly with the philosophy of wine. Instead, these four essays set the stage for the remainder of the book by providing an overview of current wine practices and how they came to be. Chapter 1 by classicist Harold Tarrant discusses the use of wine in ancient Greece. The information about the role and usage of wine in ancient Greece is fascinating and lends considerable insight to the works of Plato and Socrates. For example, finding out that Socrates was known to be able to drink any amount of wine and still stay sober helps contextualize his philosophical views on moderation.

The remaining three chapters in this section are also quite interesting and provide some interesting background to the U.S. wine experience. In Chapter 2, wine writer Jonathan Altop discusses the rise and fall of wine in U.S. history. His idiosyncratic history is filled with several very interesting tidbits such as the story of Carry A. Nation. Nation was a devout prohibitionist whose followers engaged in "hatchetations," i.e., the chopping up of bars and saloons with an axe or hatchet. Art historian Kirsten Ditterich-Shilakes examines in Chapter 3 the role of geography, time, and types of wine in explaining four different types of wine vessels represented in the collections of two San Francisco museums. The highlight of this chapter is the discussion of the signal being sent by the type of wine represented in the John Singer Sargent's painting *A Dinner Table at Night*. Chapter 4 concludes the section with a discussion of the health effects of wine consumption. While the chapter is informative, I would have appreciated more citations. For example, there is a somewhat lengthy, but non-cited discussion of a "1996 Italian study" on the J-curve relationship between alcohol consumption and health.

The second section is on tasting and talking about wine. It is here that the philosophical portion of the book begins, as these three chapters deal with what happens when we drink wine and (inevitably) talk about it. Chapter 5, for example, uses concepts from the branch of philosophy called "philosophy of mind" to argue that wine appreciation is not solely an analytical or quasi-scientific activity but instead is closer to improvisational theatre.

Chapter 6 by Kent Bach looks at “wine talk” and asks an important question: how does wine talk add to the enjoyment of wine? After taking the reader through all the possible ways that wine talk might help to improve the drinking experience (comparative pleasure, recognition and novelty, and applying standards), Bach concludes that while wine talk leads greater enjoyment *while* drinking wine, there is little evidence that it is beneficial *to* the enjoyment of wine itself.

Philosophical issues related to wine criticism are addressed in the third section. Chapter 8 by Ohio University philosopher John Bender provides a great overview of the issues involved in wine criticism. After showing that there are objective features of the wine that play an important role in wine criticism, Bender points out that there are areas of wine criticism that are inherently subjective, such as those depending on *sensitivities*. While certain objective qualities of wine (such as the degree of tannic) can be argued about and thus mutual agreement is possible, differences in our physical perceptions make our aesthetic judgment of wine inherently subjective. Unlike disagreements over the importance given to objective phenomenon, the key point made by Bender is that there is “no room for argument” when it comes to sensitivities. The second essay in this section, by Jamie Goode, is a very broad discussion of various features of wine tasting. He touches on the biology of flavor perception, the translation of wine tasting into language, and also addresses the degree of objectivity and subjectivity in wine tasting. These two essays are extremely well-written and engaging.

The fourth section is titled “The Beauty of Wine.” Each of the three chapters applies to wine concepts from aesthetics, a field of study in philosophy that tries to better understand ideas like “art” and “beauty.” These chapters primarily focus on two questions. First, should wine be considered to be an aesthetic object? Second, does wine tasting constitute an aesthetic practice? Philosophers Douglas Burham and Ole Martin Skilleås argue in Chapter 10 that wine appreciation is aesthetic. They do so by showing that wine appreciation has the same qualities as aesthetic practices such as art and music appreciation. In Chapter 11, George Gale develops further our understanding of wine aesthetics by probing issues related to wine as an aesthetic object, such as how the legal, physiological, and the tradition of wine-making constrain aesthetic judgments about wine. The final chapter in this section ingeniously uses a survey of wine drinkers to see if wine consumers feel that wine has aesthetic dimensions. The data suggests wine consumers view wine appreciation as having many of the same aesthetic qualities as other aesthetic objects.

The fifth and next-to-last section on wine and metaphysics is the most philosophical. Personally, I did not find these chapters to be engaging or educational although I am having a difficult time articulating why. Perhaps it is the heavily philosophical nature of these three essays that caused me not to appreciate them, although the fact that I learned quite a bit from the essays on aesthetics is problematic for that viewpoint. Regardless, however, I did not feel I learned anything about wine or philosophy from reading this section.

The final section of the volume is on the “The Politics and Economics of Wine” and thus is most likely to be of direct interest to the readers of the *Journal of Wine Economics*. Chapter 16, by economists Orley Ashenfelter, Richard Quandt, and George Taber, re-examines the results from the famous 1976 Paris wine tasting where some relatively unknown California wines beat well-known French wines such as Château Mouton Rothschild. They conclude that while the tasting and scoring procedure used at the tasting did not meet several basic requirements necessary to ensure internal validity of wine tasting results, the general conclusions of the 1976 Paris tasting were correct. Philosopher Justin Weinberg takes on the price of wine and rationality in Chapter 18. I suspect most economists would find at least a couple of things to disagree with in this chapter. For example, Weinberg suggests on page 264 that price is not determined by supply and demand but by stating that wine prices are determined by factors such as “the need to recoup costs due to weather-caused damage of grapes, the cost of labor, debt owed by winemaker, ... the ego of the winemaker,” etc.

I have to conclude by applauding the editor for trying to include many different perspectives into the volume. I think that bringing in non-philosophers to provide their perspective on these issues was a great idea. My understanding and knowledge of the history and culture of wine is greatly expanded by the engaging material presented in the first section, for example. At the same time, however, I finished the volume wishing I had learned more philosophy. While I now have some idea of the questions that surround the field of aesthetics (in addition to the conviction that wine is an aesthetic good), I learned less philosophy from this volume than I did from *The Simpsons and Philosophy*. Thus if your goal is to learn a large amount of philosophy, I suggest you look elsewhere. Readers interested in obtaining a deeper understanding of wine and wine appreciation, however, would likely benefit from picking up this volume.

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