

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED DISCOURSE OF WINE

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of wine is complex and varied, constructed by individuals within the context of a vast discourse of wine. I use the term discourse as it has been defined most fundamentally by Michel Foucault; it is the powerful synthesis of the possibilities of articulation, query and understanding that are available about a subject at a particular point in time. Discourses are institutionalized ways of thinking, framing boundaries of understanding for our knowledge of a particular concept. In Foucault's understanding, "There is not one dominant discourse...No discourse stands alone and no discourse is complete. The discourses interrelate and intersect each other in a continuously moving plane."¹ I assert that there is an integrated wine discourse which adheres to the characteristics of this definition. Wine knowledge is produced by the ongoing conversations that structure it. These conversations are inherently fluid, wine knowledge is continually constructed by the discourses that articulate it. I will talk about four components of this wine discourse that operate as distinct and interconnected sub-discourses. These ways of understanding form a foundation upon which different people build diverse and multiple understandings of wine and through which people come to know wine. My goal is to contribute to an understanding of contemporary wine discourse by discussing both the shortcomings of a disengaged analysis of the subject and the benefits of realizing its inherent complexities.

The discourse of wine has been constructed by what I call the wine community. This "speech community" is made up of people who actively engage

¹ Alison Leigh Brown, *On Foucault: A Critical Introduction* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Press, 2000), 31.

in the understanding and communication of wine.² A limited illustration of its membership includes winemakers, importers, vendors, waiters, consumers, and wine writers. Together, these people constitute the larger framework of the wine community, which is in essence composed of smaller, distinct groups, or "communities of practice," with their own particular discourses.³ A family that produces wine will understand it differently than a group of waiters, and both groups will contribute unique ways of understanding wine to the greater wine community. Additionally each speech community relates differently to specific wine discourses. This results in the production of complex, diverse possibilities of wine knowledge. However, when academics write about wine, they often isolate components within a discourse for the purposes of their discussion, without attempting to understand the greater framework, which is inherently interlinked. This weakens their arguments and produces limited and distorted information. I am both inside and outside of the wine community. As a waiter, the wine manager of an upscale restaurant, and a member of a thoughtful, meticulous wine tasting group, I have my own understanding of wine knowledge, and I have come to it through multiple communities of practice. However, my academic inquiry into the subject has asked that I step back and make an effort to regard this discourse from outside of my insider perspective.

In this thesis, I will address four primary components of wine discourse, namely, language, national classification systems, terroir (the idea that wine is a product of a unique place), and issues of authenticity. These components are in fact separate, more specific discourses which interlink to form the greater context of the overall wine discourse.

² A speech community is "a group of speakers who share . . . norms for the use of language" P. Eckert & S. McConnell-Ginet, "Communities of Practice: Where language, gender and power all live," in *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference Held in Berkeley 4-5 April 1992*, ed. K. Hall, M. Bucholtz, B. Moonwoman (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1992), 94.

³ A community of practice is "a community defined by social engagement . . . and it is this engagement that the language serves" Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, "Communities of Practice," 95.

Wine language is composed of a particular vocabulary that is primarily used to describe the sensory experience of consuming wine, giving us a framework within which to understand the subject. When we learn about something in words, it shapes our knowledge of it, and forms a context in which we think about that subject. The language of wine provides a means to articulate the experience of drinking it, yet it also limits what we are identifying by naming a limited number of ways to understand it. These limits are a result of how we come to know and articulate complex sensory data.

Descriptive language is not the only means through which we understand wine, and perceiving it this way limits our understanding of the broader wine discourse. Some language terms reflect the classification system, such as breeding and distinction. We also use language to establish notions of authenticity, such as when the word *terroir* is used as a wine descriptor. Yet it is not just the words which have meaning; their connotations and connections to memory and experience make each person's language relative.

National classification systems, another sub-discourse, are ways of organizing wine that are institutionalized by governments. Their regulations include territorial boundaries, viticultural practices (established to ensure quality) and limits on which grapes can be grown in specific regions. These classification systems work as a discourse, for they are a significant means for understanding wine. The systems are reflected on wine labels, which convey information about a region (or, perhaps, a village or a single vineyard). For example, in France, prestigious wine regions label wine according to place; the name of the grape is not placed on the label, except in Alsace, which has significant cultural and viticultural ties to Germany. In the USA, the grape is always placed on the label and it is the primary way that Americans understand wine. Therefore, the ways that a country classifies its wine reveals information about how they understand wine. Learning different country's classification systems is one way to develop an understanding of the greater wine discourse.

And again, this is not the only discourse with which to understand wine; it is inherently linked to other ways of constructing wine knowledge. Language validates its systems with words such as 'distinct' and 'well-bred.' The discourse of terroir has influenced the drawing of boundaries in many French wine regions, and one way that authenticity is established is by the appearance of the classification designation on a label.

"Terroir (tair-wahr), a French term meaning total elements of a vineyard," denotes everything about a place which makes its products singular.⁴ It includes latitude and longitude, slope of the vineyard, amount of rainfall and sunshine in a growing season, soil composition and even the depth of the water table. It also includes the human element of local knowledge, such as which trellising systems have been traditionally used.⁵ Although this inherently French concept has spread to other countries, its complete French context has not. Although some connoisseurs accept the entire French meaning of the term, some discount the human element and others reduce it to the influence of the soil.

As a discourse, terroir speaks to a uniquely French way of understanding wine as a particular product from a specific place. It is also a way of discerning the impact of specific physical influences on a wine. For example, in very hot places like Australia and the Rhône, grapes produce more sugar, which translates to higher alcohol content. When tasting very extracted, full-bodied wines, one may surmise them to be from a hot climate region (it is on deductions like these that blind tastings are founded).⁶ Even for advocates of the notion of terroir, it is not the only way to understand wine, but a relevant part of its

⁴ James Wilson, *Terroir: The Role of Geology, Climate and Culture in the Making of French Wines* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985), title page.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5, 6, 55. Many French wine regions were established hundreds of years ago, and some of their viticultural practices date from these times. This human understanding of the relationship between vines and a place is valuable local knowledge, and is considered part of the concept of terroir.

⁶ When wine is made, yeast eats sugar and produces alcohol and carbon dioxide. The more sugar for the yeast to consume, the higher the alcohol content. The word 'extracted' refers to wines with a very rich color (it will easily hold to the side of a glass) and an intense berry flavor.

greater discourse. French classification systems are terroir codified, and the discourses of these two elements are certainly integrated. Respect for terroir gives an authenticity to wine; it is this idea that gives prestige to single vineyard wines.

The quality of authenticity is desired by many wine lovers, yet it is an incredibly difficult concept to define. Merriam-Webster provides several definitions, including, "made or done in the same way as an original; true to one's own personality, spirit or character; not false or imitation."⁷ I believe these to be the most relevant to my discussion. It can also be understood in contrast to the idea of forgery. Some wines are certainly constructed as authentic, a concept that is perceived and understood differently by many.

For wine lovers, this inherently elusive discourse is a way of knowing wine to be an honestly crafted beverage, legitimately produced. It can be an expression of the grape or the place, but it is not a manipulated mass of chemical compounds, tinkered with until it resembles a marketing standard. Authenticity is established with other discourses; for example, official classifications and notions of terroir construct it. One of the reasons for initiating classification systems in France was actually to combat fraud in wine!⁸ This is an illustration of the common history/genealogy of these two discourses, which strongly supports my assertion that they cannot be separated.

I will next look at this greater wine discourse through the lenses of each of the four components that I have identified above. I will discuss how each functions as a discourse and then examine an example of a disengaged analysis of the subject. In considering how the other discourses impact the understanding of the component in question, I will integrate different ways of understanding wine and clarify my assertion of an integrated wine discourse. This greater

⁷ "Authentic," Merriam Webster, Inc., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1993), 77.

⁸ Daniel W. Gade, "Tradition, Territory, and Terroir in French Viniculture: Cassis, France, and Appellation Contrôlée," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94 (4) (May 2004): 852.

discourse also includes components that I will not directly address, but which manifest themselves in my discussion. Examples include discourses of science, globalization and economics.

WINE LANGUAGE

The discourse of wine language is one that commands an analysis of an inherently subjective and complex sensory experience. This is the foundation that enables us to understand wine, for our most fundamental relationship to the beverage is our experience of drinking it. As a discourse, it is a way knowledge is produced about wine that is based on articulating sensory data. The necessity of forging meanings between words and experience is inherently difficult, for "in this subjective area the relationship between sensation and expression, between the word and the quality it describes, is not as straightforward as it is elsewhere."⁹

A basic vocabulary of wine begins with descriptions of simple and familiar aromas and tastes. Fruits are common descriptors, including apples, raspberries, blackberries, and peaches. These are sometimes simplified into other groups such as red and/or dark fruits, stone fruits and tropical fruits, baked or fresh fruit. Another common attribute is citrus. It is not only possible to perceive lemon, lime, orange and grapefruit, but distinguish between zest and blossom. Although this may seem highly particular or even unlikely, the qualities that one is focusing on are sharpness and delicacy. Sharpness of lemon could be expressed as lemon zest. As people develop a more intricate understanding of wine, their expressions reflect their awareness of nuances. Some terroir terms meaningfully express qualities in wine; for example, they are

⁹ Emile Peynaud, *The Taste of Wine*; trans. Michael Schuster (London: Macdonald Orbis, 1987); quoted in Nigel Bruce, "Classification and Hierarchy in the discourse of wine: Emile Peynaud's 'The Taste of Wine,'" *Asp [English for Special Purposes]*, no. 23-26 (1999): 154.

often referred to with the general term “earthy.” This can indicate anything from rich soil to minerals, and is a key factor in distinguishing old and new world wines. The style of European wines tends to be much more earthy than those from the new world, which are often described as “fruit forward.”¹⁰ The French have a term, “sous bois,” which means the forest floor, and it is used to articulate this perception. Though not everyone is able to smell the earth in a glass, defining characteristics in this context is an effective means to understand and communicate particular styles and qualities of wine.

Wine not only has distinct flavors and aromas, but a variety of distinguishable textures. The word “body” describes a wine's viscosity, and there is a direct relationship between viscosity and alcohol content.¹¹ Words for this sensation include "rich" and "creamy," and are opposed by "light" and "delicate." Acidity is another important characteristic, and is best described by how it is perceived when out of balance. A wine with too much acidity seems sharp and biting, while a wine that doesn't have enough seems flat, and the common word for this is “flabby.” Tannin is another textural quality, imparted by skins and seeds, and therefore much more present in red wine (which is fermented with skins and seeds, as opposed to white, which are separated from them before fermentation). Wine and tea have similar tannin which in excess gives them an unpleasant and even puckery astringency.¹² Tannin in balance with the rest of a wine can be described as velvety, but in excess it can be bitter and make one feel like she's drinking liquid sandpaper.

As acid and tannin illustrate, balance is the ideal. A balanced wine can be described as "integrated" or "round." As Emile Peynaud wrote, “A wine's ideal

¹⁰ This term refers to wines in which fruit is the primary flavor characteristic, overshadowing other qualities such as terroir or floral components.

¹¹ Viscosity is the quality of how much weight the wine has; it is perceived texturally in the mouth and visually by swirling the wine in a glass. A comparable example is considering the difference between skim and 2% milk. (After minimal experience with both one can confidently distinguish them.) The more alcohol a wine has, the more viscous it is.

¹² Karen MacNeil, *The Wine Bible* (New York: Workman Publishing Company, Inc., 2001), 9.

form is the sphere, which represents a space in perfect equilibrium.”¹³ This is a prized quality, exhibited uniquely by many wines from different places in the world. Yet there are also many qualities that people enjoy out of balance, and there are good quality wines exhibiting them (such as a highly acidic and grapefruit-laden sauvignon blanc). Being able to articulate the characteristics that one enjoys can help someone find a wine that he will like. As one makes a habit of systematically tasting wine and developing a language meaningful to himself, specifics become more detailed, and sometimes more obscure and subjective. A friend once described a musty wine as smelling like “grandma’s afghan.” And at my job, I serve a wine that reminds me of circus peanuts, a candy from childhood; it has the same combination of orange and vanilla. Maybe another would find this contrived. But a useful and meaningful wine language must have “a concern to respect freedom of expression and yet to resist the anarchy of the absence of an agreed comprehensive vocabulary.”¹⁴

So there is a greater, general wine vocabulary that many start with when beginning to learn about the subject, and then more nuanced expressions that people choose to signify details. Some prefer an elaborate style; others may simply try to be more precise. One who attempts the latter could be perceived as the former. This vocabulary is actively created by the wine community, and through time people's ways of describing and understanding wine change as their perception develops.

Moore and Carling state that there are two purposes for the establishment of a meaningful wine language: private understanding and public communication. Private understanding allows us to "recall smells and tastes once

¹³ Emile Peynaud, *The Taste of Wine*, quoted in Bruce, "Classification and Hierarchy," 159. My favorite articulation of this concept is: "No matter how seemingly amorphous a concept, integration is what we are specifically after in wine . . . Wine that is not integrated is far easier to describe than wine that is. The first presents itself like a star in the mouth. One can taste and talk about the 'points' of acidity or tannin or oak. By comparison, an integrated wine presents itself like a sphere in the mouth. So round, so harmonious that one cannot easily grab onto any single component, sensorially or intellectually" (MacNeil, *Wine Bible*, 4).

¹⁴ Bruce, "Classification and Hierarchy," 162.

they are gone," and to use "language . . . to essentially act as a trigger."¹⁵ Language helps us to develop a personal understanding and knowledge base about the world we experience. Words are an integral part of how we think, and it is quite difficult to attempt to separate the language in our heads from the one with which we shape our understandings of the external world. Having words to articulate sensory complexity can increase retention and facilitate communication. There are two aspects of public wine discourse: to communicate and to acquire knowledge; and both require a common language. People need an "orientation to knowledge and discourse that . . . (can) provide explanations of the unknown that we can grasp -- literally and linguistically."¹⁶ Empowering words with specific meanings in the context of wine gives people a functional means with which to do this. Acquiring knowledge is where private and public uses of language come together. To learn, we must be able to both comprehend information from others and understand for ourselves. It is through language that we make sense of the elusive intricacies of wine, and wine language cannot be separated from wine knowledge.

This discourse involves various complex experiences as well as their articulation. Qualities such as flavor, texture and aroma blend together, even as we try to isolate and describe just one of them. We cannot separate the integrated qualities that make up a wine, yet some hold those who talk about wine to a standard of objectivity that does not translate to this subjective field. What we do is rely on other words in our vocabulary to give voice to what we experience when drinking wine. One scientist claims that we have "never developed specific olfactory terms to describe odors."¹⁷ We use the nouns that

¹⁵ Terrence Moore and Chris Carling, *The Limits of Language* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 119 and 117, respectively.

¹⁶ Bruce, "Classification and Hierarchy," 163.

¹⁷ Gil Morrot, "The Color of Odors," *Brain and Language*, 79 (November 2001), 318. "We rarely try to translate into words the sensations we experience when eating and drinking" (Moore, *The Limits of Language*, 110).

give off the scent to describe the odor itself, unless we are using qualitative words such as 'foul.' Similarly, many words used to describe flavor in wine are other nouns, such as other things we eat and drink (raspberry, chocolate), or textural adjectives that, again, are not exclusive to depicting wine (creamy, tannic). We are describing nuances in a beverage that varies greatly. This complexity of perception, and therefore description, is inherent in the very nature of wine. When this is considered, wine language is not exaggerated, but a lucid and eloquent attempt to communicate within the limits of our language.

These two key factors, freedom of expression and a common vocabulary, are surprisingly not considered by critics of the wine lexicon. I will discuss two articles which discredit wine language, namely, "Tradition, Territory and Terroir in French Viniculture," by Daniel W. Gade and "Wet Dogs and Gushing Oranges," by Sean Shesgreen.¹⁸ Gade's article discusses language within the greater context of terroir, while belittling wine jargon is the very subject of Shesgreen's. Wine language has been criticized as having been defined by one group, wine writers, for economic purposes.¹⁹ Their elaborate descriptions of wine are claimed to be fantastic, and unrelated to the material.²⁰ Although Gade perceptively states that writers " . . . select adjectives to enhance the consumer's ability to talk about the wine," acknowledging the important factor of communication, neither looks beyond the printed word to the vast unwritten exchanges that happen everyday in the wine *community*.²¹ There are people who want to be articulate about wine simply because they love it; and others enter the business, in which they will certainly have market interests, for the same reason. But wine language cannot be reduced to marketing; economics is only one aspect

¹⁸ Gade, "Tradition, Territory and Terroir," and Sean Shesgreen, "Wet Dogs and Gushing Oranges: *Winespeak* for a New Millennium," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49 (May 17, 2003).

¹⁹ "Why it (wine language) has won such widespread acceptance, defining the way Americans perceive -- or imagine -- the 565 million gallons of wine they spend \$19 - billion on yearly" (Shesgreen, "Wet Dogs and Gushing Oranges," 2.).

²⁰ Shesgreen, "Wet Dogs and Gushing Oranges," 1.

²¹ Gade, "Tradition, Territory and Terroir," 855.

of this discourse. Attempting a discussion about its language without considering the community as a whole is a disservice to many people and a discredit to the article itself. It is also misleading to credit writers with the development of the language, in many ways they are simply printing what many have said for years. It is also inappropriate to discount an entire system of speaking about a subject based on the words of one segment of its speech community.

Shesgreen's short piece questions the accuracy of wine language, yet disregards its inherent relativity and complexity, while neglecting to offer even a phrase on what an "accurate" wine language would look like.²² Considering accuracy is hardly the point, will we ever be able to pinpoint accurate communication about the experience? He makes no attempt to understand the challenges of understanding such a complex beverage or articulating the sensory. There have been studies analyzing people's ability to process and articulate complex sensory information.²³ We have strong associations between odor and color, and no words to exclusively articulate aroma. Considering this shines a new light on how we have managed to create a viable discourse on wine. Associations have been built up over time; wine language is a product of the ways humans understand and communicate, not just buy and sell. Gade, on the other hand, expects a literal relationship between terroir and wine language. He discredits the description of one wine's aroma, which has qualities of several local plants, as "sheer illusion."²⁴ Most people do not claim that the botanical references in wine have a direct connection to the flora of that area. Wine is from the earth, and it evokes sensory experiences that remind people of other things from the earth. Looking for causal links will not explain wine language. Just as communication is never simple, nor is the discourse of wine. Shesgreen and

²² Shesgreen, "*Wet Dogs and Gushing Oranges*," 12.

²³ Morrot, "*The Color of Odors*," 309-320.

²⁴ Gade, "*Tradition, Territory and Terroir*," 855.

Gade have both chosen to look at wine language in painfully limited terms, deriding it and distorting its purpose.

FORMAL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS

Formal governmental classification systems are powerful ways that wine is organized and understood. Learning the details of these regulations and how some of them are translated onto wine labels and into the wine itself is an important and powerful discursive practice. France was the first country to establish official designations for wine; and all other wine producing countries currently organize their wine products with the powerful discourse of place that France's system codified.²⁵ France established its INAO (*Institut National des Appellations d'Origine*) in 1935, which established the AOC (*Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*) system, to create controls for wine labeling.²⁶ Wine was already known by the name of the place in which it was produced and the place/product relationship having long standing cultural significance in France.²⁷ Italy has laws that designate DOCG (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita*), DOC (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata*), and IGT (*Indicazione Geografica Tipica*) status to a given area, while the United States has governmentally designated AVAs (*American Viticultural Area*). France's AOC system heavily regulates winemaking in an area. The AOC designation not only dictates which grapes can be grown within a boundary, but also regulates a host of other viticultural specifications, such as maximum yield and permitted frequency of and techniques for pruning.²⁸ The international status of wines with prestigious AOC's comes from the historical quality of some of its most prestigious wine

²⁵ Gade, "Tradition, Territory, and Terroir," 852.

²⁶ MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, 116. Gade, "Tradition, Territory, and Terroir," 852.

²⁷ "Lieux-dits," Warren Moran, "The Wine Appellation as Territory in France and California," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83(4) (December 1993): 698.

²⁸ MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, 116.

producing regions. Burgundy is an excellent example. Viticulture there was perfected by monks in the Middle Ages, who spent centuries meticulously observing details of specific vineyards. As MacNeil eloquently states, "Patient in temperament, systematic in approach, well bestowed with land, and most important, literate, the monks were uniquely prepared for their mission. Plot by plot, they studiously compared vineyards and the wines made from them, recording their impressions over centuries."²⁹ Hence, when Burgundy was codified into wine regions, it was done so on the basis of the uniqueness of plots and the wine they produced. This is in striking contrast to the Italian system. Many Italian wines codified the traditions of peasant winemaking.³⁰ Pruning of vines was anathema to them, wines were meant for everyday consumption and the more grapes a vine yielded, the better. The Italian laws followed the French system of place, but not of viticultural standards. In the United States, AVAs were established in 1978, and primarily designated boundaries for wine regions. American laws are much more lenient and deal with how one can label the product; which grapes one plants and any viticultural techniques are left up to each individual producer.³¹ The common denominator here is in identifying wine by place, although what that means for each country varies dramatically.

Once one learns the laws of a certain country or region, environmental and stylistic knowledge will help to better understand this discourse. Some varietals thrive in cooler climates (pinot noir), some climates produce wines with certain qualities (cooler climate, higher acidity level). These are vast generalizations, but fundamentals for beginning to understand wine. Formal classification systems include cultural attitudes about wine as well as basic geographic (geologic and climactic) information. Also, different places do things differently stylistically, such as how much and which type of oak is used. (For

²⁹ MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, 190.

³⁰ MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, 320.

³¹ MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, 634.

example, new world wines tend to use oak much more liberally than Europeans; American oak imparts much more heavy butter and vanilla characteristics than French oak; however, winemakers from Rioja, Spain, prefer to use American oak.)³² Learning the great variety of viticultural information about a place enables one to move about within this discourse.

The discourse of formal classifications is often looked at through a narrow lens of one of its impacts on wine and its production, notably, power and economics. Both of these are valid and important aspects of classifications, but their impact is not isolated within the discourse. Those who focus on the power of the INAO classifications insist that it stifles innovation, for it regulates the varieties that can be grown in certain regions. The claim by Warren Moran is that some varieties are inherently superior, and in regulating which regions can grow them, you regulate which regions will have an inherent advantage.³³ This is possibly true, but because this argument considers such a limited aspect of winemaking, it cannot be asserted so simply. Some regions that grow quality grapes planted them centuries ago, and earned their reputation long before the INAO was established.³⁴ Also, the INAO relies heavily on the producers of a region when establishing regulations; it is not a top-down organization, but it relies heavily on the input of the winemakers.³⁵ It may be very relevant that the Midi in southern France is dominated by the varietal carignane, which is not permitted in many prestigious regions. Many prestigious regions are also not permitted to grow each other's grapes. Also, did Midi producers choose carignane? Why does it dominate their area? Some places in France are more like Italy: peasant winemaking dominated for a long time, and current practices reflect this. Not every region has the history of Burgundy. While high status

³² MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, "What Oak Does," 40-45.

³³ Moran, "The Wine Appellation as Territory," 708-13.

³⁴ MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, 190,116.

³⁵ Gade, "Tradition, Territory, and Terroir," 864.

regions certainly maintain power through the AOC designations, maintaining the power is not the only purpose or effect of this discourse.

Relating the story of Supertuscan wines may clarify this matter. Chianti, a region in Tuscany, has DOCG status; this means that all producers who make wine in accordance with certain viticultural regulations can label their wines with this high status marker (DOCG). Producers who do not choose to follow these rules are relegated the status of IGT, which is the Italian equivalent of table wine. In Chianti, for centuries, the primary grape was sangiovese. This was so due to peasant winemaking, and quality viticultural techniques were lacking. As a result, most Chiantis were unimpressive. Some innovative winemakers who had traveled to the United States and France wanted to plant cabernet sauvignon and merlot to try to make world-class wine. They succeeded famously, and their wines were soon heralded as the best in Tuscany. This meant that the best wines in Tuscany were classified as table wines, which was shameful to Chianti and a major cause of their recent quality revolution. This is an interesting story for many reasons. The producers challenged the institutionalized regulations. They forfeited DOCG status, which must have hurt them financially for years; or, they made several different wines with different classifications, and softened the blow. Their wines were successful because they are truly excellent. The status of their wine was made more credible by the wine community. This inspired Chianti producers to desire a reputation for the same reason, which is now the case.

Conversely, some critics have accused well-established French producers of becoming complacent and making mediocre wine; this has been hurtful to both sales and reputation. Formal classifications are an important way to understand wine, and they are certainly linked to power. But the story is much more complex than this. Producers in the Midi are beginning to make very good wine from more well-known and well-regarded varieties. Perhaps the INAO

stifled their potential for years, or, perhaps they were not interested in making high quality wine until there became an international demand for it.

In the United States, classifications are much more lax than in Europe, and winemakers are considered to have more freedom to experiment.³⁶ However, they are often accused of having no sense of terroir and making wines to appease the market. Again, this statement has some truth, but in some instances is unfair. American producers have the opportunity to create their own story, and while many choose to produce popular varietals, other wineries feel that a particular varietal suits their land the best, and focus on producing a few excellent wines. While in Europe, knowing information about regional regulations is important, in America, it is much more relevant to learn about individual producers.³⁷

Place is a dominant discourse in every country, and there is a relationship in this discourse between quality and a highly localized vineyard. The idea is that the more specific the wine's place of origin, the more energy went into producing the wine and featuring the land. Wines from larger areas can use any bulk grapes from the region. A wine can be from California, Sonoma County, Sonoma Valley or Sonoma Mountain, each name signifying a more specific location. It is for this reason that single vineyard wines are so prized: it is more expensive and time intensive to designate a wine from a very specific place. Learning the geography of wine regions enables one to identify the relative size of a production area, and this is relevant in the discourse of classifications.

Classification is, in part, another wine language, varietals and places being the key words with which wine knowledge is conveyed. Experience provides sensory connotations of specific grapes (for example, one may know a grape to be acidic with strong citrus flavor). Therefore, having a varietal on a label

³⁶ Moran, "The Wine Appellation as Territory," 708-713.

³⁷ This is not to claim that the producer is not important in Europe, just that it is not of the particular importance that it is in America.

conveys some information about the wine. Classification by place denotes more specific details, including a variety of climatic and cultural material (such as viticultural techniques and varieties). Once one understands the information designated on a label, it is possible to begin anticipating what one can expect from a wine. One can then talk about it and understand its context. In this way, classifications can convey some of the same information as sensory words. If one knows a varietal to produce delicate and floral wine, and then learns that a designated area only grows that varietal, it is a short jump to understand wines from that place as being delicate and floral. If this region is also a cool climate, one may anticipate that wines from this region have low percentages of alcohol, and are not exceptionally viscous. Thus, very basic knowledge of a place and its classification systems can impart considerable information about its wines. Combine this with one's own sensory experience of wines, and it is possible to understand how significant wine knowledge is accumulated.

TERROIR

The word *terroir* dates from 1246, and is defined as "land's extensive boundary, considered from the point of view of its agricultural aptitude," and "soil apt to viticulture/the culture of wine."³⁸ References from 1694 are consistent with this understanding; *terroir* is defined as "earth understood by the yield of its agriculture," and the word is used to describe the experience of drinking it -- "sense the *terroir* in the wine . . . it has a taste of the *terroir*."³⁹ These sources

³⁸ "Etendue limitée de terre considérée du point de vue de ses aptitudes agricoles," and "sol apte à la culture d'un vin" Dictionnaires Le Robert, *Le Nouveau Petit Robert*, (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1993), 2505.

³⁹ "Terre considérée par rapport à l'agriculture," and "Du vin sent le *terroir*...il a un goust (goût) de *terroir*," from "Terroir" in ARTFL [The Project for American and French Research on the Treasury of the French Language,] *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française*, 1st Edition (1694). [<http://colet.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dico1look.pl?strippedhw=terroir&dicoid=ACAD1694>], (May 8, 2006.)

clearly convey the idea that terroir is a finite space which imparts a uniqueness to its agricultural products; and that the place is, in fact, defined by this uniqueness. The origin of the word predates the scientific revolution; although primitive technology (such as irrigation) certainly existed, the original concept is certainly cultural and not scientific. Monks developed some of the earliest quality viticultural techniques as early as the eleventh century, through patience and labor coming to know certain plots of land well and yield quality products.⁴⁰ The word used for winemaker in French is *vigneron*, which dates from the twelfth century and translates as "wine grower;" "winemaker" is not a separate distinction.⁴¹ There is a strong idea that the land produces the wine, and the vigneron should not get in the way.⁴²

The concept of *terroir* signifies a strong French cultural understanding of wine. It is a sense of the land producing the wine and of people knowing the land well enough to help it produce to its greatest potential. I find it significant that the term predates the scientific revolution. Modern people, and especially those who are not from France, cannot separate our understanding of terroir from science. (Perhaps some French can, if they were raised with the cultural connotation.) Science is a pervasive contemporary discourse, and being immersed in it makes it difficult to relate to the cultural origins of the concept of terroir, and the fact that these origins were not scientific, certainly not in our modern understanding of science. Although it is certainly useful to look at the relationship between science and terroir, we must remember that it is not a complete way to understand the idea.

Many academic criticisms of terroir reveal misunderstandings of the concept. It is either isolated as a scientific discourse, or a cultural or economic aspect is brought into exclusive focus, presenting a distorted idea of the term.

⁴⁰ Wilson, *Terroir*, 52; Mac Neil, *The Wine Bible*, 190.

⁴¹ "Vigneron," Le Petit Robert, 2675; MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, 190.

⁴² Wilson, *Terroir*, 55; MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, 190.

When considering the scientific aspects of terroir, many rely solely on this precise, modern understanding of the term, losing the depth of its cultural significance in the search for direct cause and effect relationships. Some query as to whether or not terroir is scientifically predictable; others acknowledge that the environment definitely has an impact on a wine, while critically maintaining that the 'how' has not been proven.⁴³ These suggestions illustrate an incomplete understanding of the term. The cultural concept of terroir contends that each place produces a unique product; it does not claim such linear relationships as 'all wines with basalt in the soil will exhibit chocolate on the finish.' The desire to understand terroir in such terms is a product of a modern scientific discourse.

Another has questioned that if the terroir of prestigious wine regions makes them unique, why do owners of wineries in these regions buy land in other countries? Are they not invalidating their precious concept of terroir?⁴⁴ Again, this demonstrates a partial understanding. All places will impart a uniqueness to a wine produced there; every vineyard has its own singular terroir. This is the essence of the word. Terroir as a concept has no direct relationship to quality, though those who prefer wines that exhibit terroir may claim that those wines are better. It is a fine line, discerning the distinction between an understanding of terroir and individuals simply asserting pride or preference. For pride of place is a powerful regional and familial construct in itself, without the agricultural notion of terroir. This discourse cannot be separated from how people feel about and understand their land and/or the wines they love.

The intersection of the elements of language, terroir and science is also often misunderstood, as Daniel Gade states in his idea that fragrances of plants

⁴³ Mary-Colleen Tinney, "Is Terroir More than just Place?" *Wine Business Monthly* 11(9) (September 1, 2004): 2. See also Moran, "The Wine Appellation as Territory," 714.

⁴⁴ Moran, "The Wine Appellation as Territory," 715.

from a certain area are present in a wine's aroma is "sheer illusion."⁴⁵ In this statement, he assumes the relationship between terroir and language to be linear, with a scientific explanation. Though the discourse of terroir does not claim the relationship to be such, this is not to say that there is no relationship between the two. Language and terroir are both ways of understanding and knowing wine, and they can function together. Terroir is expressed through language; it can be used itself as a wine descriptor, though its meaning is highly nuanced. Other organic words used to describe wine reference the earth, from flavor and aromatic nouns (raspberry) to textural qualities (chalky). Wine is understood to be from the land, and is often described in these terms. However, specific flora themselves do not directly impart their botanical characteristics on a wine. For example, some perceive grapefruit in a wine when it was certainly not present in the vineyard. No causal relationship is posited and the validity of this descriptor is not contested. Language and terroir work together as different, sometimes overlapping, ways to understand wine without a causal correlation.

In addition to distorting isolated aspects of terroir, critics have reduced its purpose to an economic one.⁴⁶ It has been asserted that the concept of terroir is used to support the AOC system, and that this relationship is market driven.⁴⁷ Terroir is certainly tied to classification, for both are originally French ways of understanding wine and place. But they are distinct ways of doing so. Terroir credits a place with being unique while classifying wine is a way of organizing and regulating it. The origin of the AOC system was to combat fraud, linking both of these discourses to the notion of authenticity.⁴⁸ Yet it did also codify quality, institutionalizing superior regions. I am not arguing that the INAO has no economic interests, simply that these interests are not their exclusive purpose

⁴⁵ Gade, "Tradition, Territory, and Terroir," 854-5.

⁴⁶ Roger Bohmrich, "Terroir: Competing Perspectives on the Roles of Soil, Climate and People," *Journal of Wine Research* 7(1) (April 1, 1996): 2.

⁴⁷ Gade, "Tradition, Territory, and Terroir," 865; Moran, "The Wine Appellation as Territory," 704.

⁴⁸ Gade, "Tradition, Territory, and Terroir," 852.

or effect. The cultural understanding of terroir goes well beyond the commercial, even predating it. Regarding terroir as a profit-oriented concept is highly imperceptive.

AUTHENTICITY

"The term 'authenticity' remains problematic. Few authors define the term, nor is a generally acceptable definition available . . . (it) can be inherent in an object . . . true and/or contrived."⁴⁹ Authenticity is the most elusive of all of the components of wine discourse that I am presenting. It is difficult to isolate as an individual component, not being perceived as an independent discourse in the way that the other sub-discourses that I have discussed are. It is, in fact, constructed in multiple ways, defined both by and against the other components of wine discourse. These include the authoritativeness of formal classification systems, the cultural capital of terroir, and the discourses of art and science and technology.

In the art world, authenticity deals with originality and identity, not quality.⁵⁰ These concepts are manifest in terroir and the AOC system, respectively. Defined as the uniqueness of a place, terroir is how this place produces an original wine. AOC status gives a wine identity: a name and a relationship to other wines. These related discourses of classifications and terroir reference different aspects of place, but they both work to establish authenticity. Historically, the AOC system was established to combat fraud.⁵¹ Place names were already a way to understand wine.⁵² It was important to people that a wine

⁴⁹ Michael Beverland, "Crafting Brand Authenticity: The Case of Luxury Wines," *Journal of Management Studies* 42(5) (July 2005): 1006.

⁵⁰ L.B. Cebik, "Forging Issues from Forged Art," *Nonaesthetic Issues in the Philosophy of Art* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995,) 129-150.

⁵¹ Gade, "Tradition, Territory, and Terroir," 852.

⁵² "Lieux-dits," Moran, "The Wine Appellation as Territory," 702.

was represented meaningfully and honestly. By institutionalizing place and validating it on a wine label, credibility was established. Classifications have become a way to demonstrate the authenticity of a place as well as certain viticultural techniques that indicate quality. Alternatively, terroir relates to authenticity in its very definition. A wine from a specific place is genuine, credibly from that place by its very nature. The concept is meaningful if a wine is from a small enough place for it to be relevant. (This size is not officially determined, but is connotatively understood as relative to larger areas.) The AOC system denotes this. For example, there are five primary sub-regions of Burgundy. If a wine is labeled *Bourgogne* but the AOC designation is not one of these five regions, one can infer that the AOC area is smaller, making the concept of terroir more relevant.⁵³ In this way, a basic knowledge of the French classification system can indicate terroir and authenticity.

Authenticity is a key feature of why people will pay a significant amount of money for a bottle of wine. It is status and sincerity which establish authenticity in luxury wines, and these are qualities that are both inherent and constructed by producers of wine.⁵⁴ Status involves official classification systems as well as the age of a winery or region and the historical legitimacy that this imparts. These qualities are inherent and validate a wine as being from a specific place, perhaps with an established viticultural history. Additionally, sincerity includes various notions, such as links to place (including classifications, but also terroir and individual wineries with established reputations); traditional production methods (perhaps codified by the AOC system, or asserted by the producer); history and culture as referents (including being a family businesses, the age of a region or a winery and new world pioneering stories as myths); and being above commercial considerations (such as using traditional production methods for quality, not sales). These elements

⁵³ *Bourgogne* is the French word for Burgundy.

⁵⁴ Beverland, "Crafting Brand Authenticity."

contain a variety of ways to denote authenticity. For example, being a family owned and operated winery is usually perceived as a more genuine attribute than being owned by a large corporation. Although examples such as this are real world facts, the notion of being above commercial considerations is almost certainly constructed. No matter how much one values authenticity in wine, owning a winery is fundamentally a business. One may engage in expensive and traditional means of production, but one earns back the money with the profit from an 'authentic' and well-esteemed wine.

The opposite of authentic is forged or misrepresented.⁵⁵ Further, consumer perception of these characteristics is varied. Contradictions abound when contemplating what makes wine genuine. Considering what is blatantly artificial can help to clarify the matter. There is a company in California called Enologix that chemically analyses wine and provides "quality recognition tools to predict winemakers' and national critics' tasting scores before bottling."⁵⁶ This company regards wine as more of a chemical compound than a beverage with valuable historical methods and expertise, let alone a product of the earth. They measure quality by ratings rather than the result of the work of skilled winemakers or the product of quality land. Yes, with the help of technology we can take the things we consume and break them down to their most basic components, and then reconstruct them to assemble a marketable product. But the organic food movement is an indicator of how appalling some find these artificial, fabricated objects of consumption. It is a confusing time; I am sure that many people do not realize how much chemistry goes into food and drink that they consider quite natural, if it is considered at all.

Wine technology has existed for ages, notably in the forms of irrigation and oak barrels. There is much debate on where to draw the technological line in

⁵⁵ L.B. Cebik, "Secondary Language and Secondary Art," *Nonaesthetic Issues in the Philosophy of Art* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995,) 254-5.

⁵⁶ Enologix Systems, Official Website, *Enologix Products*, (1999-2005), <<http://www.enologix.com/products.lasso>>, (May 2, 2006).

the very relevant issue of authenticity. For this reason, science is another important discourse in regarding this concept. Admittedly, authentic wine is a combination of art and science, but perhaps not so much science to nullify the art. Technology permeates our life and is important in contemporary winemaking. Many winemakers ferment white wine in stainless steel tanks; in this way delicate wines are not overwhelmed by oak. So this use of technology can give the air of authenticity to the production of a white wine, for a delicate grape fermented in stainless steel will be more purely represented in the glass. Also, it is illegal to irrigate in many vineyards of Europe, yet there are numerous state of the art wineries there.⁵⁷ Authentic wine is certainly produced with technology, but it is not exclusively the product of science.

It is relevant to ask how much scientific input is excessive, but there are no simple answers. The line is not neatly drawn, for in Europe irrigation is illegal, but in California, Enologix is not. Yet this does not mean that all citizens of a country agree with its legally established relationships between science and authenticity. The discourse of authenticity is established differently by individuals and groups of people, just as are the other discourses. Critics of the concept may assert that the idea is contrived or irrelevant, for what matters is what is in the glass and whether or not people like it. Connoisseurs, on the other hand, consider wines of quality to have a sense of place and intense varietal character; they are not homogenized.⁵⁸ Those whose knowledge of wine includes discourses which construct authenticity understand it to be a credible concept.

Inauthentic wine is not just a scientific concept. Personally, I discount a bottle of Burgundy with the grape printed on the label. Because of my understanding of French classification systems, I realize that this bottle is attempting to gain an international market, and I question the style of a wine that

⁵⁷ MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, 18.

⁵⁸ Matthew Citriglia, "Redefining Greatness in Wine," *Winegeeks.com*, 8 January 2006, <http://winegeeks.com/articles/64/redefining_greatness_in_wine/>, 15 March 2006.

would renounce the very culture of its region on the label. However, due to my knowledge of Supertuscans, I consider the possibility that a nontraditionally labeled bottle of wine can be of a very high quality. These are, however, two different scenarios. The possible grapes of Burgundy are pinot noir and chardonnay: one red and one white grape. Stating the grape on the label is blatantly redundant for anyone who knows this. It is not the winemaking that is innovative, but only the labeling that is nontraditional for marketing purposes. However, a region producing varietals that are not regulated by their classification system can still make an outstanding wine, though also defying tradition. In this example, the discourse of authenticity permeates understandings of labeling, classification and terroir.

CONCLUSION

Wine discourse is a way of understanding wine that is made up of numerous components, or ways of structuring wine knowledge. I have discussed language, formal classification systems, terroir and authenticity in this context. These components of wine discourse work together to form a discursive practice that informs individual and group understanding of the subject. Language is the basic means by which we convey and retain sensory data, though it is an element of all other discourses, for it is with language that we articulate them. Classification systems work as another language, conveying specific information about wine while denoting material information about the regions they codify. The French concept of terroir works together with classifications to shape perspectives about place, and both of these discourses work together to construct authenticity. There is also a wine community made up of people with a variety of experience, motives and positions in the wine industry. This community works with the individual elements of wine knowledge to establish its greater discourse.

Additionally, there are numerous other discourses which impact the greater wine conversation, including science, globalization and economics. Thorough analysis of each is beyond the scope of this paper, but these three in particular have manifested in my discussion. Science is a powerful modern discourse which permeates contemporary knowledge; we cannot separate it from our understanding of wine as technologically produced. However, wine is a beverage and a cultural construct which predates the scientific revolution, and an awareness of this history can only widen our conception of it. The concept of globalization is also pervasive, causing the notion of authenticity to be especially relevant. People appreciate a product with a tie to a specific place and locally produced products are significantly marketed in terms of this.⁵⁹ This makes the concepts of terroir and classification as authentic especially meaningful to some consumers. Economics has always played a role in the story of wine, though our current economic order gives it a particular significance. It is important to remember that commercial motives are not the only ones driving the production of wine.

Understandings of wine are complex, distinctively shaped by multiple discourses by and for those who seek knowledge of it. Like all cultural texts, it is not beneficial to attempt to understand wine discourse by isolating its components. Elements of wine discourse form a tangled web of information and attitudes; there are as many ways to understand wine as there are people who love it.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Barham, "Translating Terroir: the global challenge of French AOC labeling," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19 (2003): 132.