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wineworld

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Steven Shapin

THE TASTES OF WINE: TOWARDS A CULTURAL HISTORY

Abstract

How have people talked about the organoleptic characteristics of wines? How and why have descriptive and evaluative vocabularies changed over time? The essay shows that these vocabularies have shifted from the spare to the elaborate, from medical implications to aesthetic analyses, from a leading concern with “goodness” (authenticity, soundness) to interest in the analytic description of component flavors and odors. The causes of these changes are various: one involves the importance, and eventual disappearance, of a traditional physiological framework for appreciating the powers and qualities of different sorts of aliment, including wines; another concerns the development of chemical sciences concerned with flavor components; and still another flows from changing social and economic circumstances in which wine was consumed and the functions served by languages of connoisseurship. The historical span surveyed here extends from Antiquity to the present and the essay displays talk about wine tastes as a perspicuous site for understanding aspects of wide-ranging social and cultural change.

There is a way of talking about the characteristics and virtues of wine that has become increasingly popular in recent years. It can be found on the back-labels of wine bottles; in newspaper, magazine, and internet writing about wine; and in specialist publications for connoisseurs and professionals. To some extent, it is also a way of describing wine that belongs to the modern oral vernacular. Aspects of it can be heard when reflective wine-drinkers tell each other what a certain wine “is like”, and the many websites allowing consumers to upload their tasting notes are full of this sort of talk. Here is a sample: «The nose offers up a plethora of celestial aromas, including plum liqueur, kirsch, spice box, coffee, prunes, and jammy cherries. As the wine sits in the glass, spicy oak, pepper, allspice, and clove scents emerge. Full-bodied, rich, and mouth-filling, this is velvety-textured, voluptuous, hedonistic wine.... 95 points». This is the celebrated

American wine critic, Robert M. Parker, Jr., describing and evaluating the 1997 Martinelli Jackass Vineyard Zinfandel from California.

Some wine-people are critical of Parker's numerical evaluations; fewer say much about the words he uses to describe wine, but features of this descriptive idiom can be found even among writers dissenting from Parker's quality judgments. Here is a British website reporting on the 2005 Catherine & Pierre Breton Bourgeuil Les Perrières: «There is fabulous fruit intensity here, raspberry, blackberry and even tinges of blueberry, cut through with elements of smoke, charcoal and a little nutty toffee... It has some big, meaty substance, power and structure. There is an elegance to it as well though, a crisp layer of fruit, rose petals encrusted with sugar and fruit juices, underpinned by a great grip, bite and finish».

No need for more instances, or, indeed, for specific references. These examples are just a reminder, a prompt to consider and reflect upon forms of wine-talk in bits of our current culture¹. My focus here is on Anglophone practices: I know them better than others; their sensibilities and forms have for some time been seeping into other cultures; and my concluding gestures at a relevant social history point to features of American and British culture which link them to global changes in the worlds of taste and taste-talk. Occasionally, I draw on writings about taste from other linguistic traditions – typically when these have been brought into conversation with Anglophone sensibilities – but there is a certain coherence, as well as undeniable loss, in focusing on American and British materials. Modern taste worlds obviously interact, but they also have different genealogies and maintain a degree of cultural specificity.

One ought not to make grand claims for the inherent importance of this subject. Most people, and possibly even most casual wine-drinkers, pay no attention to the substance of taste-talk, and, while the economic and social importance of taste is considerable and under-appreciated, there is an enduring, and hard-to-combat, aura of the trivial about it. (It's only wine and only words, it might be said, and, in the grand scheme of things, that's undeniably right.) Rather, the significance of the subject emerges from seeing taste-practices as a perspicuous site for understanding aspects of both long- and short-term cultural change. Many practices involving the constitution and communication of expertise, and many practices of the self, are implicated in the languages of taste. What does historical change from the early modern period to the present look like at levels not usually engaged with by social and cultural theorists? What does it look like over the past hundred years or so? How have modes of subjectivity, and resources for communicating subjective experience, been positioned with respect to the things we put in our mouths and how have these forms of communication changed over time? How did we once think about what was *in* our food and drink, and how have *these* understandings changed? How have taste

¹ Lehrer 2009 gives an extended semantic analysis of modern wine vocabularies, including detailed reports on psycho-linguistic experiments; see also Lehrer 2007.

and smell constituted sensory indices of qualities, powers, and constituents?² And what roles have been played in these respects at various times by medical, scientific, and aesthetic expertise? The subject here, one could say, is the taste of tradition and the taste of modernity.

Reference and Reaction

In currently popular wine-talk, wines are both scored and described. The numbers are now often on a 100-point scale – actually from 50 to 100, since Parker gives wines 50 points for just showing up. Or, more traditionally, they go from 0 to 20 (which some of the British still prefer), though the *Financial Times* wine critic Jancis Robinson recently scored a wine 17.33 – which, if one thinks about it, implies a 2,000 point scale – and there are still wine-writers who persist in awarding stars – from one to three or four – and a very few who try to hold out against the assumptions involved in any form of hierarchical numerical ranking³. The more familiar descriptive vocabulary ranges, for example, from black currants (for cabernet sauvignon) to gooseberries (for sauvignon blanc) to lead-pencil, cedar and cigar-box (for clarets) – all of which seem (to me) fairly straightforward ways of linking tastes in one domain to familiar tastes in another. But then we encounter predicates like wet stones, tomato skin, brier, Provençal herb, fig paste, and blanched almonds – where the path to wine taste and smell from the reference descriptors is less apparent. Nevertheless, one can call this sort of vocabulary *referential* because the evident intention is reliably to describe the organoleptic characteristics of wine by *reference to* tastes and smells which are *really in* the wine and in the entities – fruits, minerals, herbs, animal substances etc. – to which comparisons are made. This is a very different sort of exercise from one which talks about the *powers* or *qualities* of wine or one which seeks to *evoke* the sensations of drinking wine by way of other modes of aesthetic experiences. The vocabulary used to talk about wine has become much more referential in recent times⁴.

This referential way of talking about wine has gone so far as to generate a reaction, mainly among the British, though a bit among Americans too. Auberon Waugh had his tasting-organ firmly in his cheek when he wrote that «wine writing should be camped up [...]. Bizarre and improbable side-tastes should be

²It was always understood that gustation and olfaction were not only related but complementary senses. When I refer here to “taste”, it should be clear from context whether I mean to pick out elements specific to gustation or whether, more usually, I treat taste and smell together.

³For one of the more confident and outspoken British critics of Parker-style scoring, see Johnson 2006: 40-45.

⁴A fine paper by the French philosopher Ophelia Deroy (2007: 106) argues that some of our current wine vocabulary does *not* pick out properties objectively *in* wine, e.g., saying that a wine is “feminine”. This must be granted, while it is the increasing shift to referential descriptors, and the system of beliefs attending this shift, that are my subjects here.

proclaimed: mushrooms, rotting wood, black treacle, burned pencils, condensed milk, sewage, the smell of French railway stations or ladies' "underwear" – anything to get away from the accepted list of fruit and flowers. I am not sure that it helps much but it is more amusing to read»⁵. And Kingsley Amis said that «when I find someone I respect writing about an edgy, nervous wine that dithered in the glass, I cringe. When I hear someone that I don't respect talk about an austere, unforgiving wine, I turn a bit austere and unforgiving myself... You can call a wine red, and dry, and strong and pleasant. After that, watch out...!»⁶. The distinguished wine writer Hugh Johnson has also had enough, targeting several of his British colleagues: «I don't really want my favourite subject to be ridiculed. There is a problem when these people list all these flavours and aromas they think they have detected. It then gets on to the label of the bottle and what you are looking at appears to be a recipe for fruit salad. That is not what a wine is like. It is not appley or blackcurranty. People don't sniff a rose and say, "Oh yes, pineapple, cucumber". It smells like a rose – and a bottle of wine smells like wine»⁷.

In the US, the novelist Jay McInerney recently insisted on the incommunicable subjectivity of wine, calling any other presumption a fiction – a useful one, he thought, but one which Americans tended to take neat⁸. And, of course, there is the famous 1937 James Thurber *New Yorker* cartoon, skewering then-current pomposities, though it's got little to do with blanched almonds and roasted lilacs: «It's a naïve domestic Burgundy without any breeding», the host announces, «but I think you'll be amused by its presumption»⁹. And the tee-totaling American Master of Wine Tim Hanni is now making a small business out of telling cowed drinkers that no one's taste is really any better than anyone else's and that virtually all attempts reliably to describe wine are fruitless¹⁰. «When wine drinkers tell me they taste notes of cherries, tobacco and rose petals», a *Los Angeles Times* wine writer recently declared, «usually all I can detect is a whole lot of jackass»¹¹.

A cultural history of wine tastes belongs to the history of subjectivity and its relations with notions of objectivity. While the causes of tastes are usually objects-in-the-world, the experience of taste belongs to the individual human subject, and no other person can *know* just what it is that someone else tastes and smells. That said, the private and subjective experience of tasting wine intrudes into the public and objective domain when people *report upon* and

⁵ Quoted in McInerney 2007: 116.

⁶ Amis 2008: 191.

⁷ Quoted in Young 2003.

⁸ McInerney 2007: 153.

⁹ The cartoon appears in the *New Yorker*, 27 March 1937, p. 23. The joke-line is then quoted many times, e.g., in a telling piece about American wine snobbery in the 1960s: "Adam Smith" 1968: 27.

¹⁰ http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120069310588201343.html?mod=hpp_us_leisure, accessed 6 February 2012.

¹¹ Stein 2008.

try to *communicate* those private and subjective experiences. How, and to what extent, does talk about wine render those experiences *intersubjective*, and what sorts of intersubjectivity have the varying forms of wine-talk represented? How, historically, have people talked about the tastes and characteristics of wine? What vocabularies have been available to them in doing so? What purposes have they had when talking about tastes? A tempest in a wine-glass this all may be, but it is nevertheless testimony to public contests about the boundaries between what is subjective and what is objective, about where objectivity can and cannot go, and about how it is intelligible and right to talk about subjective experiences¹².

Wine, Medicine, and Natural Philosophy

The language used to describe wine at any period from Antiquity through the 16th and 17th centuries was different from present-day usages in the type and the elaborateness of its predicates. Consider this from a physician's mid-16th-century survey of the wines then available in England: the tastes of wines are categorized, in Latin, as *dulcia*, *astringentia*, *austera*, and *acerba*, and «such like as are *acria* and *acida*, for the most part wherof we have never one proper name in English»¹³. And this broadly similar list of tastes from a 17th century text titled *The Blood of the Grape*: «There are four tastes of wine: sweet, acute, austere, and milde»¹⁴. That's pretty much it: some Italian commentaries back to the Middle Ages seemed to have ranged more widely¹⁵, but the four-taste list was common in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, and it is not easy to find early modern writers reaching out much beyond that. A late 16th century practical treatise on making things like ink and wine cautioned those charged with producing or purchasing wine to taste under the right climatic circumstances, to have their palates in the proper condition, and to be wary of the tricks sellers use to pass off unsound or poor wine as good, new as old, wine from a mediocre region for wine from the best places. Wine could taste – and be – unsound (e.g., moldy or vinegary), but the text did not seek to specify what different wines tasted like when they

¹² Shapin 2012.

¹³ Turner 1568: sig. Diiir. Sweetness apart, the problem of translating Greek and Latin taste terms into vernacular English was, Turner reckoned, insurmountable, so he tried to show the reference of ancient terms. See here Best 1976: 362, though he wrongly dates Turner's book to 1658.

¹⁴ Whitaker 1638: 19; see also Venner 1620: 30. Even in the early 19th century, when chemical research was offering a new vocabulary for talking of the constituents of wine, the same list of wine flavors appeared in medical texts: see, for example, Sinclair 1807: I, 307: «It may be sufficient to divide [the types of wine] into four sorts; *the acid*, *the sweet*, *the mild*, and *the austere*». Sinclair did, however, specify which wines had which characters: Rhenish and Hock were acid; Hungary, Spain, France, Italy, and Greece produced a wide range of sweet wines; mild wines included claret, burgundy, sherry, madeira, and champagne; and austere and astringent wines included port (307-308); see also Paris 1826: 137-140.

¹⁵ Grappe 2007.

were sound¹⁶. This restricted vocabulary tracks back to Aristotle, as he insisted that the senses of taste, smell, and touch were related and that they were notably crude compared to those of, say, vision and hearing. This was probably because taste and smell were *contact* senses – the sensed body, or some exuded stream of it – had to be in contact with the sensing organ, and that is why taste, smell, and touch belonged in the same category. And this is also probably why, as the aesthetician Frank Sibley noted, philosophers «have largely ignored the senses other than vision», judging «that tasting and smelling are “lower” senses»¹⁷.

Aristotle listed «the species of flavour», and, apart from the recently discovered *umami*, one can recognize these species as close to our modern neuro-physiologically-informed basic taste categories of sweet, sour, bitter, and salty: there were the opposing categories, sweet and bitter. The former included the succulent, and the latter, the salty. Somewhere in between came the pungent, the harsh, the astringent, and the acid. «These pretty well exhaust the varieties of flavour», Aristotle said, concluding that there was neither the need for nor the possibility of a rich and extensive vocabulary of tastes and odors¹⁸. Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* is a rich source of evidence about Roman views of the characteristics of wines. The Romans took as a matter of course that there were very good, good, mediocre, and bad wines; they knew quite well which regions produced the best wines (Falernian wine was evidently the gold standard); and they referred degrees of goodness partly to taste and partly to medical consequences. The Romans cared about taste, though they were aware that there was no accounting for it: some people were known to sing the praises of wines which others found ordinary. Pliny mentioned a freed slave in the court of the Emperor Augustus who was a skilled wine taster: encountering a new wine, he judged it to be less than first-rate, but knew that the Emperor would like it very much. Still, the vocabulary Pliny used to describe wine taste was limited. Apart from the sweetness of sweet wines and the gustatory and olfactory effects of doctoring wines with such aromatic substances as resin, myrrh, aloes, and herbs, Pliny referred to wine tastes as “tart”, “sharp”, “harsh”, “hard”, “rough”, “luscious”, and “unripe”, and tasting too much of wood – all bad things – and, for evidently good tastes, he deployed a more restricted and less referential repertoire, notably including “pretty”, “pleasant”, and, of course, “sweet”. Pliny also described less-well-recognized wines to an evidently knowing readership as tasting like wines with which they were familiar¹⁹. But, as Andrew Dalby notes, Roman connoisseurs

¹⁶ Phillip 1596: sig. D-E. This text is apparently a translation of the *Liber de Vinis*, by Arnald of Villanova (1235-1311) which was published in 1478. For a translation of the original German edition: Arnald of Villanova 1943: esp. 27 (for wine tasting).

¹⁷ Sibley 2001: 207, 211.

¹⁸ Aristotle 1984: I, 672; also Peynaud 1983: 83-84.

¹⁹ Pliny the Elder 1634: 413-415. At around the same time, the Greco-Roman Dioscorides mainly described the medicinal properties of various wines, the flavor categories used being similar to Pliny’s, including “sweet”, “sharp”, “unripe”, “hard”, “astringent”, “mild”, and “sour”:

rarely mentioned what must have been one of the main taste elements of foreign wines, many of which were brined and spiced to stabilize them for sea transport²⁰. A limited vocabulary for talking about taste persisted, even while aristocratic society clearly cared about the differences between wines and about their relative qualities. In the 13th century, French King Philip II was supposed to have sponsored a wine tasting competition among about 70 wines from all over Europe, memorialized in Henri d'Andeli's satirical poem *La Bataille des Vins*. Here too the chief tasters – the King's English chaplain and the King himself – were able to order wines in goodness – a Cypriot wine was judged best in show – while the referential vocabulary for describing tastes was little different than it had been in Antiquity. Bouquet and flavor *were* mentioned, but most attention was given to strength, sweetness, and medical consequence²¹. Around the same time, an Irish Dominican offered this as a tasting note on an Italian white wine: «It opens out sweetly as it comes into the mouth, greets the nostrils and comforts the brain, taking the palate softly but with force»²². Chaucer, whose family was in the wine trade, talked a lot about wine, and was well aware of the strength and physiological effects of wines from different places, but he too had almost nothing to say about their characteristic tastes²³.

Even after an attempted revolution in the language and epistemology of the senses and sensed objects in the 17th century, John Locke, one of that revolution's leaders, wrote that «the variety of Smells, which are as many almost, if not more, than Species of Bodies in the World, do most of them want names. *Sweet* and *Stinking* commonly serve our turn for these *Ideas*, which in effect is little more than to call them pleasing or displeasing [...] Nor are the different Tastes, that by our Palates we receive *Ideas* of, much better provided with Names. Sweet, Bitter, Sour, Harsh, and Salt are almost all the Epithets we have to denominate that numberless variety of Relishes, which are to be found distinct, not only in almost every sort of Creatures, but in the different parts of the same Plant, Fruit, or Animal»²⁴.

A hundred years later, aesthetic philosophers as well as connoisseurs cited wine and cheese as paradigm instances of the gap between the richness of tastes and the thinness of vocabulary for describing those tastes. Thomas Reid, for

Dioscorides 2000: 747-750. Horace's *Odes* are another source for Roman consciousness of the variety of wines and their relative goodness, though his descriptive vocabulary was no richer than Pliny's and he was more concerned with wine's psychological powers than its gustatory and olfactory characteristics: McKinlay 1946.

²⁰ Dalby 2000: esp. 134-136.

²¹ d'Andeli 1880: 23-30.

²² Quoted in Johnson 1989: 127.

²³ Chaucer 1687: 114-115.

²⁴ Locke 1714: 41. For remarks on the language, or lack of language, for designating odors, see Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994: 3-4.

example, wrote that «if a man was to examine five hundred different wines, he would hardly find two of them that had precisely the same taste. The same thing holds in cheese, and in many other things. Yet, of five hundred different tastes in cheese or wine, we can hardly describe twenty, so as to give a distinct notion of them to one who had not tasted them»²⁵.

So the early moderns and their baroque and classical heirs were, unlike us, mostly lost for words in describing the tastes and odors of wine. Writing in 1635, the playwright Thomas Heywood surveyed the wines of Italy and Greece for English consumers. He knew which were strong and which weak, which benefitted from aging and which were easy to digest, but his vocabulary of taste was almost entirely confined to the notions sweet, bitter, tart, and sharp. An exception was a description of some Greek wines, one of which was said to smell of apples and another of violets²⁶. The connoisseur John Evelyn loved his drink, but his descriptive language was bland: «The Pleasantness of *Taste*, which is not unwholesome, is the chief thing which I prefer both in *Wine* and *Ciders*»²⁷. In 1663, his friend, the diarist Samuel Pepys, in the first documented English mention of a named French chateau, famously said he «drank a sort of French wine, called *Ho Bryan*, that hath a good and most perticular taste that I never met with»²⁸. «A good and most particular taste» would hardly pass muster in the US connoisseur's magazine *Wine Spectator*. But this restricted vocabulary satisfied early modern purposes.

Wine Taste and Wine Goodness

This is not to say that the early moderns didn't care about the properties of the wine they bought and drank. They *did* care – perhaps even more than we do, because the properties and powers of wine were in many respects much more important to them than they are for us. They cared greatly about whether wine was good or not, and this mattered because a lot of wine *wasn't* good. It isn't that we would dislike it if we drank it – though that's possibly true; the point is that they reckoned that much wine on the market was not sound, that it might be watered (though consumers also generally watered wine after they had purchased it), that it was too old, that it didn't have the properties it was supposed to have,

²⁵ Reid 1863: 116. The point was underlined by the Scottish physician-connoisseur Alexander Henderson 1824: 133. Various naturalists and physicians from the end of the 17th century to the middle of the 18th century – including Nehemiah Grew, Carolus Linnaeus, and Albrecht von Haller – sought to add to the basic repertoire of tastes, but none of these got much grip on expert or lay culture and, writing of wine tastes, Henderson (1824: 133-134) was seriously skeptical of Grew's attempt to identify and name 1800 distinct tastes. See, in this connection, Shapin 2011.

²⁶ Heywood 1635: 38-42; see also Nicholls 2008: 194-195.

²⁷ Evelyn 1729: 90.

²⁸ Pepys 1995: IV, 100 (entry for 10 April 1663).

or that it was adulterated (or, as was then said, *sophisticated*)²⁹. The 18th century English popular medical writer William Buchan, for example, commended the therapeutic virtues of wine while pointing to the worrying goodness problem: «Good wine possesses all the virtues of the cordial medicines, while it is free from many of their bad qualities. I say good wine; for however common this article of luxury is now become, it is rarely to be obtained genuine». «No benefit», he wrote, «is to be expected from the common trash that is often sold by the name of wine, without possessing one drop of the juice of the grape»³⁰.

Suspicion of wine's goodness was standard in the 18th century: Dr Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* commented that «what passes for wine among us [the English], is not the juice of the grape. It is an adulterous mixture, brewed up of nauseous ingredients, by dunces, who are bunglers in the art of poison-making»³¹. The *Encyclopédie* article on wine had little to say about the taste of sound wines, and most of that was medically orientated. Wines that possessed «a pleasant aroma, or what is called a raspberry bouquet», were said to be good for digestion and suitable for the aged, and there were perfunctory remarks on wines that were sweet or dry, acidic or acrid. But as much space was devoted to the olfactory and gustatory marks of unsound and unsafe wines: «Some wines have a smell of the cask, some smell "cooked", and others smell of stockings. All such wines are unwholesome»³². Writing in the 1770s, the English physician Edward Barry surveyed the wines of the ancients in comparison with modern products. He too had little to say about tastes, remarking only briefly about how one might deduce medical powers from wines' «more evident qualities, as being either of an *austere, soft, mild, or sweet* taste, or of a fragrant smell, or inodorous». In the event, medical men understood that *strength* was the most important consideration³³.

When David Hume's celebrated essay *Of the Standard of Taste* re-told Cervantes' story about the delicacy of taste possessed by Sancho Panza's relatives, the issue concerned wine and its *goodness*. There was a hogshead of wine which was supposed to be good, but the villagers wanted the opinion of Sancho's kinsmen, the noted wine tasters:

One of them tastes it, considers it, and after mature reflection pronounces the wine to be good, were it not for a small taste of leather, which he perceived in it. The other, after using the same precautions, gives also his verdict in favor of the wine; but with the reserve of a taste of iron, which he could easily distinguish. You cannot imagine how much they

²⁹ Merret 1675; Best 1976: 367-368 (for the attribution to Merret); Phillips 2000; Ludington 2003: ch. 3. For chemistry and the problem of unsound wines in the 18th century, see, e.g., Gough 1998: esp. 80-87.

³⁰ Buchan 1790: 190, 706.

³¹ Smollett 1771: I, 93; also Best 1976: 364-366.

³² Jaucourt 1765.

³³ Barry 1775: 387.

were both ridiculed for their judgment. But who laughed in the end? On emptying the hoghead, there was found at the bottom, an old key with a leathern thong tied to it³⁴.

The issue here was not fineness but goodness – wine with an iron key and a leather thong in it was marginally not good, containing what it should not contain, having tastes it should not have. This example was prized by 18th century philosophers deliberating over using the word *taste* to designate both gustation and a relish for beautiful paintings³⁵. Writing several decades after Hume's essay, the Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart noted that «a dealer in wines is able, in any of the common articles of his trade, to detect the least ingredient which does not properly enter into the composition; and, in pronouncing it to be good or bad, can fix at once on the specific qualities which please or offend»³⁶. The goal here was not the same as that of a modern connoisseur assessing the quality of wine through a cultivated ability to discern the flavor components a sound wine might have, though here, of course, the capacity to detect “off” notes is also pertinent. Judgments of the goodness of wine were common, just as it was believed that some people were more capable than others of assessing whether a wine *was* good. Sancho's relatives were good tasters; Dugald Stewart's professional dealers were supposed to be good tasters; Samuel Pepys modeled his taste, in many things, including wine, on that of an Admiralty colleague whom he reckoned had good taste.

There was an English proverb, well known in the 17th century: «Good wine needs no bush». Shakespeare used it in the epilogue to *As You Like It*: «If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue; yet to good wine they do use good bushes, and good plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues». This meant that you could tell good wine by its taste, smell, and color – so you needed no advertising and no puffery. The “bush” in this proverb is the sign hanging outside a tavern – like *The Lamb and Flag* or *The Plough and Stars* of the modern English pub. It said, in effect, here's good wine, but you didn't need any advertisement if there was good wine inside.

In the 1630s, an English doctor wrote that «three senses are the chiefe judges of wine. The eye for the colour and consistence, the tongue for the taste, the nose for the savour. And all these must be applied to wine in it[s] kinde, as for example, if Claret wine have a right claret colour, if it bee in savour, in taste, in thinnesse, or thicknesse, in age accordingly, then may you be bold to call it good Claret. And so of all other sorts in suo genere»³⁷. The judgment here, again, was of *goodness*, in the sense of soundness and authenticity, being the thing it was supposed to be – just as in a dog show you would judge the

³⁴ Hume 1758: 138-139.

³⁵ Korsmeyer 1999; Dickie 1996.

³⁶ Stewart 1810: 442.

³⁷ Cogan 1636: 246.

best beagle not as the biggest beagle or the beagle with the floppiest ears, but the beagle that was truest to beagle type. It wasn't that the early moderns did not know about, or were not interested in, the differences between wines; it was that judgments of goodness, and medical consequence, then occupied so much cultural space, and taste was then importantly orientated towards goodness and consequence. As another 17th-century physician wrote, «there are several sorts of *Wine*; differing much from one another, in goodness and worth; so likewise in *taste, colour, consistence, and smell*: being of the growth of several Countries, and places, differing in *Climate, or soil...*». But it would be «tedious, and not so necessary and useful for the *Reader* to describe them further»³⁸. What is now central to modern ways of talking about wine was then deemed “tedious”, not worth extended description or evaluation.

In 1824, a Scottish physician writing about ancient and modern wines despaired that the words available to describe wine tastes were, apart from the traditional sour-sweet-bitter-salty set, “indistinct” and even misleading. One could discern the distinctiveness of wines, and one could even order them in quality, but one could not *describe* them with any accuracy at all³⁹. Even the great early 19th century French gourmet Brillat-Savarin had almost nothing to say about the qualities and properties of the wines that he clearly valued so much. About the language of taste in general, he echoed Locke on its impoverishment: «[W]e have been forced to depend on a small number of generalizations such as *sweet, sugary, sour, bitter*, and other like ones which express, in the end, no more than the words *agreeable* or *disagreeable...*». In one of the few passages dealing with wine in his *Physiology of Taste*, he lost his temper at the provider of a meal in which the goodness of the food was insulted by the badness of the wine. A fine dish of spinach done in quail fat was accompanied by a wine of well-known poorness – that of Suresnes, a «charming little village, about two leagues from Paris... noted for its bad wines. One proverb says that in order to drink a glass of Suresnes wine, you must have three people, the drinker and two people to support him and give him courage»⁴⁰. Just as proverbs spoke about good wine, so they also had something to say about bad wine, without displaying any obligation to describe in what way the wine *was* bad, apart from the possibility that it was unsound or inauthentic. A French proverb had it that «the best use of bad wine is to drive away poor relations»⁴¹. Even the poor relations were assumed to recognize that they had been given bad wine. In the 16th century, Montaigne offered an argument against “fastidiousness” in the enjoyment of wines: «If you make your pleasure depend on drinking good wine, you condemn yourself to

³⁸ Maynwaringe 1683: 112.

³⁹ Henderson 1824: 133.

⁴⁰ Brillat-Savarin 2009: 48, 147; compare Grappe 2007: 34.

⁴¹ http://www.theworldwidewine.com/Wine_quotes/Wine_proverbs.php [accessed 6 February 2012].

the pain of sometimes drinking bad wine. We must have a less exacting and freer taste. To be a good drinker, one must not have so delicate a palate». There was no mention of specific tastes, only of the ability to distinguish the good from the bad⁴². A character in Trollope's novel *The Claverings* was of the opinion that women had no proper palate, not able to «recognize any difference in flavours»: he said his wife couldn't tell duck and mutton apart if she was blindfolded. Yet he was quite sure that she «knows a glass of good wine when she gets it»⁴³.

Wine that Agrees with You

The one domain which testifies to how *much* the early moderns cared about the properties and qualities of sound wine is *medicine*. Wine was, for many people, an everyday component of diet and, like all other forms of aliment in traditional medicine, wines were carefully assessed for their powers and their effects on the body. The physician who thought it “tedious” to go on at length about the tastes and smells of wines, nevertheless recommended that one should choose wines «as may best suit with the *nature* and condition of your Body»⁴⁴. What is that about?

First, we need to understand that, even in non-wine-producing countries like England, wine was a normal beverage, certainly not as normal as ale and beer but quite normal: there were hundreds of wine-selling taverns in 17th century London, and Pepys's breakfast, or what he called his “morning draught”, was commonly watered wine. Like other parts of the normal diet, wine was talked about in the language of contemporary medicine, a vocabulary which was as familiar to laymen as it was to doctors. It was a vocabulary that originated with Galen in the 2nd century AD and that remained pervasive in popular medicine well into the 18th and even 19th centuries⁴⁵. There were four elements in the world – earth, air, water, and fire – and each of the elements had associated with it a pair of the four basic physical qualities – hot, cold, dry, and moist. Everything in the world was made up of those elements with those qualities, including, for present purposes, a glass, the wine in it, and you – the drinker. People had what were called temperaments or complexions, each linked with the “humor” that was dominant in it: phlegmatic, choleric, sanguinary, and melancholic. So scholars and artists were famously *melancholic*, meaning that black bile was dominant in them and therefore that they tended to be cold and dry. Health was a balance of qualities; ill health was imbalance; and the norm for any individual was plastic

⁴² Montaigne 1965: 247.

⁴³ Trollope 1867: I, 99-100.

⁴⁴ Maynwarige 1683: 112.

⁴⁵ On Galenic dietetic medicine, see, e.g., Shapin 2010. The dietary significance of wine was obviously more evident in cultures where the vine flourished; in early modern Britain, the wine/ale-beer divide roughly followed class contours, though it is likely that a higher proportion of Englishmen drank wine in the 17th century than do so in the early 21st century.

enough that it was constituted by his or her temperament, in which one of the humors might be – without inducing illness – dominant⁴⁶.

John Locke was both a philosopher and a physician and he reckoned that wine in general was good for those who had a taste for it: «'twas a right Answer of the Physician to his Patient that had sore Eyes: If you have more pleasure in the Taste of Wine than in the Use of your Sight, Wine is good for you; but if the pleasure of Seeing be greater to you than that of Drinking, Wine is naught»⁴⁷. You should eat and drink things that *matched* your temperament. For example, if your temperament was sanguinary, you should normally eat and drink things that were hot and moist, the qualities associated with blood. And so on for each of the humors. If you were a person in normal health, medical counsel was drink wines that *agree with* you. On the other hand, if you were ill, or if you were judged to be at risk of becoming humorally imbalanced, you might want to consume things *correcting for* that imbalance. Wine in general, as well as specific sorts of wine, figured in that dietary advice.

In Galenic medicine the major axis on which wines differed was that going from cold to hot⁴⁸. So there was a rich vocabulary in the past for describing wines in ways that now connect only slightly with modern wine-talk. Wines *warmed*. Everybody knew that. Sir John Falstaff loved sherry (sack): it warmed the blood, and warm blood made men courageous, «so that skill in the weapon is nothing without sack»⁴⁹. But the early moderns were very interested in *how* hot different wines were⁵⁰. Wine was understood to become hotter as it got older, and wines from different parts of the world were hot in different *degrees* (from first to third). At the same time, *you* got colder as you got older, and so the wines that suited you might be those that corrected for your increasingly, and perhaps pathologically, cold temperament. In terms of your overall diet, this was a reason why you should increase your wine drinking as you aged. As the Talmud said: «Before the age of forty, eating is more wholesome; but after that, drinking is better»⁵¹. Dr. Johnson told Boswell in the 1770s that «Claret is the liquor for boys; port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy»⁵². That was one of the (few) benefits of aging, the obverse side of which was that children and young people should

⁴⁶ See, among many sources, Arikha 2007; Mikkeli 1999.

⁴⁷ Locke 1714: 113.

⁴⁸ Historians differ on whether Galen accounted wines – at least sometimes – to have a drying or a moistening effect, or indeed whether he had a consistent view on the matter: Galen 1998: 181.

⁴⁹ Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, Part 2, Act IV, sc. 3.

⁵⁰ The category of *hotness* is current in present-day wine-talk. Drinkers occasionally describe wines as *hot* if they are high in alcohol, if they have flavors attracting words like “burnt tyres”, “shoe-polish”, or “hair-spray” – wines like Amarone, some old-fashioned Portuguese wines, or the bolder styles of zinfandel, and, of course, fortified wines like Port and Madeira.

⁵¹ Talmud 1896: 356.

⁵² Boswell 1833: 207.

not drink wine. This was Plato's view: «Shall we begin by enacting that boys shall not taste wine at all until they are eighteen years of age; we will tell them that fire shall not be poured on fire?»⁵³. Ancient authorities were quoted on this into the 16th and 17th centuries: «Galene also prohibeth chyldern to drynke any wyne, forasmoch as they be of an hot and moist temperature, and soo is wyne: and therfore it heateth and moysteth to moch theyr bodyes, and fylleth theyr heedes with vapours»⁵⁴. They were already too hot and wet. So too were certain types of madmen, those beset by “frenzy”, or other conditions proceeding from an excess of heat. «Wine is bad for madmen, and such as are troubled with heat in their inner parts or braines», Robert Burton wrote in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, «but to melancholy which is cold..., Wine is very good»⁵⁵.

This is the kind of thing that late 16th century physicians said about the properties of different sorts of wine: «Wine after Galen is hot in the second degree, and if it bee very old, it is hot in the third». But readers should know that heat was relative to the type and source of the wine: «For who doth not know that sacke is hotter than white Wine or Claret, and Malmsay or Muskadell hotter than Sacke, and Wine of Madera or Canary to bee hottest of all?»⁵⁶. The white wines of France were less hot than the reds, but even the red wines of France were less hot than, say, Spanish or Italian white wines. Laypeople knew this sort of vocabulary, and they *had* to know these things – because of the place of wine in diet and because of the relationship of wines (and other aliment) to your temperament. Get these things wrong and your wines would not nourish but harm you. Moreover, talk about the medical effects of wines did *not* use a different vocabulary than that belonging to apparently aesthetic judgments. When you said that a wine was “pleasant” or “agreeable”, or just that you liked its taste, one was understood to say that its qualities matched – agreed with – those of one's body. Taste (and also digestibility) indexed agreement or disagreement, since your tasting organs and guts were made of the same stuff as the rest of your body. You tended to like what you *were* like. And that is one reason why sweet wines were so widely approved by physicians: «Sweet wines properly so called, nourish best, and are not only grateful to the pallate, but also to the *Bowels*»⁵⁷. It was just that everyone liked sweet things and that this liking was a reliable sign that they *agreed with* you. If you like it, it likes you.

Galenic language was important, but it was not the only vocabulary involved in describing the qualities and powers of different aliments, including wine. There were specifically medical things to be said about wine which depended less on the four-quality theory than on a range of *analogies* – inferring from

⁵³ Plato 1892: 204.

⁵⁴ Elyot 1539: 35.

⁵⁵ Burton 1621: 473.

⁵⁶ Cogan 1636: 238; see also Turner 1568: sig. Bii-Biiii.

⁵⁷ Archer 1671: 86.

the appearance and texture of wines to their physiological effects. Wines that resembled blood were ascribed some of its qualities and powers. Galen reckoned that “thick red” wines «are the most useful of all wines for the production of blood, since they require the least change into it»⁵⁸. And early modern physicians fell in with that view: “tent” (or “tinto”) «is a grosse nutritive wine, and is very quickly concocted into bloud, but the same is oppilative [obstructing secretion], and therefore it is very hurtfull for such as are subject to obstructions. It is fit for them that are extenuated and weake, and stand in neede of much nourishment, and the same somewhat astrictive [binding or astringent]». Greek wine, «which is of a blackish red colour, [...] breedeth very good bloud, reviveth the spirits, comforteth the stomach and liver, and exceedingly cheereth and strengtheneth the heart»⁵⁹. Wines which were light in color and texture were often said to have medical consequences flowing from those sensible qualities. Canary and sweet wines are «purgative, and open Obstructions in the Lungs»; light, white Rhenish wine, is wholesome, «diuretick, and serviceable in the Stone and Gravel»; Champagne «affords a sudden Flush of animal Spirits, and inspires Vivacity»⁶⁰. Wine that is «white, subtile, and thinne, is not turbulent to the stomach, but of easie digestion, soone penetrateth the veines, provoketh urine, and is profitable in Fevers»⁶¹. You could use taste and other organoleptic properties as powerful guides to physiological action: a 16th century Italian physician advised choosing wines that were «pleasant in taste and of a sweete smell, of suche relish (I say) as in taste seemeth neither to be very tarte and sharpe, nor yet very doulcet & sweet. For thynges sharpe and pontique, [...] do quickly cause obstructions: the one because they bynde, the other because they passe into the veines and members unconcocted...»⁶². Analogical reasoning of this sort offered rich resources for talking about taste and linking taste to physiological consequence.

From Qualities to Constituents: Wine Chemistry

These ways of talking about the qualities and properties of wine have substantially disappeared, at least from expert and lay medical discourse. No one these days talks about Barolo as “hot in the second degree” or about Piesporter Goldtröpfchen as an “opening wine”. This language, and the notion of taste as *agreement*, went the way of the Galenic system to which it belonged for so long. Sometime between the beginning of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, Galenic concepts and, to a lesser extent, Galenic language, were set aside by official medical culture, while they continued in some currency in

⁵⁸ Galen 2003: 150.

⁵⁹ Venner 1620: 29.

⁶⁰ P. Shaw: 1724: 15; see also Hancock 2009: 326-331.

⁶¹ Whitaker 1638: 26.

⁶² Gratarolo 1574: sig. Gii.

popular medical texts and in lay discourse through much of the 19th century, and even longer. Bits and pieces of that vocabulary clearly persist, kicking around in our own culture, as when we may still describe a person as phlegmatic or melancholic, or when someone says that red wine doesn't "agree with" them, but such locutions are relics, with no clear connection to the theory of nature, of aliment, and of bodies to which this vocabulary was once so firmly linked. The decline of Galenic vocabulary, and of medical frameworks for talking about wine in general, obviously freed up ways of talking about wine to do all sorts of other things, and the emergence of a more ornate and more socially widespread culture of connoisseurship is one of those things⁶³.

We do not yet have much understanding of the scientific pre-history to modern ways of talking about the tastes and odors of wine, or, indeed, of other forms of aliment. The 19th century founders of organic chemistry – it is well known – did substantial work on the processes and products of fermentation and distillation, the most celebrated figure here being Louis Pasteur. For all sorts of reasons, including the economic importance of cheese, beer, spirit, and wine-making and the interests of the State in regulating and taxing fermented and distilled beverages, one strand of early research aimed at reliable ways of determining alcohol content. There was a long-standing dispute about whether alcohol – which was obtained from the distillation of wines ("spirits of wine") – was an authentic component of wine or whether it was produced (as maintained by the Italian chemist Adamo Fabbroni) through the subsequent process of distillation. In England, the chemist William Thomas Brande worked successfully in the 1810s to establish the former position – not as straightforward as it might seem, since it was then customary to add brandy to common wines – and he published widely-circulated tables of the percentages of alcohol in different kinds of wine⁶⁴. This research was not importantly motivated by the search for the flavor components of wine, though it was recognized that alcohol did contribute to taste. Experienced tasters, it was said, could tell when alcohol had been added to such wines as Hermitage, Champagne, and Burgundy. It made wine «warmer to the taste», the more so when the alcohol was thought yet to be in a state of «imperfect union» with the aqueous component⁶⁵.

It had long been understood that other chemical components made important contributions to wine taste and odor, as well as to their soundness – a soundness which, of course, might be detected by taste and odor – and, through the 18th and 19th centuries, chemists developed a more analytically specific grasp

⁶³ Wine continued to be assessed by medical writers for its health effects into the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but now the issue was mainly the consumption of alcohol and secondarily of sugar, free acids, tannin, and salts in relation to inebriety, gout, and dyspepsia – though a certain amount of attention was given to the chemically elusive compound ethers that were considered responsible for the unique flavors of aged fine wines; see, for example, Anstie 1870.

⁶⁴ Brande 1811: 337-338, 343; for the tables, see 345-346; also Brande 1819: 400-404; Mulder 1857: 138-187.

⁶⁵ Brande 1811: 337-338; Brande 1813: 86.

of the role of sugars, albuminous matter, and free acids in wine goodness and wine flavor – the German organic chemist Justus von Liebig believing that the most pronounced bouquets were found in wines richest in tartaric acid⁶⁶. Other strands of early to mid-19th century organic chemistry engaged in a more focused way with organoleptic properties, and here it was increasingly recognized that substances responsible for wine taste and odor might be – unlike sugar and alcohol – present only in very small quantities. The technical difficulties associated with “trace component” chemistry made this sort of research extremely difficult. One distinguished chemist estimated the key flavor component of wine at no more than one part in 40,000 and another said that its quantity was «so insignificant, that the substance almost disappears during analysis»⁶⁷. But this did not prevent scientists from trying to render taste in chemical terms, ultimately assigning specific molecular causes of an increasing – though not exhaustive – range of flavors and odors known to experienced tasters.

There is, however, a difference between present-day flavor chemistry and the 19th century search for the chemical causes of wine taste and odor. Into the early 20th century, the thrust of wine chemistry retained a focus on its goodness: «The chemical examination of wine», as an applied chemistry text put it in 1913, «is usually restricted to the determination of those constituents which enable an opinion to be formed concerning its purity or freedom from adulteration»⁶⁸. But where chemists in this period were engaged in a search for wine taste and odor, it was at a generic level – what made wine, so to speak, winery. It was only later in the 20th century that chemical answers were sought for questions like “What makes New Zealand sauvignon taste like it does and differently from sauvignon from the Loire?” or “What is the chemical (or chemicals) responsible for the “barnyardy” bouquet of many red Burgundies?” Early modern Galenic taste language, one can say, picked out the *qualities* and *powers* bearing on taste while newer scientific language focused on the *constituents* making for taste, to the extent that chemists might have confidence in their ability to assign specific molecular causes to specific subjective experiences. Yet the newer science remained dependent upon the vocabulary for recognizing taste circulating among the laity and connoisseurs. The *cause* might be identified as a specific substance or substances, but the effect *caused* is a recognizable subjective experience. However, throughout the 19th century, lay and expert vocabularies of wine tastes were little more developed than they were under the Galenic regime⁶⁹.

⁶⁶ Liebig 1843: 311; also Mulder 1857: 324. “Racemic acid” – once thought to be chemically distinct – was recognized by Pasteur as an optically inactive form of tartaric acid.

⁶⁷ Brande and Taylor 1863: 535; Mulder 1857: 137, 294, 300; also Accum 1820: 23: «The peculiar flavour and odour of different kinds of wine, depend upon the presence of a volatile oil so small in quantity that it cannot be separated». That judgment remained essentially unchanged into the early 20th century: see Thorpe 1913: 760.

⁶⁸ Thorpe 1913: 765.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., remarks on taste language in Henderson 1824: 133-138; also McMullen 1852: 38-39.

Note the generic character of taste language in accounts of chemical research in the first half of the 19th century. A Scottish report on the findings of Liebig and his French associate Théophile-Jules Pélouze in the 1830s said that chemists had «long suspected» that there was a specific «cause of *the* agreeable odour generally known as *the* bouquet of wines», and it celebrated Liebig for discovering, as they put it, an ether (whose analysis they gave and which they named œnanthic ether) extracted from a sample of an essential oil sent to them from a French chemist, «and which, from all its properties, appears to be *the* principle so long sought after. [...] [I]ts odour is completely that of old wine, with the exception of its intensity»⁷⁰. Sometimes referred to as «the flower of wine», Brande later wrote that œnanthic ether «constitutes *the* perfume or bouquet of the wine», that it possesses a «strong vinous odor», and that it «imparts a powerful aroma» to wine, while the Dutch chemist G.J. Mulder asserted its presence in «the best wines» and especially in older fine wines⁷¹.

By mid-century, chemists were gesturing at a typology of taste domains, allowing them to array their causal inquiries from the generic to the specific. It was said that there were chemicals that gave flavor and odor to all wines (usually identified with œnanthic ether), those that developed as wines aged (substances – in contemporary designations – like acetic ether, oxides of amyl, butyric, caproic, caprylic, and pelargonic acids), and, lastly, those that «depend entirely on the peculiarities of the places in which the grapes were grown» (a range of ethereal oils). «We are still far», Mulder wrote in the 1850s, «from being able to say with certainty this or that kind of wine owes its peculiar character to such a substance», and the likely complexity of the chemical bases of many specific wine flavors and odors was acknowledged⁷². Flavor chemistry was advancing, but, even at the end of the century and the beginning of the 20th century, the vernacular language of wine taste had not fundamentally changed from what it had been in the times of Brande, Liebig, and Mulder.

While wine experts were neither able nor willing to assign descriptive analytic predicates to specific wines, a relatively durable set of flavor and odor *categories* was evidently in place from early in the century. In 1816, the Parisian vintner André Jullien produced a manual about how to choose wines which offered a formal, although spare, vocabulary of terms used to express organoleptic characteristics, notably including the terms *acerbe* («harsh, rough, and sharp»), *bouquet* (an agreeable complex odor), *franc de goût* (wines having no other flavors than those which the relevant grapes should give), *soyeux* («wines causing an agreeable sensation without harshness»), and *sève* (an aromatic flavor which lingers on the

⁷⁰ Anon. 1836-1837 (emphases added); Liebig 1843: 313; Liebig 1859: 217.

⁷¹ Brande and Taylor 1863: 535 (emphasis added); Mulder 1857: 136, 264. For the role of the Bordeaux pharmacist, J. Fauré, in the analysis of œnanthin gum, see Paul 2002: 306-308. Brande and Taylor (1863: 535) regarded œnanthic ether as a specific substance whose formula was given as $C_{16}H_{18}O_3$.

⁷² Mulder 1857: 294-295, 300-301, 326-328.

palate the wine has been swallowed). The burgundy Richebourg, for example, is adequately described by comparing its color and body to Romanée Conti and judging it to possess «a great deal of *sève* and *bouquet*», while Chateau Haut Brion in Bordeaux has «a fine bouquet, a *sève* more aromatic, but less *bouquet*» than Chateau Margaux⁷³. This way of talking about wine tastes and odors provided a pattern for much subsequent 19th-century writing. In 1833, the English journalist Cyrus Redding parsed some genera of smell and taste for the benefit of general readers. “Bouquet” was defined as the aromatic smell issuing from «any of the finer wines», so named because it was complex, «a union of several agreeable odours». The term “*sève*” was applied to the taste of wine «the instant it is swallowed», said to be «composed both of the spiritous quality and aromatic odour united», and something called the “*aroma spiriteux*”, meaning «nearly the same thing as *sève*, and both are acquired at uncertain ages of the wine», sometimes produced by infusing different substances into the wine⁷⁴. The precise meaning of these terms is hard to decipher, and Redding rarely gave them specific content in dealing with different types of wines, to whose particularities (including price and medical effects) he was very sensitive. Among Côte d’Or burgundies, Nuits-St. George, for example, possesses «exquisite flavour, delicious bouquet, and great delicacy»; Le Montrachet is notable for «its fineness, lightness, bouquet, and exquisite delicacy, having spirit without too great dryness, and a luscious taste without cloying»; and Volnay is «a fine, delicate, light wine». There were only a handful of occasions on which Redding attached referential predicates to specific wines: Volnay had «a taste of the raspberry»; a Côte Rôtie and a St. Estèphe both had the «sweet odour of the violet»; a minor Bordeaux possessed «a taste of the almond»; the bouquet of Ch. Haut-Brion was violet and raspberry, and its flavor struck Redding as resembling «burning sealing wax» (here Redding closely followed Jullien); a Chablis and a Pouilly-Fuissé were «flinty»; and a number of different wines were unpleasantly «earthy»⁷⁵. However, the basic organoleptic categories – bouquet, aroma, *sève* – seem to have enjoyed recognition throughout the century.

In the 1890s, the California State Viticultural Commission ordered a translation of an œnological manual written by Giacomo Grazzi-Soncini, Director of the Royal School of Viticulture and Œnology in Alba, Piemonte, and this is a good source for what the vocabulary of (expert) wine taste had become by the end of the 19th century⁷⁶. Given his position and his presumed professional audience, Grazzi-Soncini was wholly concerned with soundness of wines and whatever characteristics constituted their fineness, and, therefore, their economic significance. What were the tastes and odors that constituted faults? What was known

⁷³ Jullien 1824: xi-xvi, 68, 115.

⁷⁴ Redding 1833: 67. (Further editions, with stable vocabularies, were produced into the 1870s.)

⁷⁵ Redding 1833: 98, 101-102, 106, 109, 116, 118 140, 143, 145-147, 150, 312, 353.

⁷⁶ Starr 1985: 155.

about the material causes of those tastes and odors? And here Grazzi-Soncini was emphatic that the tribunal of taste and smell was ultimately far more important than chemical analysis. Not only were these senses powerful – no matter the poverty of words available for designating what they delivered – but they were, after all, judge and jury, from which there could be no appeal to the laboratory⁷⁷.

Grazzi-Soncini offered a practical list of wine tastes and odors, attempting to stabilize their references and, occasionally, identifying possible underlying chemical causes. The broadest characteristics – other than color and sweetness – again included “aroma”, “bouquet” (or “perfume”), “flavor”, and “sève”. His usages of these categories differed from Redding, though the family resemblance is evident. Aroma designated «the odor which comes from the skins of aromatic grapes», and, if that seems circular, Grazzi-Soncini noted that the ancients sought to produce or enhance aromaticity by adding to the fermenting must substances like apples, ginger, saffron, and myrrh – so he was referring to the more volatile aspects of odor. Bouquet (in Italian *profumo*) was described as the odor individuating fine wines, not found in the grape but developing in the course of wine-making, and caused by the volatilization of ethers, while flavor (*sapore*) is «the effect of wine on the sense of taste” (as opposed to smell). Bouquet is experienced on the tongue and the sides of the mouth, and its effect is immediate. The even more difficult-of-definition sève (*abboccato*) was distinguished from both aroma and bouquet: «it is a certain savor, a certain fragrant quality of the wine due to a smooth and delicate blending of perfections, of aromas and bouquets. [...] [It] is especially the property of fine wines, due to the presence of certain substances which are formed in the grapes during the short time preceding their complete maturity; these substances are peculiar to certain varieties of grapes, and owe their existence also to careful cultivation, as well as to certain conditions of climate and soil». This is to be identified with the substance œnanthin; it is found only in fine wines, and the more œnanthin, the finer the wine; and it was now understood not as the single substance posited by the chemists of the 1830s, but as a complex mixture of substances. Sève is further marked out from the other broad categories by its point of action on the palate and its temporality – «perceived when the wine is in the mouth and in the act of swallowing... The bouquet and aroma affect the senses before, the sève after drinking the wine»⁷⁸.

All of these are best considered as *categories* or *modes* of taste and smell, genera rather than species of sensation. The short-list of more-or-less specific tastes and odors that followed included “sharp”, “lively”, “full”, “heady”, “clean”, “smooth”, “hot”, “fruity”, “astringent”, “bitter”, and “earthy”. Some of these were provisionally assigned a chemical basis; others were not. For example, warmth was said to be owing to alcohol content; smoothness to glycerin; astringency to tannin; and fruitiness was not a gesture at the flavors of any specific fruit (black currants,

⁷⁷ Grazzi-Soncini 1892: 17; also Thorpe 1913: 759; Deroy 2007: 104-107.

⁷⁸ Grazzi-Soncini 1892: 34-37; cf. Guyot 1865: 97, and Henderson 1824: 135-137.

gooseberries, peach kernels) but at the generic effect of grape sugar. With the exception of «the slight pleasing bitterness” of Barolo, the bitter was identified as a defect, as was earthiness – “disgusting”, not found in high-class wines, though here the French phrase used to designate this was the now much cried-up *goût de terroir*. There was only one specified wine taste which seems to resemble the modern elaborate and referential usages introduced at the start of this paper: Chablis is «a wine of a certain renown” which nevertheless «has a slight flavor of flint», thought to be caused by the composition of the soil – rich in iron, alumina, or silica. The flintiness of Chablis has a specific reference to a well-known sensory experience – recalling «the sensation experienced by the olfactory organs when a flint recently struck by the steel is held under the nose». It is an earthy note usually taken as a flaw, and so constitutes an exception to the association of earth-like tastes with poor quality⁷⁹. Virtually the only other specific tastes or odors that Grazzi-Soncini found in wine and thought worth mentioning were either artificially introduced (violet, rose, mignonette, bitter almonds) or were identified as flaws – something between wood and mold, a “stemmy” taste (what now tends to be called “stalkiness”) from excessive contact with grape stems, an acrid or bitter smokiness (possibly imparted by smoke from stoves used to heat wineries), excessive oakiness from barrels, and a bitter taste of the lees⁸⁰.

So scientific developments during the course of the 19th century did affect ways of talking about the tastes and odors of wine – but not much, and not much beyond the professional community of wine producers and professionals. The flavor chemistry of the 19th century did not, therefore, license or underpin a rich descriptive vocabulary such as the one we currently possess – “plum liqueur”, “black cherries” etc. We now have some sense of what beliefs and practices sustained the restricted wine vocabulary of the past. How may one account for the shift to our current ornate, elaborate, analytic, and referential vocabulary?

The Evocation of Taste: Wine as Bottled Poetry

18th-century polite society valued “delicacy of taste”, even if this was not necessarily the same capacity as that involved in assigning specific names to specific sensory and aesthetic experiences. The relationship between palate taste and taste

⁷⁹ Grazzi-Soncini 1892: 3, 37-47. The history of the taste term “flinty” goes back at least to the 18th century. Describing to Louis XV a white wine from Graves, Cardinal Richelieu said it was “flinty” – «[I] sent la pierre à fusil comme une vieille carabine” – similar, he said, to the wines of the Moselle: Cousin 1834: 79. This flintiness was evidently valued, though there is indication that others found it a defect, like having iron in your wine in the story from Don Quixote. «Le goût de terroir», and this was taken to include flintiness (or «le goût de pierre à fusil”), «pris dans sa mauvaise acception, et c’est ainsi que nous le faisons en ce moment, est un goût assez difficile à définir: quelque chose qui pique, qui agace le gosier et donne au vin l’apparence de certaines préparations pharmaceutiques»: Petit-Lafitte 1868: 76. For historical remarks on the history of the notion of *terroir*, see Guy 2003: 42-43.

⁸⁰ Grazzi-Soncini 1892: 49-51.

for paintings and sculpture was debated, while polite society generally recognized the need to negotiate one's way through conversation about things like wine as well as paintings. In the 1750s, the earl of Chesterfield instructed his son that

There is a fashionable kind of *small talk* which you should get: which, trifling as it is, is of use in mixed companies, and at table, especially in your foreign department; where it keeps off certain serious subjects, that might create disputes, or at least coldness for a time. Upon such occasions it is not amiss to know how to *parler cuisine*, and to be able to dissert upon the growth and flavour of wines. These, it is true, are very little things; but they are little things that occur very often, and therefore should be said *avec gentillesse et grace*⁸¹.

Chesterfield wrote intermittently to his son about different sorts of wines in terms of price and value, but he *never* found an occasion to *describe* them.

Through the 19th century, people who made, marketed, and consumed wine did, of course, care about goodness, in the senses of soundness, purity, authenticity, and quality. That was one concern addressed by the 1855 classification of the wines of Bordeaux ordered by Emperor Napoleon III: the classification of wines into orders of quality, from premier cru (first growth, Ch'x. Lafite, Latour, Margaux, and so on) through fifth growth, and then, later, from the 1930s, the designation of "bourgeois" clarets – wine classification by way of the social class system. This was, indeed, a classification of quality, but it did *not* depend upon a rich descriptive vocabulary of what different wines tasted and smelled like – what specific organoleptic properties made Ch. Margaux different from Ch. Lafite, or what specific properties distinguished the Lafite of 1854 from that of 1853. An English connoisseur, visiting Bordeaux less than ten years after the great classification, offered these as the sum of his tasting notes for a handful of great clarets: «Château Latour – delicious bouquet – deficient in body; Château Margaux – Fine, but light; Lascombe – Very good, will turn out well». Tasting in Burgundy, the connoisseur's notes included «Beaune, 1858 – very pleasant; Volnay, 1858 – do not like it; Pommard, 1858 – very soft flavour, excellent»⁸². Much as in the 17th century, there were good wines, indeed very good wines; there were not so good wines; and there were flawed or adulterated wines. And there were people, sensitive and experienced, who were considered, as a matter of fact, competent to make such judgments reliably. But they did not make them by way of an analysis of component flavors and odors, and they did not justify or publicize them through any such taste and smell language.

What the 19th and early 20th century *did* witness was the elaboration of a way of talking about wine which had some precedent in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but which developed in a serious way in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. That was a way not so much of *describing* individual wines but of *evok-*

⁸¹ Chesterfield 1838: 480 (letter of 22 September 1752).

⁸² T. Shaw 1864: 252, 347; Barry 1775: 436-439 (in an appendix on contemporary French wines).

ing their characteristics and their effects on the drinker – especially by way of literary allusion⁸³. Poets, and those of a poetic frame of mind, did this routinely. Writing to his brother and sister-in-law in 1819, John Keats announced that «I like Claret... it is the only palate affair that I am at all sensual in». Keats's attempt to say what he liked about claret ranged from the superficially tactile and physiological to the allusively literary:

For really't is so fine – it fills one's mouth with a gushing freshness – then goes down cool and feverless – then you do not feel it quarrelling with your liver – no, it is rather a Peacemaker, and lies as quiet as it did in the grape; then it is as fragrant as the Queen Bee, and the more ethereal Part of it mounts into the brain, not assaulting the cerebral apartments like a bully in a bad-house looking for his trull and hurrying from door to door bouncing against the waistcoat, but rather walks like Aladdin about his own enchanted palace so gently that you do not feel his step. Other wines of a heavy and spirituous nature transform a Man to a Silenus: this makes him a Hermes – and gives a Woman the soul and immortality of Ariadne, for whom Bacchus always kept a good cellar of claret...⁸⁴.

The greatest and best-known practitioner of the literary school of wine-talk in the late Victorian and Edwardian period was the English critic and professor George Saintsbury, whose 1920 *Notes on a Cellar-Book* has become a sacred text of Anglophone wine connoisseurs. The Saintsbury Club founded in 1932 by André Simon and others testifies to his standing, as does a recent re-issue of the *Cellar-Book* by the gastronomically-inclined University of California Press. Saintsbury wrote his book late in life as a memorial to the wines that had passed through his cellar and, subsequently, through him. (He was then under doctors' orders and could no longer drink nearly as much as he once had.) Saintsbury informally ranked wines, or least ordered them from time to time in their degrees of goodness. The 1884 Haut-Brion was «at least the equal of any claret I ever drank»; he accounted the 1878 Léoville Barton the best claret he'd had – and the only contrary opinion he could set against that was Trollope's, who rated the 1864 above it; he judged an 1881 Cockburn's «the best rich [port] that I ever had»; and of the 1858 Romanée-Conti Saintsbury wrote that it was «impossible to conceive anything more perfect in its kind». But the ranking didn't flow from a rich descriptive language. Saintsbury almost *never* tried to describe a wine's properties in terms of supposedly more familiar flavors and odors – as is now the custom. Once, Saintsbury described a great Hermitage as having a «Bouquet rather like that of the less sweet wall-flower», but it is not the sort of thing he went in for, and there was a touch of the camp about that isolated usage. Saintsbury loved his wines; he knew, and thought you should know, what was good and what

⁸³ Professional wine writers have noted historical transitions between styles of wine-talk, including the passage between evocativeness and “scientific” reference: e.g., Johnson 2006: 46-47.

⁸⁴ John Keats to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February 1819, in Keats 1899: 356. There is much more of this sort of thing in the work of such Victorian writers as Trollope and Thackeray.

was not so good, but describing wines in terms of their constituent tastes and smells was not what he did. This sort of thing was more in Saintsbury's line, as it was Keats's – either evoking *instead of* describing or evoking *as* describing: of the 1888 and 1889 vintages of the Graves Château Smith Haut Lafitte, Saintsbury wrote that «they were charming. Browning's "A Pretty Woman" is the poem that reminds me most of them»⁸⁵. Robert Louis Stevenson coined the aphorism for this way of talking: «Wine», he said, «is bottled poetry». But if it was not women or verse, the preferred metaphors were astronomical. Thomas Love Peacock had it that «The juice of the grape is the liquid quintessence of concentrated sun-beams», and a remark attributed to Dom Pérignon, the legendary discoverer of Champagne around 1700, reached higher in the heavens: «Come quickly, I am drinking the stars!»⁸⁶. You might take apart a poem by analyzing its component aesthetic units, and you might dissect the body of a beautiful woman, but it was assumed that you could not evoke, communicate, or reproduce their aesthetic impacts by listing and re-assembling the parts. From the point of view of aesthetic experience, there were limits to analysis.

Matters began to change around the time of Saintsbury's death in 1933. Christie's Michael Broadbent recently recalled the hey-day of the fancy poetic style of evoking wine tastes in the 1920s and '30s, finding it precious and wonderfully Gallic:

I do like a bit of pure poetry, my favourite author being the late and great André Simon. At the end of a lunch at the Hind's Head in Bray [...] his host asked Simon for his first reaction to the wines. He answered that [...] a 1926 Chablis reminded him of the «grace of the silver willow»; the 1919 Montrachet «of the stateliness of the Italian poplar»; the 1920 Cheval Blanc «of the magnificence of the purple beech»; the 1870 Lafite «of the majesty of the Royal Oak» [...] Mind you, the French have always been good at this sort of thing. [...] A bit more down to earth were the late Louis Jadot's last words on the subject: «There are four things to do when tasting a wine. First look at it and say "what a lovely colour". Then smell and say "what a beautiful bouquet". Thirdly, drink it and say "what a good wine". And lastly, look at your glass and remark, with pathos, "what a pity it is empty"». Surely preferable to tortured and over-the-top descriptions incorporating a (largely imagined) full panoply of fruits, spices, coffee and chocolate; "gobs" (ugh) of decadent, mouthfilling heaven knows what [...] If you find you can't describe a wine, don't. Just s it back and enjoy it⁸⁷.

Broadbent was possibly right about France as a source of this way of talking about wine, and maybe even as a specific model for Saintsbury's literary evocativeness. The great French agronomist Jules Guyot, writing in 1860, rested his

⁸⁵ Saintsbury 2008: 47, 51-52, 69, 78, 81, 87; see also Shapin 2009.

⁸⁶ For "sun-beams", see Peacock 1817: II, 21; for "bottled poetry", see Stevenson 1884: 49; for Champagne, any number of sources, including Mazzeo 2008: 31.

⁸⁷ Broadbent 2007; see also Shapin 2009.

hopes on science for the eventual development of a rational, properly referential taste language, voicing mild frustration at the vocabulary used by current wine-drinkers: «It would be a curious collection that contained all the expressions that tasters, wine merchants, travellers, amateurs, use to express the sensations they feel in tasting wines. I have known an Englishman who did not like a wine “unless it makes the peacock tail in the mouth”. Everybody knows the expression that the Auvergnat (a native of the province of Auvergne) used when drinking a glass of old and generous wine – “It is a yard of velvet that goes down the throat»⁸⁸.

The Public Taste

Many aspects of modern, and increasingly globalized, wine-talk undoubtedly emerged in Anglophone settings, and especially in the United States. Among its leading practitioners, Alexis Lichine, Frank Schoonmaker, and A.J. Liebling were all writers for the *New Yorker* magazine, which became an influential site – along with *Vanity Fair*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, and, from 1941, *Gourmet* magazine – for emerging 20th century attention to wine and the culture of tasting it and talking about it. In 1934, Frank Schoonmaker was rude about what he saw as a burgeoning culture of wine snobbery and pomposity, and he thought that comparing the perfume of a claret to the «twinkling feet of dancing nymphs” was absurd. At the same time, his own description of two nice Armagnacs melded Saintsbury’s literary allusiveness with referential gestures: «Both have the lovely, heavy quality of fine silk, and drinking them, one thinks of what Anatole France wrote, apropos of armagnac, in *L’Orme du Mail*: «Martin! Quel velours!»⁸⁹. Visiting New York several times in the between-the-wars period, the English editor (and socialist) Raymond Postgate documented tidal changes in the modes and content of wine-talk. In 1929, he said, Americans who discoursed about wine at all talked only about its purity, its alcohol content, and presumably its price. Now, in 1937, post-Prohibition, Postgate found New York wine consumption surrounded by a “fantastic” code of manners and what seemed to him an equally baroque vocabulary: «You must be able to discuss vintages, and “nose”, “breed”, and “roundness”, and I don’t know what else». Postgate thought it was pure pretentiousness: while some wine tasters could indeed tell one wine from another, common-or-garden “wine snobs” – he was certain – could not⁹⁰. The *New Yorker’s* metropolitan readership was clearly much concerned with wine tasting as a social marker in 1937: Thurber’s famous wine-snob cartoon appeared in March and Postgate’s piece in November of 1937. And by the 1950s, A.J. Liebling was writing in the *New Yorker* about wine in

⁸⁸ Guyot 1865: 98.

⁸⁹ For his attack on wine snobbishness, see Schoonmaker and Marvel 1934: 15-16 (and, for “dancing nymphs”, 249); for the Armagnac descriptions, Schoonmaker 1934: 90.

⁹⁰ Postgate 1937. After World War II, Postgate founded the influential British *Good Food Guide*.

the full “high style”, including this sort of thing on a modest southern French rosé: «Tavel has a rose-cerise “robe”, like a number of well-known racing silks, but its taste is not thin or acidulous, as that of most of its mimics is. The taste is warm but dry, like an enthusiasm held under restraint, and there is a tantalizing suspicion of bitterness when the wine hits the top of the palate»⁹¹.

But even this archly arty genre is not the vocabulary we’re familiar with these days, not the «peach skin, roasted lilacs and blanched almonds» style, and certainly not the awarding of points-out-of-100. The search for the origins of these practices moves closer to the present, and, as it does so, the social and cultural circumstances that brought them into being are more likely to be still in force. So far as the Anglophone world is concerned, we now look to the American golden decades of relative affluence and social mobility following World War II and the opening up of gray British mores and taste-buds to technicolor Continental possibilities in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, there were very few books on *wine tasting*, or even general surveys of the world’s wines, for consumers – lots of books for professionals about viticulture and œnology – until about the middle of the 20th century. They then began to appear in bundles.

Some representative markers in the US include Frank Schoonmaker’s *Complete Wine Book* in 1934, his *Dictionary of Wines* in 1951, an expanded *Encyclopedia of Wine* in 1964, and a guide to the still radically undeveloped world of American wines in 1941. Alexis Lichine brought out the *Wines of France* in 1951 and an *Encyclopedia of Wines and Spirits* in 1967. One of the first American popular manuals specifically instructing people how to taste wine came out in 1978 – John and Patricia Gottfried’s *A Wine Tasting Course: The Practical Way to Know and Enjoy Wine*. In Britain, T. E. Carling’s slim *Wine Lore* (1954) was a popular antidote to wine anxiety, though – beyond sweet and dry; white, red, and rosé; natural and fortified – it contained scarcely a word on how different wines *tasted*⁹². Frank Prial was writing the “Wine Talk” column for *The New York Times* from 1972, and, while his writing through the 1970s was elegant and knowledgeable, there was very little detailed comment about the tastes of different wines⁹³. The annual Oxford and Cambridge undergraduate wine-tasting competition began in 1953, and Michael Broadbent produced several guides to wine tasting for merchants and consumers in the 1960s. “Coffee-table” surveys of the world’s wines became common from the 1970s: Hugh Johnson’s *World Atlas of Wine* appeared in 1971, Edmund Penning-Rowsell’s primer *Red, White and Rosé* in 1967, and his *The Wines of Bordeaux* in 1969. In Australia, Len Evans was from the 1960s composing regular wine columns orientated towards

⁹¹ Liebling 2004: 46.

⁹² Carling 1954.

⁹³ A collection of his pieces is Prial 1978. In a later collection, Prial noted that he had «resolved to downplay the technical side of wine [...] along with the long list of tasting notes that are the lifeblood of the wine newsletters and specialty magazines»: Prial 2001: xiii.

ordinary consumers, and the 1970s saw an explosion of consumer-orientated English-language wine periodicals: in Britain, *Decanter* (1975; preceded by *Wine* magazine, founded in 1959) and the now-defunct *The Vine* (1975); in the US, Robert Finigan's *Private Guide to Wines* (1972), Nick Ponomareff's *California Grapevine* (1973), Charlie Olken's *Connoisseurs' Guide to California Wines* (1974), *Wine Spectator* (1976), *Food & Wine* (1978), and Parker's subscription-only *Wine Advocate* (1978)⁹⁴. In 1976, the celebrated Judgment of Paris blind "taste-off", "won" by California wines over some of the most celebrated bottles of Bordeaux and Burgundy, gave a patriotic fillip to American wine consciousness and further expanded the community of "fine wine" drinkers in the United States.

Scoring Subjectivity

There are two broad tendencies to account for in wine taste: the first is the vast expansion of putatively referential descriptors (peach skin, wet stones, fig paste), and the second is the systematic quantification of gustatory quality. The numbers attract most attention these days, but they too have a history going back more than a century. In the late 19th century, the œnologist Grazzi-Soncini briefly mentioned a 10-point scale which he said was in occasional use by professional wine tasters, though it was neither elaborated nor linked to any sort of descriptive language: 10 = "perfect"; 9 = "almost perfect"; 8 = "quite good"; 7 = "relatively good"; 6 = "fair, sound but not harmonious"; below that, various defects "according to their gravity". Nothing else was said about "scoring" wine, nor did the text contain any other reference to numerical assessment⁹⁵.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of well-known wine critics were using a "star" system, ranging from one to four or five stars – presumably deriving its plausibility from the Michelin Guide's long-established, and much imitated, award of overall quality symbols – one to three stars – to restaurants⁹⁶. In Britain, Hugh Johnson was giving wines one to four stars from the late '60s, and, on its founding, *Decanter* bestowed stars from one to five. In the States, Frank Prial in the *New York Times* also used a system topping out at four stars, and the Italian wine magazine *Gambero Rosso* awards *bicchieri* (glasses) from one to three. A 20-point scheme was used early in the history of *La Revue du vin de France*; it was common through the middle of the century; it was employed in the Judg-

⁹⁴ *La Revue du vin de France* was founded in 1927, providing a model – though one not always followed – for Anglophone wine writing.

⁹⁵ Grazzi-Soncini 1892: 25. I have not seen references to numerical scales in other 19th-century œnology texts or in commentary on wine by consumers, though it is quite possible that I missed such usages.

⁹⁶ The use of stars to indicate the quality of movies in the US goes back to 1928 and *Cahiers du Cinéma* used a star system from the 1950s: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123265679206407369.html> [accessed 4 February 2012]. For a schematic account of the history of wine rating systems, see <http://www.winemcgee.com/wine-rating-history.pdf> [accessed 4 February 2012].

ment of Paris competition; and it continues to be used in the Australian show judging system. In 1959, the University of California at Davis œnology professor Maynard Amerine devised a 20-point scale specifically to be used in assessing a large number of experimental California wines – not originally intended for wines in general. The Davis system was evidently a hybrid, orientated in large part to detect and penalize *defects*, not to measure excellences – and flaws are the sort of thing you might be primarily interested in when assessing wines made through significantly new practices:

- 17 – 20 Wines of outstanding characteristics having no defects
- 13 – 16 Standard wines with neither outstanding character or defect
- 9 – 12 Wines of commercial acceptability with noticeable defects
- 5 – 8 Wines below commercial acceptability
- 1 – 5 Completely spoiled wines

A wine scored in the Davis system loses points for a weighted series of defects: a cloudy wine drops two points; two points may also be deducted for volatile acidity; more or less sweetness than is indicated for the type loses one point; excessive astringency (other than that typical for the wine’s age and appropriate exposure to wood) means a deduction of two points; and aroma or bouquet which is alcoholic, excessively woody, moldy, or corked can lose a further four. Wiggle room for “subjective” impressions is given by a category Amerine called «general quality»⁹⁷.

A 100-point scale for evaluating wine was proposed and used by some œnologists at least as early as the 1940s, but it was Parker’s mid-1970s version which was the foundation of its current prominence, and, while there are critics who hold out, it now constitutes the global norm for wine writers, merchants, and, especially, confused consumers looking for a clear and unambiguous measure of the goodness of wine taste. Parker explicitly recommends it over 20-point schemes, because, he says, these «do not provide enough flexibility and often result in compressed and inflated wine rating». Parker compares the various numerical bands to school grades, with 90-100 counting as an A, 80-89 a B, 70-79 a C, and, below 70, a D or F, «depending on where you went to school»⁹⁸. The reference here to “school” is telling. It was indeed the American school grading system that Parker had in mind, and that link helps give the system its authority with American consumers – Parker as schoolmaster – and, possibly, to non-Americans generally at home in a metric world. School, after all, is the institution that speaks for what is wrong and right, true and untrue. School marks are performative. When school says that your performance is a 75 or a 91, there is no effective appeal and no effective way for any other agency to

⁹⁷http://finias.com/wine/ucd_scoring.htm [accessed 4 February 2012]; also Lehrer 2009: 52-59.

⁹⁸ Parker 2008: 4; for the development of Parker’s scoring system, see McCoy 2005: 63-64.

dispute the judgment: your work *is* or *is not* a 75 or a 91. If school grading is indeed the model, then wines *are* in themselves defective or perfect; they *are* in themselves positioned in their proper place on the scale of excellence. But the analogy between wine and school performance turns out not to be uniquely American. The 20-point scale popular among French critics drew its authority from scoring systems in French higher education: 10-11.9 points = *passable*; 12-13.9 = *assez bien*; 14-15.9 = *bien*; 16-17.9 = *très bien*; 18-19 = *exceptionnel* (or *félicitations du jury*); 20 = *perfection*⁹⁹.

The Parker scale, like Amerine's, has its categories, which are meant to be summed up to yield the overall mark, but Parker's is more straightforwardly a measure of virtues rather than of vices. If wines start with 20 and lose points for defects in the Davis scale, in Parker's they start with nothing (that is, 50) and aspire to taste-perfection: «The aroma and bouquet merit up to 15 points, depending on the intensity level and dimension of the aroma and bouquet as well as the cleanliness of the wine. The flavor and finish merit up to 20 points, and again, intensity of flavor, balance, cleanliness, and depth and length on the palate are all important considerations when giving out points. Finally, the overall quality level or potential for further evolution and improvement – aging – merits up to 10 points». Parker is at pains to reject any implication of “objectivity” – the issue is, instead, some notion of fairness and disinterestedness – attaching to the 100-point scale, although there is little doubt that, despite Parker's formal denials, the marketplace has both reified and fetishized the numbers¹⁰⁰.

Scoring wines at all – still more confidently assigning a numerical score to a particular wine as a judgment of its taste, smell, and related organoleptic virtues – is a *de-contextualizing* gesture. That has been identified as one of its drawbacks, but, in another form, it is a criticism that might also apply to the specific descriptive language of wine taste. How can you possibly quantify the goodness of a wine (or, how can you possibly say that a wine has an odor of fig paste), since your experiences of its taste and smell are inevitably shaped by circumstance – what you *want* at the time, what, when, and whom you drink it *with*, the momentary condition of your palate and mood? Announcing that one wine is 88 and another 91 is said to be an absurdity; it strips away from the subjective experience of drinking a wine almost everything that makes it wine *drinking* as opposed to some hollowed-out analytic exercise. That point was readily conceded by the Davis oenologist Maynard Amerine, when he marked out what he called «the sensory evaluation of wines» from «the sensory enjoyment of wines» – even while advertising the importance and value of the former. “Enjoyment” belongs to «the real world», “evaluation” to professional or professionally-informed attempts at assessment;

⁹⁹ <http://wineeconomist.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/winescales.jpg>; <http://www.esdes.fr/institutional-partners/french-higher-educational-system/> [both accessed 4 February 2012].

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.erobertparker.com/info/legend.asp> [accessed 4 February 2012]; see also Shapin 2005.

the former embraces its subjectivity, the latter seeks to discipline or eliminate it, expecting eventually to deliver its findings back to the domain of enjoyment¹⁰¹. Even if scoring were possible and relevant, the settings in which many wines are professionally scored – mass, blind tastings, in cold cellars or airplane hangers at ten in the morning, in silence and without food – tend to favor certain *sorts* of wines over others, especially powerful, fruit-driven, high-alcohol wines which may give less pleasure when drunk in naturally-occurring social settings¹⁰². But there is a response to such criticisms and the power of that response is indicated by the way in which the numerical scoring of wine taste has swept the world. The implicit reply from Parker and his allies is that *de-contextualizing* taste is precisely what is intended. School exams are *meant* to be de-contextualized: they are supposed to assess pupils' innate abilities absent the context in which those abilities will be expressed in everyday life. Performance in a school arithmetic test is not meant to reproduce the circumstances of reckoning when you buy things in a supermarket or calculate personal weight gain. And if the analogy with school holds, then it is one of the virtues of scoring wines numerically that it has *no* reference to the uncontrollably varying vicissitudes of the occasions in which you might actually drink a wine. The French sociologist Antoine Hennion writes about naturally-occurring tasting as folded into «multiple relationships to one's body, to others, to things, to events, rather than in the univocal installation of oneself into a rapport with a definitively delineated object», but it is just this univocality that tasting-for-scoring is meant to achieve. Referring to the «irreducible heterogeneity» of listening to music, Hennion asks «outside of laboratories and schools, what else is music?». Much the same question could be asked of tasting wine¹⁰³.

De-contextualization can even be flagged as a positive moral gesture. Another word here for context might be corruption. A pleasant dinner party with friends tends to flatter the wine; being given the wine by a charming wine-maker on a beautiful *terrazza* in Piemonte disposes you to like both the maker and the wine; and the *je ne sais quoi* ineffabilities of context are said to be, as often as not, an excuse for refusing honestly to say how good is the actual wine in the actual bottle. To do that you should intentionally set aside the “distortions” of context, in just the same way that an ideal scientific experiment on free-fall sets aside the accidental circumstances of friction and meteorological conditions. All of these features of context are ones that Parker has notably rejected: his context cannot be your context, so his duty to you as a critic is just, so far as he

¹⁰¹ Amerine and Roessler 1983: ix, 3-4. Amerine's co-author was a Davis mathematician and statistician, and their book is, indeed, sprinkled with mathematical equations.

¹⁰² This is a widely expressed criticism: see, e.g., Lynch 1995: 13-15. (In fact, however, one should not say that these professional tastings are de-contextualized: the context is not people and food, but other wines, so one's decision is one of relevant context: Johnson (2006: 41-43) is no doubt that the context of other wines is irrelevant, beside the point, or just wrong.

¹⁰³ Hennion 2007: 104-105; see also Hennion and Teil 2004; Teil and Hennion 2004; Shapin 2012.

can, to ignore context. Parker thinks that the sociability of the traditional – and especially British – wine-trade is indeed a form of “old boy” and “elitist” corruption; he buys his own bottles; and he tends to drink them alone in his hotel room¹⁰⁴. The outcome, he says, is not objectivity – remember that such a thing is not possible in judging wine – but it is a warrant of *disinterestedness*, and it is this de-contextualized disinterestedness about *what is actually in the bottle* that Parker values in himself and that so many others evidently value in his reporting. That is to say, if you want to criticize Parker’s practices you will need to criticize what commends de-contextualization as a moral exercise – intended to protect consumers from mystification, mumbo-jumbo, and deceit – and that is not quite as straightforward as some suppose.

Describing Subjective Experience

Parker, and other contemporary wine writers who fall in with his style, have had less to say about his preferred descriptors, but these too have a quite recent history, since the elaborate descriptive language now common in talking about wine was, as we now know, practically absent even fifty years ago¹⁰⁵. The issue here is indeed intended referentiality and, especially, the range and presumed accuracy of reference. Modern ways of talking about wine include clear attempts to describe the complex constituents thought to be objectively *in* the wine and, at least in some cases, to link them causally to the complex subjective experiences of taste and smell¹⁰⁶. It is Locke’s primary/secondary distinction when brought to bear on the tastes of wine. This is not the language of *qualities* and *powers* that informed the medically-framed language of taste through the early modern period, and it is not the literary language that sought to *evoke* the complex experiences of taste by associating them with the complex aesthetic experiences produced by a poem, novel, sublime bit of nature, female beauty, the emotions of love, and the like. Some commentators want to celebrate this new descriptive language; others mean to criticize its reliability, accuracy, pertinence, and, of course, to argue whether the tastes and smells favored by certain writers *ought* to be so valued. However, my questions here are historical and sociological: what circumstances brought this language into being and propelled it into prominence? what purposes is it meant to achieve?

The precise status of modern descriptors like peach skin and wet stones is not clear and those who use them may, of course, vary in their intentions. Yet at least some writers saying that the bouquet of a red Rioja is like “vanilla”, and that of a cabernet sauvignon has notes of “bell peppers” (or “capsicum”) have in mind chemically distinguishable constituents that might also be found in other sub-

¹⁰⁴ McCoy 2005: 152-154.

¹⁰⁵ See, notably, Lehrer 2009; also Johnson 2006: 45-51.

¹⁰⁶ On this, see Deroy 2007.

stances – in the case of vanilla, new oak, and in the case of the bell pepper aroma, in peppers. The structural identity of the underlying causal substance may or may not be known to someone using this language. The question is whether such a causal substance is *presumed*, known to have been discovered, or thought to be ultimately discoverable, by chemical analysis. It is evidently presumed by some that a claret said to smell of bell peppers does so because the basis of that subjective experience is the same objectively-knowable entity contained in green peppers. Some tasters these days will know that the bell pepper odor is caused by 2-methoxy-3-isobutylpyrazine, which is indeed found in both peppers and cabernet sauvignon grapes; that of vanilla is caused by the phenolic aldehyde known as vanillin; and so on¹⁰⁷. But that set of usages is not likely to be very large. It certainly includes the language used to designate some “off” odors: there is a population of people who can reliably attach the word “corked” to bottles with a specific fault, and a smaller group of people who say, presented with the same fault, that they smell TCA (or 2,4,6-trichloroanisole). Similarly, there are people who can repeatedly recognize a particular sort of funky or wild aroma in a wine – which they may like or detest – and fewer people who, calling it “brett”, can associate this with its cause in the chemical products of the yeast *Brettanomyces*. In her intelligent essay on *The Power of Tastes*, Ophelia Deroy writes that «we care not at all» that a cherry taste in a red Burgundy might be caused by the chemical benzaldehyde, but *some* people clearly do care to know this, and *some* might even come to identify the relevant taste with the specific chemical substance. There is also a significant difference between knowing the specific substance supposed to cause a specific taste, on the one hand, and knowing (or believing) that *some* specific chemical(s) must be the cause of a taste, and it is probably the latter that marks out change in modern attitudes. A popular guide to wine tasting that appeared in the US in the 1970s sought to demystify the process by insisting that taste just *was* chemistry:

When you hear a person describing a wine, the phrases he uses will ultimately be based on the actual chemical composition of the wine. The image of wine may be glamorous, but the knowledge is founded on mundane facts. It would therefore now be wise to get acquainted with the influence that the most prominent chemicals and compounds have on the taste of wine¹⁰⁸.

Much more recently, the American wine writer Michael Steinberger worried about the seeming arbitrariness of popular taste descriptions and took himself off to a chemistry research center to learn about «flavor hedonics»: «With scientists gaining ever-greater insights into the mechanics of taste, it is becoming harder for us wine hacks to ignore the biological [by which he means also to include

¹⁰⁷ See, e.g., Jackson 2008: 286, 300, 306-318, 477.

¹⁰⁸ Gottfried and Gottfried 1978: 29.

chemical] dimensions of what we do»¹⁰⁹. These gestures are not uncommon, while Deroy is, at the same time, quite right to say that «chemical knowledge is not needed to taste wine»¹¹⁰.

The development of a new and better referential language for describing wine was in large part a project of oenologists at the University of California, Davis. In 1976, the oenologist Maynard Amerine and his colleague the mathematician and statistician Edward Roessler published a manual for the “sensory evaluation” of wines which sought to replace existing vague, fanciful, and emotive terminologies that one should “avoid at all costs” (e.g., wines that were “masculine” or “feminine”, “naive” or “presumptuous”, “harmonious”, “mellow”, and even the tradition-anointed “austere”)¹¹¹. The Davis professors built on industrial research on “flavor profiles” conducted in the 1950s by the Cambridge, Massachusetts consulting firm, Arthur D. Little, Inc., which in the early 1970s published a three-volume study of the American wine market and ways of exploiting it¹¹². Amerine and Roessler reckoned that wines might be better made, more reliably described, and more effectively marketed if a standardized referential vocabulary could be put in place and circulated in the culture, one that had analytic intention and authority, and they offered extensive lists of proper predicates (largely referring to fruits and vegetables).

Soon, their colleague, the oenology professor Ann C. Noble developed and copyrighted a “Wine Aroma Wheel”, a laminated plastic circular device with three concentric rings designating odors, proceeding from the most fundamental olfactory categories in the middle (“floral”, “woody”, herbaceous”, “earthy” etc.), to the subcategories of each in the middle ring (the species of “fruity” including “berry” and “tropical fruit”), to the outer ring representing the further subspecies (those of “berry” including “blackberry”, “raspberry”, “strawberry”, and “black currant”). The wheel was developed to «facilitate the description of the flavors perceived by ordinary drinkers», from the nervous beginner to the experienced connoisseur, and to enhance communication by providing a standardized aroma language. She judged that, when “novice tasters” claim that they “cannot smell anything”, what they are actually saying is that they haven’t the words to designate the categories of experience. The Wine Wheel is meant to give them the categories and the words at the time: it is, therefore, what might be called an intersubjectivity engine. The analytic referentiality of the descriptors is evident. Users are supposed to prepare “standards” of each terminal aroma: for asparagus, several drops of the brine from tinned asparagus in a neutral white wine; for vanilla, a drop of vanilla extract. An aroma for which it is not easy to provide a material standard is, Noble says, the floral odor of riesling, muscat,

¹⁰⁹ Steinberger 2007a, 2007b.

¹¹⁰ Deroy 2007: 101-102.

¹¹¹ Amerine and Roessler 1983: 305-336; also McCoy 2005: 268-269.

¹¹² Little 1972; Cairncross and Sjöström 1997; Lapsley 1997: 199-200; Nollet 2007: 18.

and gewürztraminer wines: for that she suggests a commercial Handiwipe® or the branded cereal Froot Loops®¹¹³. In principle, however, intersubjectivity – the ability of a group of people reliably to assign the same word to the same private olfactory or gustatory experience, and, therefore, to agree that they share subjective states – is independent of the correspondence implied by the use of standards. One can easily imagine a community of people agreeing to use the word “permissive”, or the number “317”, to designate what other groups indicate by the word “vanilla”: they will be indexing “the same thing” and they will know what others are talking *about*¹¹⁴. The connection between this work and the development of Parker’s referential language is not obvious. An influence from Davis practice is very likely. Erin McCoy suggests that the trend to this sort of vocabulary was started in France by Émile Peynaud’s *Le Goût de Vin*, and, indeed, Peynaud vigorously advocated an analytic tasting language, firmly grounded in oenologists’ knowledge of wine constituents, but the book was published in 1983 and translated into English in 1987, and Parker was on his way to his mature referential language before then¹¹⁵.

The *idea* and *aura* of objectivity – if not its actual attainment – are crucial to modern descriptive wine language. Many wine drinkers are now evidently drawn to language which picks out real constituents, substances which are thought of as the scientifically-warranted material causes of subjective experiences. The complexity of subjective experience is then treated as the aggregate of its taste – and smell – relevant constituents, and it is those constituents that we think, or hope, to pick out by descriptors such as asparagus, fig paste, or peach skin. We may understand that there are problems in concluding that we have thereby achieved *objectivity*, but there is something about the *idea* of objectivity that is central to the historical appearance, and the cultural role, of this way of talking about wine tastes and smells.

Why should wine drinkers – especially in the Anglo-American world and in the emerging economies of what used to be called the Third World – be attracted to modern referential taste language and the associated quantification of goodness? The first consideration is the *globalization* of the wine market. In countries that produce their own wine, it was traditional to drink what was local, and casting one’s net wider, if it occurred at all, was a gesture at elite exoticism. It still remains common for American or British tourists in rural Italy or France to be surprised that they cannot find California Zinfandel or Catalan Rioja in local stores, and even the expansion of wine-choice in European franchise supermarkets yields a much narrower range of choice than one can find in British High Streets or

¹¹³<http://winearomawheel.com>, accessed 5 February 2012; McCoy 2005: 269; Brenner 2007: 17-23; Lehrer 2009: 42-50; also Johnson 2006: 47-48. One can also buy kits of reference standards, produced and marketed by the French firm, Le Nez du Vin: <http://www.nezduvin.co.uk/>, accessed 5 February 2012.

¹¹⁴For a fine discussion of taste vocabulary and taste experience, see Lanchester 2008.

¹¹⁵McCoy 2005: 269; Peynaud 1997: 161-204.

in American mega-malls. While wine consumption is dropping in traditionally wine-drinking countries, it is still rising in new markets – and everywhere there is a “flight to quality” among the more affluent new consumers, in Anglophone settings, but also in China, Russia, South Asia, and Latin America. Wine is increasingly drunk around the world with a degree of reflective attention rather than as an everyday beverage. Drinkers in these newer markets have not grown up with a stable taste reference acquired from their families, shaped by the familiar products of their region. All the world’s wines are available to them and they have no special reason – other than metrics of prestige and price – to embrace wines of one type and place over others. *Everything* is unfamiliar to the palate and the range of possible tastes vastly expands. Wines do not *have* to be described, but there is a new demand for such descriptions.

Taste and the Marketplace

Related to globalization is what might be called the *individuation of judgment*. In every setting where wine consumption is new, or where choice has recently expanded, traditional vehicles for the formation of judgment are either lacking or weak. If you were a member of the then-smaller wine-drinking classes of, say, Edwardian England, you might inherit your taste, like your wine-cellar and your furniture, from your father. Or your taste might be shaped by your Oxford or Cambridge college and its long-established wine-cellar, or by that of your club, its cellar stocked by connoisseurs presumed to possess reliable judgment. Or you might follow in the tracks of your father or grandfather in forming special ties of familiarity with trusted wine merchants: the Corney & Barrow, Justerini & Brooks, and Berry Bros & Rudd of Britain. Founded in the 1870s, the British cooperative Wine Society still performs a similar function for the middle classes (and above) lacking those sorts of family or institutional taste-guides or wanting to supplement them at what is assumed to be a good price¹¹⁶.

In modern times, we assume that our task – the *only* legitimate task – is to form *our own assessment* of wine’s goodness. That is democracy at an organoleptic level; it is subjective individualism raised to a moral principle. Even in the 1950s, the great Russo-American wine merchant Alexis Lichine – who himself contributed to a growing ornateness in wine-talk and whose palate was advertised as legendarily accurate – knew the demotic drill: «Drink the wines you like the best. Trust your own palate, and don’t listen to what anyone else tells you you ought to like»¹¹⁷. Submitting to the taste of another would be illegitimate: why defer to anyone else’s authority when you have your own capacity to judge? What was needed was a straightforward, demystified, referential language that

¹¹⁶<http://www.thewinesociety.com/Society.aspx?PageCode=ABOUTSOC&PageName=History%20and%20Mutuality> [accessed 5 February 2012]; Penning-Rowsell 1990.

¹¹⁷Wechsberg 1958: 48, and 49-51 for stories about Lichine’s tasting accuracy.

described what a wine *was really like*, and that apparently referred its taste and smell to constituents that were *really in* the wine. Such a language would be the opposite of poetry; it would be at once scientific and democratic.

But the social changes following upon the 20th century's two world wars eroded the strength of all the institutional ties that had shaped judgment. Writing in 1973 in the *New York Times*, Frank Prial reflected on those days ("not too many years ago") when «the wine trade was a gentleman's business... One knew one's suppliers and one's customers». But those days are gone, Prial said, and advice to rely on the judgment of one's wine merchant was viewed by almost all drinkers as absurdly impractical¹¹⁸. Increasingly, the consumer confronted the globalized marketplace alone, a consumer who took as his or her task selecting *the best* – the best buy, the best value for money, the bottle that would strike friends and associates to whom it might be served as at least good and maybe the best. This was a predicament confronted by consumers of all sorts of goods, and especially the goods of what Thorstein Veblen called «conspicuous consumption», those that testified to one's identity and standing¹¹⁹.

The task of selecting the best, or even the good, was made more fraught because wine had become a social marker in these new markets – at least by the middle of the 20th century and strongly so by the last quarter of the century¹²⁰. Wine judgment could help you move up in the world but it could also be your undoing, and that made consumers uneasy. In 1959, Liebling wanted *New Yorker* readers to understand that neither price nor reputation was a fool-proof guide to wine or food pleasure: just because Hermitage cost more than Tavel, that didn't mean you would like it more. In that most subjective of domains, people now had to be reminded of their subjectivity¹²¹. Yet Liebling's deflation was elicited by the increasing circulation of ideas that wine taste was indeed something you might *get wrong* and that getting it wrong was culturally consequential. Hence mid-century anxiety about wine choice – witness both the Thurber cartoon and Stephen Potter's marvelous chapter on "Winesmanship" in his 1950 masterpiece *One-upmanship*: «It has... don't you think? It's a little bit cornery. Too many tramlines... Do you notice the after-sharpness, the point of asperity in the farewell, the hint of malevolence, even, in the *au revoir*?... There, Do you get it? That "squeeze of the lemon" as it's called...»¹²². Wine is used, or is thought to be used, as a weapon of class destruction. It's a game which people feel they

¹¹⁸ Prial 1973.

¹¹⁹ Weinberg 2008. For conspicuous consumption, see Veblen 1899: ch. 4. Veblen's book, however, did not mention wine.

¹²⁰ Wine functions as a social marker in France too, but less so, if the evidence of the sociologists is reliable: wine is mentioned only about a dozen times in Bourdieu 1984, and it is never focally treated as a social sorting device.

¹²¹ Liebling 2004: 60-66.

¹²² Potter 1971: 254.

can win or lose. The drink that used to warm the heart, dissolve the stone, give pleasure, and make us feel close to the gods, now has a unique capacity to make us look stupid and to cause *embarrassment*.

That generates a paradox: in order to face choice alone, people look for guidance. Not to a friend or to a merchant or to the wine steward of their club, but to authority sources who they may not know but who display the emblems of disinterestedness. Many of us evidently seek to outsource our taste, to shape our subjectivity through the inaccessible subjectivity of others. And it remains to our outsources to tell us that the thing is impossible. It's a paradox that Parker seems to recognize when the World's Most Relied-upon Wine Authority tells readers that it's *their individual taste* that really matters: «There can never be any substitute for your own palate»¹²³. The way Parker talks about wine, and the way, indeed, many people came to talk about wine in roughly his way even before Parker's rise, is down to the appearance of disinterestedness. No more mystifying *je ne sais quoi*, no more evocations of poetry, in fact no more references to "presumptuous" wines lacking in "breeding", no more vagueness about "what's in the glass"; instead, we seek the real, objective thing, the object of both desire and dollars. The wet stones and tomato skins are, from this point of view, better, more reliable, more disinterested, supposedly more objective, more *moral*, than traditional wine predicates. If you want to know the sort of person Parker is, think of the consumer advocate Ralph Nader, on whom Parker says he modeled himself, and think of the post-Watergate sensibility that saw conflicts of interests everywhere and that reckoned citizens to be in need of a fearless and disinterested advocate to protect them from interest and corruption¹²⁴. He's there to guide the consumer through the dangers and the confusion of the global marketplace, and the way he does that is much the same as the way the American publication *Consumer Reports* does it: analyze the product, break it down into its constituents or aspects, evaluate each individually and then aggregate the parts: finally, come to an assessment which lets you compare the real worth of the product in relation to other products (and numbers are an ideal way of doing that). The result is meant to give the consumer a reliable way of ensuring value for money. «Wine», Parker wrote, «is no different from any other consumer product»¹²⁵.

The transition from wine as a medical object to wine as bottled poetry to wine as a branded prestige consumer product is a marker of modernity's changing orders, and so the language of taste now indexes not just the dominance of the

¹²³ Parker 2008: 4-5. Issues surrounding this are particularly well treated in Origgi 2007.

¹²⁴ Parker 2008: 5; Parker 1997: 19; McCoy 2005: 66-67.

¹²⁵ Parker 2008: 4. Indeed, a few years before Parker started up his *Wine Advocate*, the wine merchant Peter Sichel published a guide to the perplexed and anxious consumer, called *Which Wine?*, that concentrated on budget bottles and that helpfully included an «adjective selector for describing wines»: Sichel and Ley 1975: 227. The list of adjectives was fairly extensive (for bouquet, "flinty", "fruity", "flowery" etc.), but it did not reach the more elaborate referential vocabulary that Parker came to use.

market in our social and political arrangements but the special cultural power of the global market. But the taste of wine tracks much more than that: its changing vocabularies and the changing practices mobilized around it also belong to the history of philosophy. How have we variously configured the relationships between the subjective and the objective, between what we taste and what we can know about the order of things? Taste belongs also to the careers of medicine and natural science. Taste languages were once shaped by traditional medical schemes which focused interest on the qualities and powers possessed by aliment and their consequences once taken into the human body. Medicine has become far less important in talking about wine, while the chemical sciences involved in identifying constituents in natural products have come to stand in an ultimately causal, but edgy, relation with the subjective experiences of taste and smell. Finally, the social changes which altered the place and function of wine drinking in many cultures spawned new vocabularies of taste, partly meant to parse the sensory effects of wine in a culture increasingly wanting to know what things were *made of* and what things were worth and increasingly skeptical of evocative vocabularies which were associated with an aristocratic, and possibly corrupt, old social order. In these, and many other, ways every historically situated society tastes its wines differently. Tell me what you taste, and I will tell you who you are.

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