

Book and Film Reviews

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KATHERINE COLE: *Voodoo Vintners: Oregon's Astonishing Biodynamic Winegrowers*. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis OR, 2011, 182 pp., ISBN 978-0-87071-605-8, \$18.95.

Voodoo Vintners presents the history and farming techniques of a group of biodynamic viniculturists and winemakers in the Willamette Valley, Oregon, in America's Pacific Northwest. The region is considered excellent for Pinot Noir. Biodynamics is an occasionally ridiculed organic farming method based on the ideas

of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), the Austrian philosopher, mystic, and founder of anthroposophy. “Voodoo” refers to the method’s occult origin. As biodynamics has gained popularity with winegrowers, it has entered the awareness of consumers keen on organic food and wine, alternative lifestyles, and holism. It surprises me that this awareness extends to wine drinkers who just twist and pour. Nevertheless, *Voodoo Vintners* aims to be “a simple, readable, enjoyable book on biodynamic viticulture for the everyday wine lover to flip through and enjoy” (ix). (If “enjoying an enjoyable book” is not your idea of readable, you will find much in this book to inspire rapid flipping.) Cole gaily blends journalese, research, and conversations with offbeat Oregon wine people and succeeds in keeping things snappy. Unfortunately, her casual approach underplays biodynamics and the richness of Steiner’s thought.

Cole marks the turning point in Oregon biodynamic winegrowing with the appearance of Burgundian biodynamics pioneer Lalou Bize-Leroy at the 2001 International Pinot Noir Celebration in McMinnville. In Cole’s reconstruction of the event, Bize-Leroy presented three of her Domaine Leroy wines, which are among Burgundy’s most prestigious. The wines (Corton-Renardes, Clos de la Roche, and Latricières-Chambertin, all from the great 1999 vintage) deeply impressed the tasters, including several local winegrowers, who studied them as Bize-Leroy spoke on Steiner. (According to Cole, Bize-Leroy’s speech was incomprehensible for linguistic reasons.) Non-biodynamic wines from these vineyards would also have impressed, but it does not appear that comparisons were made. Bize-Leroy’s strict control of yields, which is not a biodynamic technique, and her exceptional tasting, blending, and winemaking skills, attested by her non-biodynamic negociant line Maison Leroy, go unmentioned. Nevertheless, Cole notes a significant increase in the local interest in biodynamics following the tasting and attributes the change to the event. At the same time, she concedes that of the four winegrowers present who later converted to biodynamics, none confirms that the tasting or speech influenced the decision to convert. To me, the Bize-Leroy tasting seems more a convenient benchmark in a diffusely triggered trend than a watershed.

In a chapter entitled “The Green Factor” and elsewhere in the book, Cole presents environmentalism as another important reason for the spread of biodynamics. In Oregon, the green movement has a long tradition and sets the tone in the urban consumer milieu. Organizations devoted to conservation are numerous. Among them is the American chapter of Demeter, the biodynamic certification society. For the state’s eco-conscious consumers, an affiliation with one of these groups is a sign of a winery’s environmental awareness and commitment to sustainability. Most Oregon wine is sold in the local market. Therefore, biodynamics possesses a promotional cachet that may be an incentive to winegrowers. Nevertheless, Cole concludes that the voodoo vintners have embraced the method not as a marketing tool but as a means to produce good wine while remaining faithful to environmentalist values, which is almost the same thing but

not quite. Some of the wine is not good: “Biodynamically farmed grapes make fascinating wines. They also make banal wines” (x), says Cole. (All the same, bad biodynamic wine that does not sell would be evidence of sincerity.) Beyond a Pinot Gris that Cole found “crisp and clean” and “pure” (vii), whether biodynamic wine has a concretely distinctive taste is unstated, and Cole doubts that biodynamics has much to do with expressing terroir. Of the biodynamic wines I have tasted, most have been almost startlingly vibrant and fresh and had a subtle seawater tang, something a professional winemaking acquaintance described as the “*gout biodynamique*” and which may simply be unadulterated umami. The vagueness of this terminology notwithstanding, it would be interesting to know whether biodynamic wine is equally popular in places where the green movement is weak. Such a comparison might reveal whether consumers buy (and winegrowers produce) biodynamic wine for the flavor or the idea.

As explained in the chapter “Big Biodynamics,” saving money is also a reason to adopt Steinerian farming. The method relies chiefly on small quantities of natural, often homemade field sprays and the precise zodiacal timing of vineyard work and winemaking. The main piece of special equipment required is a simple machine for stirring the sprays. Once established, biodynamics may reduce vine-tending and grape-processing costs by improving a vineyard’s disease and pest resistance, vigor, and fruit, Cole writes. The cost of farming at 230-acre Montinore Estates in Forest Grove is \$3,200 per acre, which is \$1,300 per acre less than at nearby non-biodynamic Willamette Valley Vineyards, Cole reports. Montinore Riesling is available at a “ridiculously affordable” \$10 per bottle (113). Cole notes similar success at other West Coast biodynamic wineries of a comparable scale.

The book does not clarify whether biodynamic winegrowing is economical for all estates, however. Cole cites one winegrower’s estimate that biodynamic vineyards cost approximately 10 to 15 percent more to manage than other sustainably farmed vineyards. Cole attributes these added costs to the demands of proper composting; field-spray mixing; encouraging biodiversity, which can include farm animals; paperwork; and, amusingly, studying books on biodynamics. Demeter certification costs \$480. Annual renewals cost \$380 plus 0.5 percent of gross sales. A consultant receives approximately \$1,000 per visit, according to Cole. Where economies of scale are limited, these expenses must be passed on to the customer. Therefore, despite the attractive prices of certain wines and the abundance of receptive consumers, some biodynamic Oregon Pinot Noir remains a difficult sell.

Josh Bergström of 84-acre Bergström Wines comments: “Price is funny when it comes to Oregon. We are making efforts here that are world-class. We have some of the lowest yields in the state, and we implement a very expensive farming system. We pay our team very well. We have great packaging, and we buy nothing but the best French barrels. If we followed the lead of Napa, Burgundy, or Bordeaux, our wine would be \$200. Our most expensive wine is \$85, and that’s still a tough pill for people to swallow” (134). Those words are either the death rattle of a voodoo

vintner on the verge of bankruptcy or a rehearsal for a chat with a loan officer about buying more land. Biodynamic Riesling specialist Jay Somers sympathizes: “It’s more about surviving than making money” (106). Bergström Pinot Noir is apparently not hard to swallow. The company’s world-class website can boast more accolades than Matt Kramer’s mother, and Somers recently bought a 40-acre vineyard and built a winery in partnership with Ernst Loosen, the Mosel Valley producer. One gets the impression that voodoo vintnering might involve a bit of voodoo financing too. In all, 1,274 acres of vineyard are farmed biodynamically in Oregon, which is approximately 6.5 percent of the state’s total 19,300 vineyard acres, according to Cole.

Despite an enthusiastic consensus that “it’s spiritual” (83), the underpinnings of biodynamics in Steiner’s revelations make Cole and the voodoo vintners uncomfortable. To provide some context, in 1924, in response to an increasing concern among European farmers about environmental degradation, Steiner gave a series of lectures that became the basis of practical biodynamics. Known in English as the *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture*, the lectures pose many challenges to readers accustomed to keeping their feet on the ground. To say the least, Steiner’s view of agriculture was unconventional. For Steiner, a farm extends past the boundaries of perceived reality, and his approach to farming draws on his acquaintance with supernatural forces and beings that influence plant growth. When Steiner said that agriculture is about healing the earth, he was speaking of curing imbalances in the physical realm by nourishing the connection to a universe beyond the senses. Yields, quality, profitability, environmental impact — the concerns of the modern winegrower — are not the primary focus of Steiner’s ideas. If anything, the recipe for superior Pinot Noir is a coincidental reward for cleansing one’s soul of delusions and opening oneself to a reality that is not centered on the ego. Steiner is “out there” in the best Zen sense of detachment, yet not contemplative. Biodynamic agriculture is a farm for active self-transcendence.

Voodoo Vintners dedicates one chapter to a summary of Steiner’s life and thought. Given the book’s humble ambitions, this sketch might be sufficient. Readers with an appetite for a thorough treatment of Steiner’s interests and achievements, which lead far and wide into questions of science, philosophy, and spirituality, may prefer Colin Wilson’s helpful *Rudolf Steiner: The Man and his Vision*. Wilson says little about biodynamics, but he succeeds where Cole does not in communicating the attraction and earnestness of Steiner’s work. I optimistically took up Cole’s book expecting guidance in the obscurities of biodynamics and Steiner-mind. I finished it with the feeling I had just misspent two hours channel-surfing.

For her part, Coles expresses a desire to address Steiner’s unusual ideas directly (28). Nevertheless, she avoids discussing the lectures, retreating instead to the skepticism she establishes in her introduction. Biodynamics, she writes, is accompanied by “a lot of extraneous spiritual baggage that I can’t help but view cynically” (x). Cole is a journalist and schooled in incredulity. However, she is not alone in her hardheadedness. Regarding Steiner’s visions, Demeter USA executive

director Jim Fullmer says, “We are pragmatic, practical people. We don’t take a lot of bullshit” (8). Even the voodoo vintners find it difficult to go further than Sam Tannahill, who underlines the importance of thoughts and feelings to farming practices, or Robert Gross, whose website mentions gravity and magnetism but says nothing about the immaterial beings who for Steiner play an indispensable role in farming. “Astonishing” turns out to mean noncommittal, and to commune as Steiner did with sylphs, undines, gnomes, and salamanders is not a reason for any winegrower portrayed in the book to pursue the agricultural epiphany of a superb bottle of wine. I find this general halfheartedness disappointing.

Cole develops her aversion to mysticism by historicizing biodynamics and questioning Steiner’s character. She provides anecdotal evidence that the herbs used in the biodynamic field sprays are part of the agricultural tradition of Iran. Admittedly, certain aspects of Steiner’s theology were Zoroastrian. However, the value of Cole’s suggestion that biodynamics is just another term for Middle Eastern natural farming is difficult to judge without a comparison of Steiner’s explanation of the sprays with the corresponding Zoroastrian accounts. Cole also implies that biodynamics is the result of plagiarism and faddism, which is trivialization and unfair to an original and insightful thinker. In addition, Cole writes that Steiner was “lonely,” “schizophrenic,” “a budding homosexual” in youth and unable to consummate “his later marriages to women [sic]”(31–32). For Cole, allegations like these disqualify Steiner (not to mention many of my favorite writers), although we are encouraged to patronize him: “It can’t have been easy to grow up in the environment that bred the First World War and then Nazism. Steiner dealt with the instability around him by believing that he possessed supernatural powers that would help him to rise above the chaos” (30). That statement is the most ingenuous summary of the great Austro-Hungarian cultural convulsion that you will find and delivers on the promise of “simple.”

Fleeing the chance for some one-on-one with Big Weird, Cole takes cover behind Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, Maria Thun, and Lynn Carpenter-Boggs, who have worked to transform Steiner’s agro-esotericism into how-to farming techniques. Pfeiffer (1899–1961), a German soil scientist, promulgated Steiner’s ideas in the U.S. after immigrating in 1940. Cole writes that Pfeiffer “should rightfully be deemed the genius behind biodynamics” (39). Warranted or not, Cole’s elevation of Pfeiffer is part of a strategy of discrediting Steiner, in which the practitioners presented in the book share to differing degrees. Scattered attributions of a protobiodynamics to Goethe, an uncompromising anti-reductionist who inspired Steiner but whose supreme literary gift and canonical status protect him from attack, also contribute to the pattern of isolating Steiner, divorcing biodynamics from its cryptic origins, and emphasizing the method’s practical, testable aspects.

Such diversionary tactics are understandable. If the intellectual environment of Cole and the voodoo vintners is anything like mine, they inhabit an embattled realm in which mechanistic, strictly quantitative thinking has more generous modes of thought on the defensive. Even in a culture as open-minded as Oregon’s, these

circumstances make it nearly impossible to take Steiner at his word much less adopt the down-to-earth approach to interpreting him that Cole touches on in a paragraph about phenomenology (34). Although Cole does not follow up on her idea, Steiner, who saw himself as a spiritual scientist, might have welcomed a view of his thought that equated subjectivity and objectivity, as absurd as that balance may appear to a rationalist. In any case, to fully digest Steiner and the expanded existence he saw, the solid nutrients of reason should be supplemented with the enzymes of intuition; inner, somatic, and qualitative experience; imagination; the arts; and myth. In groping for the truth of our unruly reality, we should avail ourselves confidently of all the means of knowing. If biodynamics cannot be contained by the Tetra Pak of the scientific method, it is not Steiner's fault.

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RICHARD G. LEAHY: *Beyond Jefferson's Vines: The Evolution of Quality Wine in Virginia*, Sterling Epicure, New York, 2012, 240 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4027-9774-3 (hardback), \$19.95.

I got carsick reading a significant portion of this book but it wasn't because I was doing so in a moving vehicle. Here is an example of why: "Leaving Tarara on Rt. 658 and continuing northwest, you'll intersect Rt. 15 again. Turn right onto Rt. 15 and make sure to put on your left turn signal and turn left on Rt. 672 before you find yourself suddenly going over the Potomac River into Maryland. At the intersection of Rt. 287, continue straight, now on Rt. 673, which soon becomes Rt. 690." (pp. 101–102) Between pages 56 and 163, passages like this mar Leahy's otherwise honest and useful portrait of the Old Dominion's mushrooming wine industry. Ironically, while he admires the achievements of Virginia's vineyard growers and winemakers due in large part to the implementation of modern technology, Leahy himself ignores the advent of online mapping and the Global Positioning System in favor of these turn-by-turn instructions. Does he really expect wine tourists to take the hardback book along, prop it up on the dash and read the directions while behind the wheel? Absurdly, he neglects to include addresses, phone numbers, and websites of the wineries he visited. Instead, almost as an afterthought on the very last page, he points you to his website, www.beyondjeffersonvines.com, for tasting notes.

Nevertheless, there is much to recommend in this volume by a well-credentialed resident connoisseur of Virginia wines. In it, we are treated to an overview of four centuries of grape-growing in the commonwealth, a grand tour of wineries and vineyards, a brief discussion of the importance of support from the state government, cameos of several "Virginia Women of the Vine," and an up-to-date

snapshot of the challenges and efforts to gain domestic and worldwide recognition and market share for the industry.

Leahy divides the 400-year history of the commercial wine industry in Virginia, America's oldest, into 5 phases, each fitting nicely into one century beginning with the seventeenth. In 1619, the Jamestown Assembly passed Acte 12 which required under penalty that each male head of household plant 10 (incorrectly stated as 20 in the book) imported vinifera vines with the intent of supplying wine to Great Britain. When this proved unsuccessful for various reasons, not the least of which was an inhospitable environment, efforts turned to growing tobacco. Experiments with *vitis vinifera* continued the following century most notably by Thomas Jefferson at Monticello and at a farm named Colle. While his efforts failed, it was recently learned that others were fruitful even before Jefferson's first attempt in 1771. One of the more fascinating tales recounts the discovery of records of the work of Charles Carter whose success was certified by the Royal Governor in 1763. In the nineteenth century, the emphasis was on native and hybrid grapes especially norton, named after Dr. Daniel Norton. As Leahy notes: "It is unclear whether Dr. Norton manually 'created' the variety by physically hybridizing it, or whether hybridization was accidental, due to cross-pollination in his garden..." (pp. 26–27). To this day, norton remains a popular and versatile alternative to the traditional *vinifera* grapes, producing a range of styles from rosé to table reds to port-like dessert wines. With a recognized world-class grape that flourished in the Virginia climate, things were looking up. "Unfortunately, just as the promise of quality commercial Virginia viticulture was being realized, Prohibition took hold in 1914." (p. 27) It wasn't until the middle of the twentieth century that the wine industry began a very slow recovery. Now in the twenty-first century and well into the fifth phase, Old Dominion's vinous odyssey has taken a sharp turn toward the promised land, a wine industry with serious national and international creds.

Leahy describes visits to dozens of wineries and vineyards in the six American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) and other regions in all parts of Virginia. When I was taken off of the virtual road and directed into a tasting room or vineyard, I was treated to insights into the personalities and opinions of the proprietors and varying degrees of detail on the grapes grown and/or the wines produced. During my residence in Alexandria, Virginia from 2004 to 2011, I visited several of the wineries that are mentioned by Leahy. For the most part, his impressions matched mine. For example, I was quite taken by Linden Vineyards which I visited twice leaving each time with a mixed case of truly impressive bottlings of Bordeaux blends and seyval blanc, a hybrid varietal that has been a guilty pleasure of mine. On the other hand, Leahy is too kind to even briefly mention Naked Mountain Winery & Vineyards which I consider a genuine blemish. Perhaps its inclusion is due to it having "one of the best slogans in the business: Drink Naked!" (p. 86) I'll demur.

Leahy points out that experimentation to determine the most suitable grape varietals for the various Virginia terroirs continues. Several of the winemakers

quoted in the book cite viognier as Virginia's signature grape. I certainly found the examples I've tasted to be noteworthy. I have also been impressed with some of the chardonnay, the varietal with the most acreage. Cabernet franc and petit verdot are also mentioned as producing very successful wines, an observation that once again matches my personal experience. Nebiollo also does surprisingly well in selected sites. As a transplant to Oregon's Willamette Valley, I found it amusing to read that pinot noir is produced by some wineries.

Stylistically, the wines of Virginia produced from vinifera grapes occupy the middle ground between those from Europe and those from California but lean more toward the former. Because of exceedingly inconsistent and occasionally inhospitable weather, fruit and alcohol tend to be much more restrained than in what comes from the west coast. Leahy quotes Rutger de Vink, founder of RdV Vineyards: "We're ripe but not as ripe as California; we're kind of between Napa and Bordeaux. . ." (p. 8) Virginia viogniers compare more favorably with those from the Rhône than with those from Paso Robles. The cabernet franc based wines are reminiscent of those from the Loire.

Any of the half dozen women in Virginia's wine industry introduced in the book would make delightful company over a glass of the local product. Lucie Morton, "a Virginia native with an international reputation as a viticulturist, vineyard consultant, and researcher" (p. 169) is in the spotlight first and gets the most ink. We also meet three winemakers, a regional sales manager, and a vineyard manager. Leahy notes "that despite a lopsided gender balance, women can and do make valuable contributions to [the Virginia wine industry]" (p. 169).

Being personally involved in turning national and international attention to Virginia wines, Leahy is particularly well-qualified to write a book on the industry in the state. But the book he did produce suffers from a number of problems in addition to the one I opened this review with. Unfortunate ordering of chapters resulted in unnecessary repetition of material. Poor editing suggests a rush to print. Three uninspiring black and white photographs alternate as illustrations above chapter headings failing to do justice to the beauty of Virginia's vineyards. Especially irritating is the index. While its four three-column pages appear impressive, the listing is woefully incomplete. For example, Middleburg, recently named Virginia's seventh AVA, is not included nor is the historically significant Acte 12. At least one important fact in the five pages of additional information at the end of the book is out of date; the total economic impact of the wine and grape industry in the commonwealth is listed as \$362 million per year (no year given), which is less than half of the \$747 million in 2010 documented in a study commissioned by the Virginia Wine Board. Old Dominion's rapidly maturing wine industry is arguably the most exciting and potentially the most influential east of the Rockies. It certainly merits better treatment, perhaps along the lines of Cole Danehower's *Essential Wines and Wineries of the Pacific Northwest*.

Like the commonwealth's wine industry it describes, *Beyond Jefferson's Vines* has both glaring flaws but more than enough compensating virtues to fill the need for an authoritative reference adequately for the moment. One can only hope, however, that like the best winemakers we meet in his chapters, Leahy will learn from his mistakes and produce a much improved edition in a not too distant vintage.

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JAMES SIMPSON: *Creating Wine: The Emergence of a World Industry, 1840–1914*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2011, 344 pp., ISBN 978-0-6911-3603-5 (hardback), US\$ 39.50.

Please do not judge *Creating Wine* by its cover. The main title plus the illustrations of two grape vines might suggest that this is a book about practical viticulture or perhaps home winemaking. The devil is in the details and in this case the truth is in the subtitle (*The Emergence of a World Industry 1840–1914*). This is the story of how the world wine business evolved in the critical years before war in Europe and Prohibition in the United States when the roots of today's global industry were established.

The story told here is how different wine regions adjusted to exogenous shocks (such as the Phylloxera scourge) and disruptive technological change (such as improved rail and sea transportation) and how these differential responses set the industries on courses that still vary today. Significantly, Simpson finds his explanations not simply in history or culture, but instead in differences in relative factor abundancies (land scarce Old World, labor scarce New World) and differing patterns of political and economic power. Here's a summary of the basic argument.

There are many ways to characterize the Old World – New World dichotomy, but from an economic standpoint it can be boiled down to the fact that the Old World is dominated (if that's the right word) by small family winegrowers and by cooperative producers, which account for over half of total production in some regions. Wine growing and production are often separated from the marketing function. New World wine, by comparison, is highly concentrated and vertically integrated, with growing often a distinct business from production and marketing. The top five firms in the U.S. and Australia produce about 70 percent of the wine, according to Simpson's figures. The concentration ratio is only slightly less (50 percent) in Argentina and Chile. The figure is about 10 percent in Italy, France and Spain, although it is possible to find particular regions where a few (often cooperative) producers dominate. It would be easy to say that it is collective wine

versus corporate wine, but many large U.S. wine firms are family-owned so the stereotype doesn't completely fit.

These differences aren't new, Simpson argues, but rather evolved over the period covered by his book in response to six "distinct but interrelated" factors: production conditions (*terroir*), traditions (path dependency), technology and technological change, the nature of market demand, the responsiveness of the political system to the plight of small producers, and particular forms of political organization. The political factors are especially relevant in understanding the differential government policy responses to periodic crises related to fraud, adulteration and over-production. Simpson weaves these six factors together in complex ways, showing that no single cause is responsible for the final effect.

This is rigorous political economy analysis (the author is professor of economic history at the Carlos III University of Madrid) so, although there are no equations, there are plenty of useful tables and charts, which add to the story, as well as some useful maps. And although it wouldn't hurt to have taken an introductory economics class to understand some of the terminology, I don't think this is a firm pre-requisite. I found the writing to be clear and interesting.

Part I focuses on Europe and particularly France and introduces in quick succession the problems of the railroads (19th century globalization), Phylloxera and the development of viticultural science, and the political economy of the response to fraud caused in part by Phylloxera-driven shortages of wine grapes. The rest of the book examines Europe's failure to penetrate export markets (especially the U.K.) followed by comparative analyses of the evolving wine industries in Bordeaux, Champagne, Spain, Portugal, the U.S., Australia and Argentina. A final chapter brings things forward to the present.

I enjoyed this book because of the way it helped me make connections. In every chapter I found two or three interesting facts that I already knew and then Simpson supplied the key connecting idea. Suddenly it all made sense! A very satisfying (and informative) read. Let me pick one example to illustrate. Thousands of Chinese workers came to the United States in the 19th century to help build the transcontinental railroad. Many remained, especially on the West Coast, after the Golden Spike was driven home. Cheap, hardworking and quick to master new skills, they became the backbone of the California wine industry.

But economic conditions changed and anti-Chinese attitudes emerged and many were driven from the country; an underlying labor shortage was revealed, only partially bridged by fresh immigrants from Italy and other European countries. The problem of scarce and expensive labor became the defining economic constraint of American wine, Simpson tells us (just as the uneconomic division and re-division of European vineyards over time defined Old World wine economics). The technical innovation of a "vertical" winery, where the force of

gravity moved the grapes and juice from one part of the production process to the next, was created to economize on labor, Simpson says, not just to provide more gentle treatment of the grapes as a dozen wine tour guides must have told me over the years.

Getting a better understanding of the past is satisfying, but I think what I like best about *Creating Wine* is the way it helped me think about the present and the future. Exogenous shocks are still with us, technological change (the now widespread use of 24,000 liter bulk wine ocean shippers) is there, too, and the problem of penetrating new export markets is with us, too. Reflecting on the past in this way promotes a deeper appreciation of current issues and

Creating Wine is a good book for anyone who loves wine economics, wine history or ... wine! Highly recommended.

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ROGER SCRUTON: *I Drink Therefore I Am. A Philosopher's Guide to Wine*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009, 214 pp., ISBN 978-1-4411-7067-5 (paperback), \$19.95.

Though I bought the book in Leeds, England, during a conference where I met the author, I read most of it during another conference in unbearably hot Odessa, Ukraine, sitting and drinking (unfiltered, I insist) beer in a German beer cellar.

The title of Scruton's book, a reminder of Descartes' *I think therefore I am*, does not tell it all. Descartes was a serious man and though he was born in Touraine, a wine region, did probably not drink much. Scruton is often very funny, serious at times (perhaps too much), knows wine very well, drinks and fondles it, writes on beauty (2009a), sexual desire (2006), is one among the great contemporary philosophers of music (1997, 2009b), and even composed two operas. He does not look very tender, but his (written) relations with wine, women, music and poetry are very delicate. And this starts very fast, in his Prelude (a musical term, of course) where he quotes Emerson "who commends the great wino Hafiz [a Persian poet] in the following words:"

Hafiz praises wines, roses, maidens, boys, birds, mornings and music, to give vent to his immense hilarity and sympathy with every form of beauty and joy.

This is echoed in Scruton's terms (p. 5) that "by thinking with wine you can learn not merely to drink in thoughts, but think in draughts. Wine, drunk at the right time, in the right place and the right company, is the path to meditation, and the harbinger of peace."

Chapter 2 is devoted to his friends who made him “fall” for wine (or is it *he* who made *them* fall) and his acquisition of a 1945 Château Lafite, “the greatest year from the greatest of clarets,” to which I will get back later with a nice suggestion. The chapter ends on a remark (p. 27) concerned with the “new habit, associated with American wine critics like Robert Parker, of assigning points to each bottle” which should not only be “viewed with nothing but contempt” but also compared to “assigning points to symphonies, as though Beethoven’s 7th, Tchaikovsky’s 6th, Mozart’s 39th, Bruckner’s 8th all hovered between 90 and 95.”

In Chapter 3 Scruton goes for a walk (or is it biking?) on a Tour de France of wines, starting in Burgundy, down to the Rhône Valley, the Pyrenees, including Collioure (pp. 52–54)—where some editors of the *Journal of Wine Economics* have a very dear old friend—and ending in Bordeaux with Eliot’s description of a spiritual journey that applies equally to a journey through wine:

We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

The exploration also discusses wines that, at least to me, are not well known (p. 59), but “as with women and horses, the real best is the second best.” This is very similar to what Orley Ashenfelter and I decided to do when we have to choose a bottle of Champaign: Always go for the cheapest.

With much reason, Scruton does not think very highly of blind tasting (p. 34): “To think that you can judge a wine from its taste and aroma alone is like thinking you can judge a Chinese poem by its sound, without knowing the language.” We can all agree on this after having applauded wine experts at the Princeton AAWE Conference in June 2012, where a blind tasting was organized to reproduce the famous 1976 Judgment of Paris (see Taber, 2005). But this time New Jersey and not Californian wines were compared to the same French wines than in 1976, though from a later vintage. The ‘expert’ tasters concluded that out of ten red wines, nine (including Châteaux Mouton-Rothschild, Haut-Brion, Leoville Las Cases, Montrose, and five NJ wines) were (statistically) not distinguishable.¹

My only problem with the chapter is that Scruton defines himself as a *terroiriste*.² I am not since I believe that terroir is chemistry. This was already the opinion expressed by Johan Joseph Krug (1800–1866), a famous champagne producer, who

¹The judgment of white wines was similar. For details, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgment_of_Princeton.

²I am grateful to Roger for correcting my spelling of the word as “terroirist” in a previous version. I preferred it without the “e”, an almost voluntary slip of the pen.

suggested that “a good wine comes from a good grape, good vats, a good cellar and a gentleman who is able to coordinate the various ingredients.”³ No trace of terroir.

Chapter 4 brings “news from elsewhere:” the Middle-East where wine was born; Greece where Bacchus, Dionysos, and more importantly, Eros used to hover; the United States; Australia, New Zealand and their misspelling of Syrah as Shiraz, the Iranian city of poets, gardens, nightingales and last but not least, wine; a few lines on South Africa, then Italy, Romania and Spain. But “travel narrows the mind, and the further you go the narrower it gets. There is only one way to visit a place with an open mind, and that is in the glass” (p. 84). Scruton had already warned the reader in chapter 3 (p. 54) not to read the “elsewhere” chapter: “After punishing body and soul with Australian Shiraz, Argentine Tempranillo, Romanian Cabernet Sauvignon and Greek Retsina, we crawl home like the Prodigal Son and beg forgiveness for our folly. . . [Claret] is the wine that made us and for which we were made, and it often astonishes me to discover that I drink anything else.”

This is for the “I drink” part of the book. Its author then moves to the “therefore I am” part which often needs much deeper philosophical knowledge than my very basic understanding of aesthetics only, which should but does not even include Immanuel Kant. Meanwhile, it rejoices me that even a man as serious as Kant “enjoyed wine and provided a pint bottle for each guest at his regular dinner parties” (p. 104). If this was merely a US pint (473 milliliters), I would have turned down his invitations, though even the imperial pint used in the UK (568 milliliters) would have left me quite unhappy.

In passing, Scruton evokes the great philosopher Avicenna who lived in Isfahan (Persia) during Islam’s Golden Age (980–1037 AD); he was a wine *aficionado* who recommended drinking at work defying “the Koranic injunction against wine, citing it as an example of sloppy reasoning,” (p. 109) that does not take into account whether it is a small or a large amount. Scruton (p. 133) also points to the fact that “in *surah* xvi, verse 7 of the Koran wine is unreservedly praised as one of God’s gifts. As the prophet, burdened by the trials of his Medina exile, became more tetchy, so did his attitude to wine begin to sour, as in *surah* v verses 91-92. Muslims believe that the later revelations cancel the earlier, whenever there is a conflict between them. I suspect, however, that God moves in a more mysterious way.”

Scruton is also quite skeptical that the vocabulary used by so-called experts to describe wine is of much help (pp. 125–126, 134, 137): “If I say of a wine that it has a flowery nose, lingers on the palate, with ripe berry flavours and a hint of chocolate and roasted almonds, then what I say conveys real information, from which someone might be able to construct a sensory image of the wine’s taste. But I have described the taste in terms of other *tastes*, and not attempted to attach a meaning, a content, or any kind of reference to it. The description I gave does not imply that the

³ See also Gergaud and Ginsburgh (2010).

wine evokes, means, symbolizes or presents the idea of chocolate; and somebody who didn't hit on this word as a description of the wine's flavour would not show that he had missed the meaning of what he drank or indeed missed anything important at all. Our experience of wine is bound up with its nature as a drink [which] endows wine with a particular inwardness [and] intimacy with the body [that is not] achieved by any smell, since smell makes no contact with the body at all, but merely enchants without touching, like the beautiful girl at the other end of the party. . . . Nothing else that we eat or drink comes to us with such a halo of significance, and by refusing to drink it people send an important message—the message that they do not belong on this earth.” Useless to add that I fully agree.

The last two chapters deal respectively with wine and whine, and being and bingeing. Though Scruton has something to say in favor of Puritanism, he castigates the ease with which (p. 140) “puritan outrage [and in particular, prohibition, but also sexual behaviour] can be displaced from one topic to another, and the equal ease with which the thing formerly disapproved of can be overnight exonerated from all taint of sin.”

He vehemently protests against “the humourless mullahs,” and the misuse of drinking, but also rejects the idea that fermented drinks are just shots of alcohol, and insists on their social functions across civilizations and time (pp. 144–160): “The burden of my arguments is that we can defend the drinking of wine, only if we see that it is a culture, and that this culture has a social, outward-going, other-regarding meaning. . . . When people sit down together sipping drinks, they rehearse in their souls the original act of settlement, the act that set our species on the path of civilization, and which endowed us with the order of neighbourhood and the rule of law.” But he has not much against drinking alone, and ends with a few words from the Chinese poet Li Po (700 BC), the same poet whom Mahler used in his *Lied von der Erde* (though in a very approximate translation):

A cup of wine, under the flowering trees;
I drink alone, for no friend is near.
Raising my cup I beckon the bright moon,
For he, with my shadow, will make three men.

Scruton knows that the best (including Li Po's poetry) should be kept for the very end. The *bouquet* (of the wine, but in French the word is also used for the finishing of a firework) comes with the Appendix: *What to drink with what*, though here the second *what* does not stand for food, but for philosophers.

St Augustine (p. 178): Drink a glass of Moroccan Cabernet Sauvignon, though “the *City of God* requires many sittings, and I regard it as one of the rare occasions when a drinking person might have legitimate recourse to a glass of lager [which I did in Odessa, while reading Scruton], putting the book to one side just as soon as the glass is finished” [which I did not do, since I had three glasses, each of which containing half a liter].

Bacon (pp. 181–182): “Any discussion of his insights should, I think, proceed by the comparative method. I suggest opening six bottles of a single varietal—say Cabernet Franc—one from the Loire, one from California, one from Moravia, one from Hungary, and if you can find two other places where it is grown successfully you will already have given some proof of the inductive method—and then pretending to compare and contrast, taking notes in winespeak, while downing the lot.”

Descartes (p. 182): “As the thinker who came nearest, prior to the Monty Python, to stumbling on the title of [my] book, Descartes deserves a little recognition. . . . He has ended up as the most overrated philosopher in history, famous for arguments that begin from nothing and go nowhere. I would suggest a deep dark Rhône wine [that] will compensate for the thinness of the *Meditations*.”

Spinoza (p. 182): “The last time that I understood what Spinoza meant by an attribute it was with a glass of red Mercurey, Les Nauges 1999. Unfortunately, I took another glass before writing down my thoughts and have never been able to retrieve them.”

Kant (p. 184): “And when it comes to [his] *Critique of the Judgment*, I find myself trying out [several wines], without getting any close to Kant’s proof that the judgment is universal but subjective, or his derivation of the ‘antinomy of taste’—surely one of his most profound and troubling paradoxes, and one that must yield to the argument contained in wine if it yields to anything.”

Nietzsche (p. 189): “Although we should drink to the author of *The Birth of the Tragedy*, therefore, it should be with a thin, hypochondriac potion, maybe a finger of Beaujolais in a glass topped up with soda-water.”

Husserl (p. 189): “I recommend three glasses of slivovitz from Husserl’s native Moravia, one to give courage, one to swallow down the jargon, and one to pour over the page.”

Sartre (pp. 190–192, passim): “Sartre’s great work of philosophy, *L’être et le néant*, introduces the Nothingness that haunts all that he wrote and said. . . . If ever I were to read Sartre again, I would look for a 1964 Burgundy to wash the poison down. Small chance of finding one, however, so there is one great writer whom I shall never again revisit—and I thank God for it.”

Heidegger (p. 192): “What potion to complement the philosopher who told us that ‘nothing noths’? To raise an empty glass to one’s lips, and to feel it as it travels down—noth, noth, noth, the whole length of the tube: this surely is an experience to delight the real connoisseur.”

It’s now time for me to conclude. Obviously, due to his publicly admitted very conservative leanings, Roger does not mention that Karl Marx’s family were the happy owners of a vineyard on the Ruwer, an affluent of the Mosel. The family sold

it, but there still exists a Karl Marx wine, of which I own a bottle that lies in my (not air-conditioned) cellar and at which I look from time to time. This is a bit like Roger whose bottle of 1945 Château Lafite “accompanied me through life’s turmoil’s like a talisman, but that I judged too good to share, except with that special person whom I had never met, and too good to drink alone unless to mark some new beginning.” (p. 26).

I promise to open my Karl Marx wine if Roger visits me. But then, in all fairness, he should come and have his 1945 Château Lafite with me.

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TADASHI AGI and SHU OKIMOTO: *The Drops of God*, vol. 1-5, New York: Vertical Inc., 2011, 432 pp., ISBN 978-1935654278 (vol. 1) (paperback), \$14.95. 2011, 416 pp.; ISBN 978-1935654292 (vol. 2) (paperback), \$14.95. 2012, 416 pp.; ISBN 978-1935654360 (vol. 3) (paperback), \$14.95. 2012, 392 pp.; ISBN 978-1935654391 (vol. 4) (paperback), \$14.95.

Introduction

I approached *The Drops of God* (DG) as a serious skeptic. After all, how could a career economist steeped in neoclassical theory find kinship in a 400 page comic book? Surprisingly, DG made short work of my inner skeptic, as my curiosity gave way to genuine interest before yielding entirely to the charms of my first full length graphic novel. Perhaps the contrast itself is the appeal – the animated storylines offer a welcome respite from the left brain-dominant world we economists inhabit. I recommend readers of this journal seeking an entertaining diversion to consider

picking up volume 1. If you take the initial step, here's betting you'll soon be buying the next volume too.

DG is a multivolume wine-themed Japanese graphic novel ("*manga*"), currently making its English translation debut one volume at a time. This review is based on the first four volumes available in English. The manga was originally published as a comic strip in a weekly newspaper in Japan beginning in the early 2000s, before becoming a 34 volume series of graphic novels there (with a total of 48 volumes planned). The Fall 2008 issue of this journal provides an insightful review of the original Japanese version of the series (Musolf, 2008). DG's popularity spawned translation into French, Korean, Taiwanese, and now English, as well as a television adaptation in Japan. Two siblings, successful manga authors writing under the pen name Tadashi Agi, created the series and Shu Okimoto provides attractive illustration. The English language publisher currently plans to print five volumes, which covers ten Japanese volumes.

Plot and Presentation

DG's storylines offer compelling drama that alternate between moments of swift action and periods of reflection. The main plot builds around Shizuku Kanzaki, the son of Japan's premier wine critic who, in an act of youthful rebellion, had vowed never to drink wine. When his father dies suddenly, he learns he must vie to inherit his mansion and world-class wine collection. The competition stipulated by his father's will requires Shizuku attempt to identify a list of twelve wines (Apostles) favored by his father, plus the divine "Drops of God", based on his poetic written descriptions. His opponent is his father's rising star protégé wine critic and adopted second son.

Against this backdrop, a lively tale of intrigue and hijinks ensues. This pursuit takes our protagonists to far corners—exclusive Tokyo restaurants, Burgundian vineyards, the Taklimakan Desert in China, even a homeless wine guru's makeshift shelter. The authors convey a deep reverence for exceptional wines, at times accompanied by emotional content that keeps the reader engaged. I unexpectedly found it hard to put down.

Part of the appeal stems from the vivid descriptions of wines sprinkled throughout each volume—evoking fields of wildflowers, crystalline lakes, rock concerts, and priceless works of art. Volume 3 describes the 2002 Chateau Lafite-Rothschild:

Plump, mature, almost pitch black cherry aromas. A bright forest full of foliage and frolicking animals. Germany's swan castle. A beauty pregnant with madness, timeless architecture, surviving the ages, reflecting antiquity, modernity, and even futurity. Lafite is the stately calm of an old castle.

Similarly, the series lionizes legendary winemakers like Henri Jayer, who buck convention to chart their own courses, resulting in exceptional quality.

Through their characters, the authors demonstrate their affinity for premier French and Italian wines, which dominate the discourse. Yet, they provide balance by touting the quality and accessibility of lesser-known value wines. This duality offers newcomers a pathway to gain a foothold in the market by introducing them to affordable wines now, while stoking their aspirations to taste the superstar Grand Crus later. The first four volumes of DG make scant mention of other wine regions including those in the U.S., although I understand some later volumes of the original Japanese versions are devoted to them.¹

Influence

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the series is the outsized influence ascribed to it by some in the wine industry. *Decanter* magazine called it, “Arguably the most influential wine publication for the last 20 years”. Such exaltations seem overblown at first blush, considering the hundreds of detailed tomes published over the period. Undoubtedly, the statement is meant to be provocative.

The evidence on its influence appears to be long on anecdotes and short on hard data. For example, numerous reported cases of changes in beverage ordering practices to include more wine within the Asian hospitality industry exist. Tales of demand spikes for specific wines mentioned by the series abound. More generally, the primary support for the DG’s influence remains the rapid growth of wine sales in Asia, marked by the emergence of Hong Kong as the world’s leading wine auction site by sales value, and the run-up in prices of high-end wines. This virtual explosion has roughly coincided with the publication dates of DG, beginning in 2004. Of course, no single publication or activity accounts for these remarkable market developments. The combination of globalization, rapid economic growth, wine investing, and the rising popularity of more traditional wine education surely share some of the credit.

Nonetheless, to the extent it educates readers, publication of this manga series could be credited with making basic wine knowledge far more popularly accessible than before. By lowering barriers to entry, DG may well facilitate market expansion, perhaps both for the specific wines it features and for wine generally.

It is impossible to definitively verify the claims of the series’ influence on demand (particularly Asian) given the numerous contemporaneous dynamics in the global wine market. Still, if the data were available, an economist could attempt to test its influence statistically. For example, a general approach might test for structural breaks in the time-series relationships between French wine prices and their determinants before and after the publication of the series in different countries.

¹ Volume 5 of the English translation series, released after this review was written, focuses on New World wines, particularly on California and Australia.

However, this could create an attribution problem if a break were found. Another option might take pooled data on price and its determinants and incorporate a dummy variable (and interaction terms) to designate specific wines (and their vintages) mentioned by DG to assess potential influence on price. A variation could use an event study method to assess potential “excess returns” to prices of these specific wines by comparing them to a broader wine price index such as the Liv-ex 100. In principle, this approach would mitigate the attribution concern, however, it may be complicated by the potential information spillover effects of different overlapping publication timelines in neighboring countries (DG began publication in Japan in 2004, South Korea in 2005, Taiwan in 2006, and China in 2010).

Education Value and Human Character

How credible is the claim that DG is an important knowledge dissemination vehicle? The series appears designed in part as a heuristic tool. Its central character is a wine novice who serves as a ready point of departure for readers to learn about wines alongside him. In Shizuku Kanzaki’s initial encounters, he stumbles to grasp some basic precepts of wine knowledge and appreciation. But armed with a cocksure attitude and youthful exuberance, he forges ahead and becomes an educational conduit for the wine neophyte reader.

In this vein, the series offers numerous potentially useful, yet entertaining, basic oenological lessons. They touch upon, for example, the influence of soil on resulting wine characteristics, the restrained winemaker’s ability to reveal the essence of a grape, and proper pairing of wines with food. While the graphic format avoids technical language and greatly simplifies these insights, it undoubtedly helps educate at least some who would otherwise avoid making the investment in a more conventional wine education.

DG’s true pedagogical value may lie in its function as an initial hook to engage a previously disinterested (and likely considerably younger than typical wine aficionado) audience. If a subset later becomes more fully immersed in knowledge acquisition, accompanied by wine consumption and collection, one could conclude the market had been influenced, perhaps profoundly so.

DG’s depiction of wine as revelatory of personal character and wisdom was particularly intriguing to me. For instance, the series describes a range of personalities who experience wines in distinct ways—as purely a money-making business interest, as an instrument for psychological recovery, as a pathway to true knowledge, etc. Wine helps to reveal and sometimes improve character, and these profiles emerge via compelling episodic storylines.

In one case, an elderly father who bequeaths his small wine shop to his quarrelsome sons buys a large amount of a Marsannay village wine and counsels them to learn from the experiences of its sibling winemakers.

I want you two to be like the brothers Philippe and Vincent Lecheneaut who made their domaine succeed – that’s the message this wine bears. Domaine Lecheneaut was founded by their father Fernand. It was a puny domaine. Their father died in ’86. .the brothers were at their wits end. .the two of them had completely different personalities. Their views were opposite as well. Just like you two. .As long as their agendas clashed in each bottle, there was no way their wine could move the drinker. They saw this and began to confer about all stages, so they could draw out each other’s strengths. While the older brother tended to the grapes, the younger turned them into wine. All for the single purpose of “creating a moving wine”. And eventually their talents blossomed. .In 1991, they achieved their dream. .wines labeled “Domaine Philippe et Vincent Lecheneaut” bearing both brothers names saw the light of day. .their wine became the talk of critics and enthusiasts. In the end, Robert Parker, Jr., strict in his ratings of Burgundies, came to award a perfect score of 100 to their Grand Cru, Clos de la Roche. .I want you working together to build up the dull, dinky shop I’m leaving you. Make it into the biggest wine shop in Japan. Be like the Lecheneaut brothers.

Readers know intuitively that wine alone cannot fundamentally alter human character. Yet, I found an enjoyable part of the experience to be my own willingness to suspend disbelief as the story unfolded. Imagining a world that benefits from having wine play a more primary role in social and professional relationships becomes easier to do thanks to DG. That alone is an achievement.

Closing Thoughts

As a first time manga reader, my expectations for this series were low. Yet, as a wine lover and Asia-watcher, I found the series surprisingly appealing. While it is no substitute for the deeper knowledge gained through serious study and experience, it artfully helps to demystify wine for those who may have considered it too formidable or simply lacked interest, while providing high entertainment value. Readers of this journal seeking a head-clearing break from data-intensive analytic work will benefit from test driving the first volume. You might find yourself transported into a parallel realm devoid of data but rich in drama, artistry, and imagination, all closely intertwined with our favorite liquid companion.

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MADELEINE PULLMAN AND ZHAOHUI WU: *Food Supply Chain Management: Economic, Social and Environmental Perspectives*. 2011, 312 pp., ISBN 978-0415885898 (paperback), \$89.95.

The food supply chain is interesting—and important—for a variety of reasons. First, we depend on food for survival. While we might do without the newest electronic device or consumer good because of a supply chain disruption, and incur little discomfort, disruptions in the food supply chain are much more problematic, having the potential to transform society (and not, I would argue, in a good way). Second, food is perishable. The nature of the product and how it's produced, affect that perishability. Perishability requires exceptionally well managed supply chains. Third, it's not one supply chain, but many—the chains vary greatly for meat, dairy, vegetables and fruit, for example. Even within a food type—seafood, for example—there is great variety in the chains. Fourth, the climate affects food production; most would argue that we have entered into a period of greater climate variation, resulting in less consistent food supplies. Fifth, we are seeing—at least in the United States of America—a rediscovery of food, with a large set of related and developing movements—to name a few, avoiding genetically modified organisms, eating seasonally, eating sustainably, farm-to-table, locavores, organic, nose-to-tail and knowing the provenance of one's food. Sixth, the price and availability of certain food products have resulted in food counterfeiting, particularly of seafood. Seventh, because food products are often comingled in the supply chain, tracking the movement from origin to consumption is a challenge, yet important because of food-borne pathogens and, potentially, food terrorism. Finally, the chains vary greatly in the size of the players involved, ranging from small, farmer-owned and run operations, to large multinational corporations.

The book delves into these issues and numerous others. Many people will find this book interesting—government employees who are responsible for regulating and monitoring food production, people in the food production industry, retailers of food products, restaurant supply chain managers, even the casual readers interested in what food chains are now and where they are heading.

The titles of the book's chapters, which give a good idea of what it covers, are: Introduction; Food Safety; Animal Protein Supply Chains; Commodity Crop Supply Chains; Fruit and Vegetable Supply Chains; Food Regulation and Verification Mechanisms; Food Service; Food Manufacturing and Logistics; Food Retailing; Food Aid and Hunger Relief; The Future of Food Supply Chain Management. Most chapters end with a company profile or case study. The chapters also have discussion questions, which would make the book well suited for educational purposes. Where appropriate, the authors provide information on the extent to which the chain is concentrated; it was surprising to see the extent that major players have at different levels of the chain for different items—the top two companies account for over 40% of the production of broiler chickens, for example. It's hard to single out one or two chapters to highlight, but for me the chapter on

Food Aid and Hunger Relief reinforced the challenges we're likely to face more often in the future, given weather-related disruptions to the supply chain.

As the book is chock full of facts and figures, the authors were thorough in their research. The book was an easy and generally engaging read. As I noted above, the use of company profiles and case studies helped ground the work. To me, the best single page in the book was Table 11.1, in which the authors compare conventional agriculture with alternative agriculture. The differences the authors point out, and the movement toward the latter, capture much of the challenges in food supply chain management (or, at least, gets one thinking about those challenges). This dichotomy can be divisive, because food brings out passions in people. To their credit, the authors have presented a balanced view, not only in this table but throughout the book. A big take away from the book for me was a much better understanding of the complexity of the food supply chain; that complexity helps explain why my favorite grocery store is sometimes out of stock of a desired item.

I have a couple of minor quibbles. I found some of the pictures and graphics hard to follow, perhaps that's because they were better suited to reproduction in color, yet were gray scale in the book. In particular, the graphics of the USA showing food production were hard to understand. There were also several tables that seemed to contain errors. Finally, the book is USA-centric. However, it's hard to imagine that people in other countries, with an interest in the topic, would not find it of great value.

On a more personal note, I would like to have seen a little on the supply chain for one of life's great sustenances: wine!

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