

That is what makes Pinot Noir wines so distinctive, with the best coming from Burgundy—the highest expression of special *terroir*. And, of course, no wines of Burgundy are more celebrated than those of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti.

Having gotten through this massive volume about the history and the wines of DRC without ever having tasted even a drop of any of these legendary wines, I should mark the occasion by opening a bottle. But, alas, I cannot afford even the “humblest” of DRC wines, or, for that matter, nearly any other Grand Cru Classé Burgundy. Much to my surprise, however, just now I found listed in my cellar database three bottles of 2007 Domaine Chandon de Briailles from the Les Bressandes vineyard in the Grand Cru appellation of Corton. If you will excuse me, I will close this review, and make my way downstairs to my cellar, with corkscrew and glass in hand.

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JOSEPH BOHLING: *The Sober Revolution: Appellation Wine and the Transformation of France*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2018, 306 pp., ISBN: 978-1501716041 (hardcover), \$47.95.

The global history of temperance has been overwhelmingly weighted towards the United States and the so-called British “dominions” of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. In some of the latter, there were established wine lobbies, but these were never very large or cohesive. The temperance movements, on the other hand, were well-organized, globally-connected, typically led by Protestant evangelicals and very largely driven by ordinary women. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was a veritable colossus that straddled North America, Asia, Africa, and Australasia. The literature on temperance in France and Italy—which were both the most prodigious producers and consumers of wine—is relatively sparse, contributing to the impression that there really was nothing much to report given a consensus that wine was part of the national

patrimony. And yet, as Bohling demonstrates, there was a profound transformation in French drinking habits after WWII. Overall alcohol consumption per capita declined and there was a marked shift from the consumption of cheap, “industrial” wines to those that emanated from designated appellations. Joseph Bohling provides an eminently convincing explanation for this outcome that explicitly links the production and consumption sides of the equation. Churches and women are pretty much absent from this particular story. This is much more about the efforts of modernizing technocrats to extend the reach of the state in alliance with the defenders of quality wine. Lined up on the other side were wine producers in the south of France and Algeria, whose interests were rarely aligned, as well as home distillers of alcohol across the regions. The latter advocated a free market for alcohol on the grounds of a defense of cultural heritage and of rural livelihoods, and expected their parliamentary representatives to fight in their corner. Bohling undertakes a meticulous unpicking of shifting alliances over roughly half a century until a point in the 1990s when the sober revolution eventually triumphed within the embrace of the European Union.

When it comes to the production side of the equation, Bohling eschews any temptation to draw a straight line from the sponsorship of the first legislation designed to tackle fraud and to promote appellations at the start of the 20th century, to the ultimate victory of a quality agenda. He highlights the ability of entrenched interests to repeatedly thwart reform through their blocking powers in the National Assembly. The net result was that the wine surplus needed to be dealt with by means of distillation and conversion into fuel at considerable public expense. The prodigious output of Algeria, which was defined as an integral part of France, presented an additional complexity. If wine was construed as quintessentially French, as its defenders insisted it should be, the prickly question that arose was where the boundaries of the “real” France began and ended.

In a revisionist vein, Bohling maintains that serious efforts to both refine the system of appellations and tackle overproduction actually began with the Vichy regime, which was relatively unencumbered by vested interests. But after the war a return to the status quo was accompanied by a renewed resistance to reform. Bohling argues that the ground really began to shift once defenders of public health and the advocates of economic modernization began to take an interest in alcohol consumption. Each maintained that while individual lives were being destroyed by excessive drinking, France as a country was being hobbled by its addiction to alcohol. Interestingly, some of the critics of the existing system, like René Dumont, whose writings on Africa were seminal, drew direct parallels with the travails of the French empire. For a historian of global temperance, what is striking is that parallel arguments in favor of temperance had been made in other parts of the world at an earlier juncture. The difference in the French case was that the state would intervene directly to address the surplus and the manner in which it was consumed. The relative strength of the National Assembly in the Fourth Republic allowed vested interests to momentarily ward off reform. Bohling reveals that the government of Pierre Mendès France actively promoted an anti-alcohol agenda,

exploiting its latitude to legislate by decree. It also established a High Commission for Studies and Information on Alcoholism (HCEIA), which began to find common ground with the National Institute of Appellations of Origin (INAO) and the National Confederation of Wine and Spirits (CNVS) in the 1950s. Although the regime collapsed in the context of the Algerian crisis, the government of Charles de Gaulle placed its own backing behind the alliance and drove the reform process forward.

Aside from the transformations in French politics, the game changers were the independence of Algeria, which reduced the need for France to absorb the vast production of this ex-colony, and the efflorescence of an increasingly urbanized middle class that embraced new consumption habits. In other parts of the world, temperance advocates were forced to strike compromises, which typically took the form of local option provisions that culminated in a patchwork of wet and dry areas. The compromise in France was between anti-alcohol advocates and the proponents of fine wine. The shared public message of “Drink Well, Drink a Little, in Order to Drink for a Long Time” was one that temperance purists elsewhere would no doubt have found difficult to swallow. In the French context, however, it seemed to underline that certain modes of wine consumption could still be construed as desirable provided they were associated with moderation. As the “quality coalition” exploited its access to government, the producers of cheap wines felt under attack. The losers were not just the large liquor concerns, but also the many small producers of the Languedoc who actively resisted what they regarded as a campaign from Paris to deprive them of their livelihoods. This has, of course, been dealt with extensively in Smith (2016).

In perhaps the most original chapter, Bohling looks more closely at the campaign against drunk driving and shows how a coalition of interests, including the promoters of regional tourism, the insurance companies, and government technocrats, raised the stakes in the 1960s and 1970s. This was partly justified in terms of the promotion of designated wine routes whose potential was supposedly being blighted by the everyday reality of death on the roads. Here, Bohling hits on the irony of wine tourism being sold through idyllic images of a timeless French countryside whereas in fact the anti-alcohol lobby had fought against the consumption (of beer, cider, and much else) to which rural populations had stubbornly adhered. Towards the end of the book, Bohling also addresses the potential threats surrounding European integration in the shape of a fresh inundation of cheap wine emanating from Italy. He demonstrates that the French authorities were highly successful in promoting their preferred version of interventionism which sought to reduce the volumes of wine produced while promoting the nomenclature of places of origin. Although this form of protectionism clearly pandered to the narrow interests of quality wine producers in the wealthier regions of France, the model travelled to other parts of Europe and also came to include products such as cheese—thereby establishing a new set of international norms for agriculture more broadly, and a new set of controversies.

Bohling's rich history sutures together a history of wine production and a history of consumption in a manner that makes infinitely more sense than considering each of these separately. Its strength resides in its close analysis of the politicking surrounding wine and the role of key lobby groups, institutional actors, and individual campaigners in retarding and effecting change. It is an account that is mostly written from the center, although regional dynamics are invoked at various junctures in the story. Again, it is not strictly speaking a social history of wine, but it does offer a convincing account for why drinking patterns changed. The book is also a tremendous pleasure to read. For anyone seeking to understand the history of interventionism in the French wine industry, and the victory of the campaign against alcoholism, this book should serve as the first port of call.

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