

BOOK AND FILM REVIEW

Cedric Klapisch (Director): *Back to Burgundy* (*Ce qui nous lie*)

Written by Cedric Klapisch, Santiago Amigorena, and Jean-Marc Roulot. Produced by Ce Qui Me Meut Motion Pictures, StudioCanal, and France 2 Cinéma. Distributed by Music Box Pictures and StudioCanal International, 2017. 1 h 53 min.

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This is a very French film; so do not expect anything remotely resembling *Top Gun*. But this is a film the French do very well, particularly Cedric Klapisch, who both wrote the film and directed it. The film tells the story of a multigenerational family inheriting a domaine (vineyard and winery) near Meursault in Burgundy. The inheritance and the payment of inheritance tax bring to the fore tensions within the family and between families—tensions that are ultimately resolved as the intergenerational transfer of the domaine is resolved.

The original title of the film, *Ce qui nous lie* (roughly translated as “what binds us”), is both descriptive and apt, since the real story is about multiple conflicts within a family, conflicts which are resolved in the end through the family’s connection to the land where their grapes are grown. To quote the eldest heir, Jean, “When you realize the land belongs to you, you also learn that you belong to the land.” Regrettably, the movie title in English is less descriptive, though perhaps more marketable: *Back to Burgundy*. An even more marketable title (though no more descriptive) might have been *A Year in Burgundy*, since the film covers almost exactly one year, from harvest to harvest, but that film title has been used before (and been reviewed in this journal).

The setup of the film is a small family vineyard and winery in Burgundy, run for many years by a man we do not meet, who dies and leaves the domaine to his three grown children. The three children have long ago gone their separate ways—the oldest son (Jean) has traveled the world working at various wineries, only to settle in Australia to own and run his own small winery—and in the process, get married and have a child. Another son (Jérémie) marries into a nearby and more successful wine family, and he is clearly not completely happy in that life, stuck with a domineering and opinionated father-in-law. We see less history for the middle child (Juliette). The events of the film are precipitated by the father’s becoming ill,

which brings Jean back from Australia to see his dad. The father dies, and the question becomes how the three siblings, with very different attitudes, can deal with their inherited winery and vineyard.

On one level, this film is about making wine in Burgundy. We learn about the subtleties of determining when the grapes are just right for picking and crushing, we learn about organic farming of grapes, and we see the hard work followed by hard partying that occurs when the labors of the fall result in fermenting wine, ready to mature over the subsequent months and years. There is a conflict between the youngest heir, Jérémie, who tends to be more attached to the technology of wine-making (relying on lab reports, weather from his mobile phone, etc.) and Jean, the oldest and most experienced heir, who prefers to sense, through taste and intuition, how to harvest grapes and make good wine. The middle sibling, Juliette, starts out lacking confidence in her wine-making abilities, but grows in confidence over the course of the film, ultimately taking over the running of the domaine to produce *her* style of wine. An overarching theme is the palpable love and appreciation of the land by those who run family vineyards and wineries. But there are other subplots in this film as well. And without these subplots, the film would be shallow and forgettable.

This setup frames a major subplot concerning patrimony and illustrates one of the reasons for primogeniture (the eldest, usually a son, inheriting a farm in its entirety). Primogeniture eliminates the need to divide the inheritance as well as the need for the children to agree on what to do. In the film, after the father dies, the question of how to deal with the inheritance is complicated by substantial estate taxes that create a cash crunch. The heirs can divide up the vineyard, sell the vineyard, or make the more difficult decision to keep it together and strain to make it work financially. (There is even some winemaking economics in the film—their advisor states that annual revenue is approximately 1% of the value of the land, though we are left trying to figure out the value shares for land, capital, and labor.)

The heirs are adults who have distinct lives of their own, but they share a connection to the land, even if they do not quite agree on the desirability of keeping the family winery going. Some want to sell some of the vineyard, others not. Jean has an additional conflict in that he is unsure about his relationship with his Australian wife, Alicia. Should he stay in France or return to Australia?

Another subplot concerns Jérémie's resentment of Jean's abandoning the family and traveling the world, only to return a decade later and try to take over. This is compounded by the suffocating relationship Jérémie has with the family he has married into—the father-in-law is overbearing, and Jérémie, with his wife and newborn, lives far too close to the in-laws. Juliette seems the most balanced of the three, and really only lacks confidence in her abilities with winemaking and supervising employees. She, of all the siblings, develops the most in the film, emerging at the end with confidence and determination.

Ultimately, Jean realizes he cannot call both France and Australia home—he has to choose between Alicia and his son Ben versus his siblings and the French domaine. He loves them both. The problem of how to pay the inheritance tax is ultimately resolved by You will need to watch the film to figure out how they resolve all their conflicts and conundrums! Be assured, everyone does live happily ever after.

Jean sums it up well toward the end of the film: “I’d come home to see my father, and discovered my sister and brother.”

At first, the film comes across as light, with many familiar and predictable scenes, overdone at times. But through a careful watching of the film (or multiple watchings!), the various subplots and interpersonal conflicts emerge. These, combined with details about the wine-making process (and beautiful Burgundian scenery), made the film eminently satisfying.