

## Book Reviews

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VICTOR J. TREMBLAY and CAROL HORTON TREMBLAY: *The U.S. Brewing Industry: Data and Economic Analysis*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA., 2005, 397 pp. ISBN 978-0262201513, \$45.00 (paperback: The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA., 2009, 400 pp., paperback ISBN 978-0262512633, \$22.00)

With the advent of craft brewing in the United States, beer is no longer just for “Joe six-pack.” Beer has become a beverage for connoisseurs. Some domestic brewers today vie for the patronage of wine drinkers, as well as for the patronage of those who normally consume imported malt beverages.

In 2005, Victor and Carol Tremblay's *The U.S. Brewing Industry* was published. The importance of the book and its popularity provoked MIT Press to bring out a paperback this year. The Tremblay book became the standard economic text on the beer industry. The authors already had a reputation as students of this industry, having published several important papers on particular economic topics associated with the production and marketing of malt beverages. *The U.S. Brewing Industry* represents not only the summation of the Tremblays' prior work, but considerable value added beyond their earlier research as well.

The basic outline of the book reflects the Industrial Organization specialties of the authors. First, the Tremblays lay out the basic demand and cost conditions for beer. Building on this, they develop data on industry concentration and use economic analysis to explain the trends in industry concentration.

Putting aside the craft beer segment, which is fragmented, the beer industry has undergone one of the greatest structural transformations of any major U.S. industry. In the post-War period, there were hundreds of independent brewers. For example, in my home state of Michigan, the leading brands in 1957 were Goebel, Stroh's, Pfeiffer and Drewrys. Most beer drinkers in Michigan today would not recognize any of these brands. Budweiser barely made the top ten; Miller was number thirteen; and Coors had zero market share. In 1970, Pabst was the leading seller in Michigan; Stroh's was still in second place; but Anheuser-Busch had moved to #3. Miller had not made its move (this was prior to Miller's acquisition by Philip Morris); Carling was number four. Imports were barely on the radar screen in those days (less than 1% of sales). The beer brands that once were stalwarts in Michigan are gone (and the same story could be told over and over again in other states from Maine to California).

Through exit and merger, the hundreds of independent brewers who once were household names have dwindled to a few. Some observers refer to the core of the beer industry today as essentially a duopoly: comprising Anheuser-Busch (recently acquired by InBev) and MillerCoors (a recent joint venture of Miller and Coors).

The Tremblays assess why the beer industry has gone through this structural transformation. The two main explanations that they consider are: the exploitation of economies of scale; and the role that mass advertising has played as the beer industry moved to its current structure. They find that both contributed to the industry's structural shakeup.

*The U.S. Brewing Industry* has one chapter devoted to the leading mass-producing brewers which provide the millions of six-packs for Joe six-pack (and, Jill six-pack). This focus on the major brewers is appropriate. As the authors put it, "Anheuser-Busch and Miller spill more beer than the specialty brewers produce." (p. 13). Increasingly, Anheuser-Busch and MillerCoors offer an array of new brands and line extensions from their flagship brands. The question is: will these firms be nimble enough to exploit the cost economies associated with 5+ million barrel capacity breweries and be able to tap into (no pun intended) the increasing demand for product differentiation spawned by the emergence of the craft brewing segment?

The Tremblays also discuss the economic importance of imports and what they call “domestic specialty brewers” in the domestic beer industry and they analyze the growth of this segment of the malt beverage industry. The domestic specialty segment, which now has its own brewers association, is the attention-getter in the industry. It has been the avenue for many new entrepreneurs to enter the malt beverage industry. These firms would be unlikely entrants if they had to go head-to-head against the major flagship brands.

In their prior writings, the Tremblays had an interest in pricing and advertising strategies, particularly by the large brewers. One chapter of their book is devoted to what they call “Strategic Behavior.” This chapter has a dual focus on pricing behavior and advertising resources devoted to the promotion of beer (with a primary focus on the major brewers). The analytical lens for this chapter is game theory. The academic literature on game theory often eschews empirical work and case studies. Thanks to the Tremblays, we have a real-world case study of oligopolistic interaction. Would that more of the game theory literature had this connection to the inside workings of an actual market.

The chapter on “Economic Performance” is devoted to whether the beer industry is an efficient steward of society’s scarce resources and whether the industry’s technological progress can be considered exemplary. The authors put the spotlight on Anheuser-Busch and its relative size and market power (this was before AB’s acquisition by InBev).

The penultimate chapter of *The U.S. Brewing Industry* is devoted to public policy. Here, the authors deviate from the stock-in-trade industry study of Industrial Organization economists. They discuss externality concerns associated with the beer industry, notably alcoholism and drunk driving. The research they cite is mainly that of other scholars, but the chapter provides an efficient introduction to this literature for the reader unacquainted with these studies.

The public policy chapter also contains the Tremblays’ assessment of U.S. merger policy as applied to the domestic beer industry. The beer industry not only experienced many horizontal mergers in the post-WW II period; the industry also has been the subject of several prominent antimerger cases. Here again, the book was written before the two mega-combinations: Anheuser-Busch-InBev and MillerCoors, both of which were approved by the Department of Justice.

The Tremblays book is solid economics: they are not in the pocket of the beer industry, nor are they in the pocket of the neo-prohibitionists. Any reader of *The Journal of Wine Economics* is likely to have a complementary interest in the economic analysis of malt beverages and sophisticated oenophiles may find *The U.S. Brewing Industry* to be a congenial diversion from reading about their beverage of choice. Not to be overlooked as an asset within the book’s covers are the statistical appendices and the bibliography. Anyone with an interest in the beer industry will enjoy browsing the sources that buttress the volume’s scholarship. The Tremblays’ book is a superb piece of scholarship and is the “go to” book on the U.S. brewing industry.

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GEORGE M. TABER: *In Search of Bacchus: Wanderings in the Wonderful World of Wine Tourism*. Scribner, New York, 2009, 320 pp., ISBN-13:978-1-4165-6243-6, \$30.00.

George Taber's professional wine book writing career started with the smash hit tale of French vs. California wine tasting in his *Judgment of Paris* (think movie—as in the Alan Rickman vehicle *Bottleshock*). His second book, *To Cork or Not to Cork*, tracked the controversy in the wine world over the best closure for a bottle of wine (think *Popular Science* magazine). Taber's latest book, *In Search of Bacchus*, is about wine tourism (think “looking for wine in all the wrong places”!) and it is a lovely read for anyone who enjoys travel writing, and especially anyone who also enjoys a glass of wine.

Taber starts his tour by reminding us that wine tourism has a long history. Englishman John Locke learned about the wines of France when he traveled there as part of his medical treatments in Montpellier, and Thomas Jefferson toured and wrote extensively about the wines of France and Germany during his diplomatic stay in Europe. Even Scotsman Robert Louis Stevenson, who spent his honeymoon in Napa after traveling to San Francisco to marry an American divorcee he had met during his bohemian life in Paris, took copious notes about viticulture. The notes formed the basis for his *Silverado Squatters*, which contains a chapter about Napa's wines and winemakers.

The structure of Taber's book involves first his very business-like report on the details of 12 of the world's far flung wine producing regions, followed by a personal vignette of Taber actually engaging in some tourism in each of these places. These vignettes can be charming, and they also sometimes reveal more about Taber's reaction to his touring experience and the wines he encounters than the drier discussions that precede them. When Taber visits Central Otago on the South Island of New Zealand, home of the world's greatest risk managers, and some pretty good pinot noir too, what does he do? He takes the road to AJ Hackett's Bungy Jump and makes the plunge with, in some of the best writing in the book, a quite endearing description of just what it all feels like. Taber covers some more well trodden areas too, with sometimes revealing results. In the Napa Valley, for example, he encounters the fantastical Darioush Winery, modeled after a Persian palace, and remarks that it looks “as out of place in Napa as a log cabin might look in the middle of Iran.” And when he visits the fabled region of Bordeaux, with its focus on high prices, collectability, and limited access to tourists, what enjoyable vignette does Taber describe? You guessed it, a week long escorted bike tour through the friendly wineries and vineyards of Burgundy!

Taber travels to virtually all the continents in his wine touring including, in a description that may be the most heart felt and charming writing in this book, a visit to the country of Georgia at the crossroads of Asia and Europe. As the buried wine storage pot, called a *kveris*, is opened and the toasts begin during an extended luncheon in the cellars, it is pretty clear that Taber has learned something about this exotic place and its wines, but also that he is having a lot of fun too.

For anyone who has followed Taber's wine journalism career, it is fascinating to watch how he takes a relatively mundane topic related to wine and forms it into a readable,

coherent whole. Admittedly, this was easier to do with *Judgment of Paris*, where he had the benefit of being the only journalist actually present for the historic 1976 wine tasting. But it was certainly harder when writing a book about corks, as it seems to me it must have been in writing about wine tourism. At this point I think Taber deserves the crown as the undisputedly finest American wine writer currently at work. The books are well written, topical, and interesting—making them a refreshing change from the laundry list of scores, points, or useless flowery wine descriptions that constitutes most American wine writing. And what is more, the books sell!

Are there any lessons for aspiring wine writers in Taber's success? I think there are three. First, basic writing skills are critical. Second, real research that requires time and effort is critical. Finally, a writer needs a hook, a gimmick that will bring the appeal of a book to a broader audience. Some of Taber's books are stronger in this regard than others, but all of them represent a conscious effort to grab a reader's attention. I certainly look forward to the next one.

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HUGH JOHNSON: *Hugh Johnson's Wine Companion*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition, revised and updated by Stephen Brook. Mitchell Beazley, London, 2009. 672 pp., ISBN 978-1845334574, \$60.00 (hardback).

The first edition of this book ignited this writer's fledgling interest in all things vinous some twenty-five years ago. It was the first wine book I ever bought, almost by accident. I was initially attracted to it because of the superb illustrations by Paul Hogarth rather than by the words; they added to my treasured collection of Hogarth-illustrated Graham Greene paperbacks. These marvellous pen pictures are thankfully retained in this new edition and remain almost as indispensable as the writing itself because they convey the joy of wine better than almost any photograph. However, I soon became captivated by the writing style and sheer erudition on show. To this day I still refer to the 3rd edition, its bright blue cover prominent on my bookshelf.

Since then this encyclopaedia of wines, vineyards and winemakers has expanded enormously, reflecting, in Hugh's own words, "*the most eventful quarter-century in the history of wine*". The subject of wine has changed fundamentally in many ways during this time, as this book bears witness; from the rise of the New World to the development of the global wine village, from the dominance of international wines to the continuing adoption of biodynamics and from vintage variation to global warming. Back then, entries on China, India and Uruguay would have been merely eccentric footnotes, now these regions loom ever larger in our future.

In this new edition the content has been sensitively updated by Stephen Brook, with the heart of the book still arranged on a country-by-country basis, listing key producers in

succinct detail. But there is much more besides, with chapters covering grapes, winemaking and wine styles and not least giving practical advice on enjoying wine—from buying through to serving and tasting.

Any test of an encyclopaedia should, in my view, be made my dipping into the contents, particularly to check out the reviews of favourite wineries and to discover unfamiliar entries to fuel future exploration. The book is a unique lens of preference and discovery, where entries are graded on a simple four-star system and web addresses are helpfully included. Given that the book covers the global wine scene and some well known producers are naturally self-selecting entries then three examples chosen almost at random must suffice to illustrate the quality and depth of coverage. I could of course have listed hundreds more.

Firstly, I was delighted to see Domaine Belluard listed in the Savoie section, whose biodynamic white wine, made from the ultra-rare Gringet grape, made such a favourable impression on me just a few weeks ago. Secondly, welcome recognition is given to Fox Run Vineyards, arguably the best wine producer in New York's Fingerlakes region, which bought back fond memories. Finally, Quinta de Covilha from Portugal's Minho rightly focuses on their exciting red and white blends.

This book does what says on the cover—a constant companion to my own wine journey. While I have amassed a collection of hundreds of books on the subject of wine it's still a privilege to continue to learn from and enjoy Hugh's subtle writing style. His most articulate and concise prose manages that rare three card trick of being authoritative, up-to-date and entertaining.

For anyone setting out to discover wine then this book, alongside *The World Atlas of Wine* and *The Oxford Companion* are the indispensable tomes. For those of us already immersed in wine lore this book is no less essential—it raises the bar to which we all strive another notch.

Paul Howard  
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JEROME TUCCILLE: *Gallo Be Thy Name: The Inside Story of How One Family Rose to Dominate the U.S. Wine Market*. Phoenix Books, Beverly Hills, 2009, 269 pp., ISBN 978-1-59777-590-8, \$22.95.

The “inside story” of the Gallo wine empire and its progenitors, brothers Ernest and Julio, *Gallo Be Thy Name* is an engaging and thoughtful look at the making of the world's largest privately held, family-owned winemaker. Jerome Tuccille, author of more than two-dozen books—including respective biographies of Donald Trump and Alan Greenspan, four novels, and several how-to guides—mostly succeeds in the endeavor. While readers of true crime and celebrity tell-alls will no doubt revel in Tuccille's tales of murder, familial

rancor, deception, and mafia dealings, devotees of wine economics will appreciate Tuccille's faithful recounting of the Gallo family's saga as a story of two sons of an Italian-immigrant family rebuilding the American wine market, one jug at a time. From exposing the Gallo family's well-guarded successes during Prohibition to its post-Prohibition expansion and subsequent boom as the result of savvy marketing and distribution decisions, Tuccille shows Ernest and Julio together possessed a unique ability to respond to the demands of the American wine consumer across more than seven turbulent decades.<sup>1</sup>

Tuccille presents his work in five roughly chronological "books," each of which—in keeping with the reference within the book's title—borrows its name and theme from the Bible. Book One, "Our Father," tells the story of Gallo wine patriarch Joseph Gallo and the family's emergence from poverty during—and because of—its concurrent strategy of legal grape growing and land acquisition coupled with its illegal winemaking and distribution during Prohibition. Tuccille reminds readers that Prohibition, in spite of its aim to ban consumer sales of alcohol, had the effect instead of giving rise to an underground economy of bribery and illicit sales in which only the strong, daring, and ingenious survived. Since wine—unlike beer or hard liquor—could be used legally for religious purposes during Prohibition, demand for "sacramental" wine jumped by 800,000 gallons over a two-year period in the mid-1920s, and wine consumption doubled. Right in the thick of the wine trade during Prohibition was the Gallo family. W.C. Fields, the great showman, could never blame the Gallo family for the dreadful period during Prohibition when, he claimed, he "was forced to live for days on nothing but food and water."

Tuccille paints Gallo patriarch Joseph as a cruel authoritarian who, in partnership with his mob-connected brother Mike—"the Al Capone of the West Coast"—thought nothing of sending an adolescent Ernest, riding a train packed with grapes and vine-glo, a "jellied 'wine juice'" that magically transformed into wine once mixed with water and allowed to ferment, to Chicago to sell to mobster Al Capone and his henchmen. Both Ernest and Julio, who made similar trips to the East Coast, hated the travel. But these trips taught Ernest business acumen, and allowed Julio to befriend expert winemakers, who shared with him the secrets of raising quality grapes. Thus, while both brothers would have preferred to remain in California, the travel helped settle the brothers into what would become their lifelong roles: Ernest the tough and savvy businessman, and Julio the inventive and gifted winemaker.

Book Two, "Thy Will Be Done," opens with the winding down of Prohibition in 1933, and takes the reader through the 1940s. The repeal of Prohibition followed on the heels of the deaths of Joseph and matriarch Susie Gallo, who perished at the hand of a gun, under mysterious circumstances, at the family's Fresno farm earlier that year. Their deaths left

<sup>1</sup> For those whose interest in beverage economics runs beyond wine to distilled spirits, Tuccille's work should whet the palate for an upcoming book by Daniel S. Pierce on the origins of NASCAR, the auto-racing sanctioning body. The success of NASCAR, which came into being thanks to the automotive feats of bootleg liquor supplymen in the South during Prohibition, shares many common themes with the early accomplishments of the Ernest and Julio Gallo Winery. See DANIEL S. PIERCE: *Real NASCAR: White Lightning, Red Clay, and Big Bill France*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2010, 352 pp., ISBN 978-0807833841.

Ernest and Julio in charge of both the wine business and of raising younger brother Joe. The brothers were well positioned to succeed in the post-Prohibition market, having been one of but a few winemakers to weather temperance. Still, the re-legalization of wine quickly devalued their product. They needed both to grow and to streamline their operations. After formally establishing the Ernest & Julio Gallo Winery in 1933, Tuccille recounts how the brothers capitalized on their existing contacts—often those still in the underworld, or those who (like the Gallos themselves) had crossed over from the grey economy to legitimacy—and used both their ingenuity and drive to revolutionize the wine business. The brothers purchased a winery space next to a rail line to make shipping more efficient, and snatched up a competitor in order to expand storage capacity. They traveled to meetings by airplane, saving valuable time, while their competitors still traveled by train. And the winery also focused on vertical integration, creating its own distribution channels when existing distributors rejected their overtures to supply Gallo to an ever-expanding audience. On the marketing end, Ernest introduced a series of innovations, including placing promotional displays in stores that sold Gallo products and creating an aggressive, carrot-and-stick-driven sales force.

Perhaps the most interesting competitive advantage Gallo Winery enjoyed was the result of familial competition between the brothers themselves. It's a story of specialization Adam Smith himself would love. Ernest's goal, writes Tuccille, was to sell more wine than Julio could produce, while Julio's aim was to produce more than Ernest could sell. When Ernest outdid Julio in this respect, the brothers began to buy grapes from other Napa growers so that supply could keep up with demand. While Tuccille makes clear that Ernest was a businessman nonpareil, it's possible Julio, the expert winemaker, lost the competition because his heart was elsewhere. From early on in their venture, Julio had hoped that the American wine palate—dulled by the strong liquor and sweet wine prevalent during Prohibition—might recover its senses so that he could make the dry, high-quality, varietal wines he preferred. Still, the market forced Julio for decades to produce a stable of cheap, sweet, nondescript reds and whites. Julio's lifelong wish would not come to fruition until near the time of his death several decades later.

Book Three, "Thy Kingdom Come," explores the Gallo Winery's innovations during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. If the period immediately following Prohibition was about fortifying the company's position in the marketplace, the next three decades were the story of the Gallo family's viticultural manifest destiny. During these decades, writes Tuccille, the brothers would not rest until their wines covered the whole of the country, which set the stage during subsequent decades for their global expansion. Though in 1955 Gallo was still only sold in twenty states, Tuccille writes, by 1960 it was the number one winery in the country. The winery's continuing growth was fueled by just the sort of cheap, sweet plonk Julio hated—Thunderbird, Ripple, and Boone's Farm—but that America loved. It was because of the latter, Boone's, that *Time* dubbed Gallo the "kings of pop wine."

Fitting for a privately held, global corporation operating in a highly regulated market, the history of the Gallo wine empire is rife with legal, familial, and political struggles.

As Book Three closes with Ernest and Julio effectively sacking younger brother Joe Jr. from his position as a winery employee, under the guise of giving him the freedom to spend more time operating his own farm, Book Four, “*Deliver Us From Evil*,” begins with the Gallo winery’s damaging battle against Cesar Chavez and California’s grape pickers. While Ernest at first backed the rights of workers to organize, his failure to yield to all of the workers’ demands led Chavez to urge a boycott of Gallo wines. As the dispute dragged on, the California Agricultural Relations Board sided for Chavez and against Gallo. The Federal Trade Commission, meanwhile, issued a consent order against Gallo after having reviewed the company’s vertical integration for antitrust violations. But it would be a mistake to look at Gallo Winery as merely a recipient of so much judicial and regulatory bombardment. The Gallo empire—dating back to its early days, as Tuccille recounts—was adept at using litigation and lobbying to achieve its own ends. The Gallo family was a frequent political contributor, and had succeeded in using its clout to earn special tax dispensations and to push back against efforts to open U.S. markets to cheap foreign wines. Gallo had also trademarked its name in the early 1940s, and scrupulously protected the trademark in a series of court cases over the years.

The most famous and acrimonious of the trademark cases, by far, and which is the focus of Book Four and a good portion of Book Five, “*Gallo Be Thy Name*,” was Ernest and Julio’s decision to sue younger brother Joe Gallo. Ernest and Julio first told Joe, who had founded “*Joseph Gallo Vineyards*” after being fired by his brothers, and who was selling cheese under the name “*Joseph Gallo Cheese*,” to desist from using the Gallo name—his own name—on his products. When Joe balked, and negotiations broke down, Ernest and Julio sued Joe. After the youngest brother learned during the course of the litigation that his parents had left a will entitling him to one-third of their winery—something his older brothers, who had raised him after their parents’ deaths, never told Joe—he countersued. The case wound through the courts from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, and was ultimately decided in favor of Ernest and Julio. Joe, his relationship with his brothers broken, was forbidden to use the Gallo name, and renamed his product line “*Joseph Farms*.”

Book Five closes with the deaths of Ernest and Julio and a consideration of today’s Gallo Winery. While Gallo’s growth throughout the twentieth century had rested on the making and selling of pop wine, and cut-throat business tactics, Tuccille shows the new generation of Gallos who now run the company, including foxy young executive Gina Gallo—with whom Tuccille is clearly smitten—have a more modern view of the wine business. From its EPA-recognized environmental stewardship, to its embrace of globalization, to its production of quality wines—long Julio’s dream—that have won acclaim and awards from critics in the U.S. and Europe, Gallo today is a company respected not just by industry and economists, but by environmentalists and wine journalists as well. So while it’s still possible to walk into nearly any wine seller in America and buy a 1.5L bottle of Carlo Rossi Paisano for about seven dollars, domestic and foreign Gallo-owned vineyards are producing high-quality, in-demand 750ml varietals for only a few dollars more.

At least two noteworthy accounts of Ernest and Julio Gallo preceded Tuccille's. The first, Ellen Hawkes's 1993 *Blood & Wine: The Unauthorized Story of the Gallo Wine Empire*, presents many of the same facts as does Tuccille, though in a sometimes-melodramatic and overly wordy manner. (Hawkes describes Gallo brother Joseph, in the span of two pages, as a man who "sometimes lost his temper," "was so upset that he phoned Julio," and "was so distraught ... that he phoned Julio".) (312–313)<sup>2</sup> *Blood & Wine*, as Tuccille writes in his book's acknowledgments section, focuses more on the "dark side" of Ernest Gallo. In doing so, notes Tuccille, Hawkes fails to give Ernest his proper due as a "genius ... who created the largest and most powerful wine empire in the world." It is that consideration of genius that, ultimately, is what distinguishes Tuccille's work from that of Hawkes and makes it an important study of American wine and capitalism. The other account of the Gallo Winery, which followed a year after Hawkes's, *Ernest & Julio: Our Story*, was written by the brothers themselves (with author Bruce B. Henderson), and presents, writes Tuccille, "the brothers' version of their family and business history as they wanted the public to see it." Tuccille no doubt noted the gap in what the public knew about the Gallo story—some of it too dark, some of it too maudlin—and sought to fill that gap with *Gallo Be Thy Name*.

If Tuccille's work has any glaring weaknesses, one is its lack of an index and notes—both of which are strengths of Hawkes's work. Tuccille also fumbles in his treatment of the death of Joseph and Susie, the parents of Ernest, Julio, and Joe. While the book opens with a consideration of their mysterious deaths, which is often referenced later during the litigation between Ernest and Julio, on the one side, and Joe, on the other, Tuccille never gives the reader a clear vision of his beliefs about the cause of their deaths. Throughout his book, Tuccille neither embraces the official police version of the events, one also sanctioned by Ernest and Julio—that financial difficulties led Joseph to first shoot his wife and then himself—nor does he adopt the view of some that the parents were both victims of a mob hit. It is confusing, then, when in the acknowledgements section of the book Tuccille twice refers to the "murders" of Joseph and Susie.

From seed to vine, and cellar to seller, and with their own sweat and muscle, Ernest and Julio Gallo shaped and dominated the wine business in America. *Gallo Be Thy Name* is a worthy tribute to the Gallo brothers because, though billed as an "inside story," Tuccille writes in fact as an admiring though even-handed outsider given access to the Gallo family. By focusing on the Gallos as American entrepreneurs and wine pioneers, while eschewing the fawning Tuccille saw in the brothers' autobiography and forsaking the emotional verbosity and single-minded focus on the dark underbelly sometimes evident in Ellen Hawkes's work on the Gallo family, *Gallo Be Thy Name* stands out as an important contribution to the study of the American wine sector.

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<sup>2</sup> ELLEN HAWKES: *Blood & Wine: The Unauthorized Story of the Gallo Wine Empire*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1993, 464 pp., ISBN 0-671-64986-8.

MASANOBU FUKUOKA: *The One-Straw Revolution*. New York Review Books, New York, 2009, 184 pp., ISBN 978-1-59017-313-8, \$15.95.

I'm not sure what books, or how many, farmers read. Even if they're headphoning *East of Eden* in the cockpit of the giga reaper or *Faust* at the crank of the biodynamic churn, probably not as many as they would like. *The One-Straw Revolution* has a good deal to say to any agriculturalist, but it makes plain most farmers are too busy farming for any pleasure as bucolic as the quiet contemplation of print. For the most part, then, it is Michael Pollan readers and knee-chair agrarians who will find their fodder in this green movement bible, which first appeared in 1978. Nevertheless, Fukuoka's notion of natural farming has always exerted an inextinguishable fascination for a small but feisty group of unorthodox farmers around the world, and his farm has even become a Mecca of sorts for them. Our readers will be interested to hear that a good number of organic or biodynamic grapegrowers and winemakers know Fukuoka and are adapting his ideas. Chewing is required, but ultimately this timely eco-pastoral is a goji berry of nutritious ideas on low-input farming and spiritual well-being.

By the time *The One-Straw Revolution* was first published modern farming had already grown madly complex. In Japan and the West alike, for each new hybrid a new protocol of fertilization and disease and pest control evolved. Expenses ballooned, the waxing mass of a farmer's tractor a rough gauge of the ever more staggering burden of a farmer's debt. Get big or get out became the mantra of survival, self-delusion on a stick, as it turned out, with family farms plummeting to oblivion and labor efficiency as elusive as ever. In Fukuoka's words, the farmer had become the samurai of many strokes, countering the enemy not with finesse but with a spasmodic flurry of badly aimed slash and poke. This book's surprising, Zen-influenced response, however, is not to drill farmers into one-stroke mastery (conventional organics) but, instead, to teach them to drop the combat stance entirely and become farmers of no strokes at all. What is this? How did Fukuoka arrive at this idea?

Leaving a career as a microbiologist in Yokohama and returning to his father's farm in Shikoku in 1938, Fukuoka (1913–2008) did not plan to reform farming. His purpose was to express through agriculture a crushing realization that had come upon him during an acute illness: "In this world there is nothing at all." His turn to farming was coincidental, a means, he tells us, to practice what he had been fruitlessly preaching, the message that human action is useless, without meaning, to prove, in other words, that by doing nothing, he could be at least as productive a farmer as those wearying themselves to the bone. And thus unconsciously sprouted the seeds of Do-Nothing Agriculture.

His green laboratory was an orchard of tangerine trees and a double-cropped field of rice and barley. After decades of work and frequent, severe setbacks, Fukuoka ultimately had good reason to believe: "When you get right down to it, there are few agricultural practices that are really necessary." True to his words, Fukuoka did not cultivate (it stirs up weed seeds), and used neither chemical fertilizer, prepared compost, or any chemical means of weed, pest, or disease control. In this way, he eliminated most of the money- and

labor-hogging practices of his farm. Aeration was achieved through cover crops and micro-organisms. Mulch, short-term flooding, and careful timing of seeding to give his rice and barley a headstart were the foundation of his weed strategy, a program of avoidance and toleration, not eradication.

Natural farming, however, is not abandonment, and there are some unavoidable do-somethings that must occur. Sowing takes place by making and scattering homemade orbs of dirtcovered seeds, unpalatable to birds. These are strewn by hand into a field spread with the straw of the preceding harvest, another barrier to feathered marauders. (This worthless straw, which Fukuoka wished would cover every barren winter field, is the source of his book's title.) For fertilizer, a thin layer of chicken manure. Fukuoka had much patience for smallish problems, relying on strong crops and a healthy, harmoniously balanced natural environment to solve the bigger ones. There was no tractor on his farm, and his fields have not felt the plow in over thirty years. With time, things became easier, and he achieved top yields. Odd to say, but his success was not the result of farming but of creating and restoring or, perhaps most accurately, of standing back and watching his land's inherent natural balance reveal its healthy, verdant face.

Fukuoka was an inveterate experimenter, and he was a competent, experienced specialist in plant diseases. Yet despite this familiarity with scientific habit, his ideas run in the opposite direction: "all I have been doing, farming out here in the country, is trying to show that humanity knows nothing." His glowing tangerines, his brimming bushels of grain were something like the coincidental product of a strange, negative epistemology, demanding as a prerequisite for success the admission of ignorance, the jettisoning of any thought of conquest or improving on nature. The spiritual yield of such thinking is also rich. "No matter how the harvest will turn out, whether or not there will be enough food to eat, in simply sowing seed and caring tenderly for plants under nature's guidance there is joy." Can you eat joy? No, but if you are not content, Fukuoka makes us question, are you truly alive? "Living is no more than the result of being born," he writes memorably. "[W]hatever people think they must eat to live is nothing more than something they have thought up. The world is set up in such a way that if people will set aside their human will and be guided instead by nature there is no reason to expect to starve."

Why isn't contemporary small-scale, organic farming, or its more radical sibling biodynamics, the fulfillment of Fukuoka's ideal? Despite the admirable aims of sustainable farmers, the returning health of their land, the flavor and nutrition of their produce, their farming is technical, task heavy, and to differing degrees interventionist, knowledge-based rather than intuitive. Some committed biodynamists, including an Oregon farming acquaintance, admit feeling harrassed by the relentless demands of the cosmic clock. My friend's lusty wine grape vineyards are as demanding as any zombified Central Valley raisin factory. Fukuoka's challenge was originally an inspiration to green farmers. Today it also reads as if it were a criticism of them.

One farmer who does manage to squeeze in some reading is Anselme Selosse, the leading light of the grower-maker group in Champagne. In the transition to an individualized,

less mechanistically applied biodynamics, Fukuoka has been Selse's guide. Speaking with a Japanese wine writer, Selse summarized Fukuoka's philosophy this way: "Know what you should not do before you know what you should do."

Selse's vineyards stand out from those of his neighbors because of their between-row cover crop. He does not compost, having developed in the wake of reading *The One-Straw Revolution* a vision of his vineyards as small forests, each complete into itself and needing nothing from the outside to thrive. Nor does he use the conventional biodynamic preparations, favoring an unusual application of snail excretion to the standard horn silica, silica being a mineral strange to the local environment. He has also stopped following the biodynamic calendar, observing the vineyard with his own eyes and accordingly acting ... or not. "L'homme doit accompagner sans imposer," he says.

Similarly, Selse's cellar practice is noninterventionist, depending on long, patient fermentation in barriques, a vivid image of Fukuoka's contemplative doing and the very model of the hidden development of the inner life, the unconscious of the wine. Riddling and disgorgement are by hand. For Selse, the identity of the wine is created in the vineyard. "En vinification," he says, "on peut que perdre, cacher ou détruire." This is a rebellious stance in a wine region famous for the precise order of its fields, and for micromanaging its product from grape to glass. But the upshot of Selse's approach is wines alive with a rare, delicious *mojo*.

Selse's passion for Fukuoka culminated in a visit to Fukuoka's home in Japan in 2006. Fukuoka was ill, having lost the use of his legs, and the ninety-minute meeting took place with the master on his futon and the visitor listening on folded knees. A translator did his utmost to allow the two to interact. Fukuoka spoke of the poems he'd been writing for the past year and the photos he'd taken to go with them. He told of the success his seedballs have had in India. The entire time, though, he was really just sowing ideas in Selse's head, who left the meeting deeply moved. People, he had realized "are just a part of nature, and we should think about what we can do *within* nature. Fukuoka's death was approaching. But I could feel something from him. It might have been something like Zen enlightenment. I felt as if I had received a mission."

Absent from this new printing is 無, the Chinese character for nothingness embossed on the cover of the original. This is too bad because *mu*, as it is read in Japanese, is the sharpest summary of Fukuoka's thought, in which humanity and nature are equally without meaning. It is an important precept, one which the great French poet Mallarmé, in a Fukuokan mood, once applied to champagne, to life: "Rien cette écume, vierge vers; À ne désigner que la coupe." (This foam is nothing, virginal verse, designating nothing but the cup.) And it is one worth contemplating when we sip the liquid joy of Anselme Selse's beautifully pointless wine.

Peter Musolf  
Yokohama

NATALIE MacLEAN: *Red, White, and Drunk All Over: A Wine Soaked Journey from Grape to Glass*. Bloomsburg Publishers, New York, 2006, 279 pp., ISBN 13: 978-2-58234, \$23.95

I first learned of this book and its author from a Canadian wine enthusiast whom I met and with whom I exchanged oenologic interests on the train from Frankfurt to Trier for the first annual meeting of the AAWE. My interest piqued, I agreed to review the book for JWE.

The book can be classified as an autobiographic portrayal that highlights a series of unusual and often quite humorous experiences of a devoted oenophile.

The introduction, “The Making of a Wine Lover,” describes Natalie’s sharing a glorious glass of Brunello with her later to be husband, a wine lover and talented cook, who has served as such for the many dinner parties he and Natalie have hosted over the years. This experience was followed by an introductory course on wine where she first learned that 80% of wine’s essence resides in its aroma, and that the sense of smell is “the only one of our senses that connects directly to the brain areas responsible for memory and emotion.” It seems axiomatic that her wine career was already in progress.

Natalie is very critical of typical wine-tasting notes as in her phrase “... when I hear *muscular*, *tight*, or *rakish*, it’s hard to tell whether the critic is talking about wine or Brad Pitt. *Legendary concentration* is what I need to figure out my income tax return, and *perfectly integrated* is how I’d describe my son’s school. But *opulent* is indeed a legitimate wine descriptor- it often refers to the price.”

Such ill-defined terms make us appreciate the wide variation in tasting notes for wines with some cachè, such as the 2003 grand Cru Chateau Pavie, selling for about \$150 a bottle. As MacLean notes: Robert Parker waxes eloquently with: “An off-the-chart effort ... a wine of sublime richness, minerality, delineation and nobleness ... provocative aromas of minerals, black and red fruits, balsamic vinegar, licorice, and smoke ... a brilliant effort ... along with Ausone and Petrus, is one of the three greatest offerings of the right bank in 2003”... Rating: 96–100%.

Jancis Robinson, in distinct contrast, describes the same wine as: “Completely unappetizing overripe aromas. Why? Porty sweet. Oh REALLY! Port is best from the Douro, not St. Emilion. Ridiculous wine more reminiscent of a late-harvest Zinfandel than a red Bordeaux with its unappetizing green notes”... Rating: 12 on a 10–20 point wine rating scale.

The highly regarded British Master of Wine critic Clive Coates adamantly refused to rate it, while noting acerbically: “Anyone who thinks this is a good wine needs a brain and palate transplant.”

In “The Good Earth” chapter Natalie makes clear her preference for wines that reflect terroir over their high alcohol, fruit-up-front competitors. Her stance here resonates with this writer’s palate, as well.

“Harvesting Dreams” documents the fact that the Zinfandel varietal is native neither to Italy nor to California, but probably originated from the Croatian grape “*crljenak kastelanski*,” and offers, among many other fascinating oenologic facts that, even when yields are low, it nonetheless requires close to 1000 grapes to produce a single bottle of wine.

In later chapters, Natalie focuses upon how champagne is made; why Canada provides an ideal terroir for ice wines, some of which consistently win Gold and Silver medals in worldwide wine competitions; and the suggestion that women may have better wine palates than men, based upon the views of both medical specialists and many male vintners she has interviewed who indicate that their wives or girlfriends are far better wine tasters than are they.

It needs to be stressed that Natalie never relinquishes an opportunity to inject her sense of humor into almost any oenologic context, no matter how somber. Concerning the indelicate act of expectorating into a bucket designed for just that purpose, Natalie says, quite straightforwardly, “... after you have tasted some wine, you just suck in your cheeks, purse your lips into a slightly open O-shape, lean close to the bucket (or mug), and expel in a steady stream. It’s considered bad form to dribble, spray, or have your wine ricochet back at you.”

In order to understand her gustatory appreciation of wine, in a much broader oenologic context, Natalie decided that she needed to perform other activities, such as: working as a vineyard laborer (one for whom having “toiled in the vineyard” now makes literal sense); and working a ten hour shift in a prestigious California wine shop—here she learns first-hand the serious economic problems that plague the small wine shop merchant. For example we learn that Costco, as of 2007, was the leading retailer of first-growth Bordeaux. Her deep sense of concern over this wrenching problem for the small wine retailer is evident. But as the evening approaches, with the cash registers building some much needed momentum, her humor returns. She observes “an amorous couple in their late twenties, a business man who seems jet-lagged, and a thin, heavily made-up woman whose affections seem to be negotiable.”

In order to appreciate the role of a waitperson with the daunting task of obtaining knowledge of thousands of wines, Natalie “apprentices” herself to the sommelier in an award winning Canadian restaurant in Quebec posing as an “undercover sommelier” in a chapter of that title; she also conducts very informative and humor-laden wine interviews with: Randall Grahm, the imaginative and masterful wine maker of the famed California Bonny Doon Vineyards; in Santa Cruz, California; and with the famed novelist, Jay McInerney, author of *Bacchus and Me* and: *A Hedonist in the Cellar*.

In summary, this entertaining book receives high marks for its humorous and rather complete account of the wine enterprise by one who has spent some time outside the realm of her laudable writing skills to obtain first-hand knowledge of what it feels like to produce, sell, and serve wine. I hope the readers enjoy her book as much as this reviewer.

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