Introduction

Wine cultures have been shaped by text since the first representations of making and drinking wine emerged in the images and sculptures of ancient peoples in the Fertile Crescent and the Mediterranean. As writing became a more nuanced means of communicating facts as well as ideas, more complex narratives around wine developed in the form of manuals on how to make wine (Hesiod and Strabo) and philosophers’ treatises on how to drink it (Plato and Pliny). Religious rituals related to wine were recorded in pictorial and scriptural texts which differentiated wine cultures throughout the region. Over the following millennia, wine cultures were practised and performed, repeated and revised through the written word as information and appreciation were communicated in this textual form for posterity. When the mechanics of the wine press inspired Gutenberg’s first inklings for the printing press in the 1430s, wine and text were effectively elided as intertwined cultural products. The printing press offered possibilities to disseminate viticultural advice, wine rankings and prices and, therefore, comparative (dis)advantages more widely across the industry. Much later, the advent of journalism, photography, film, advertising, criticism and the multiple digital modes of media and storytelling that exist today have expanded the ways of recounting wine cultures through text. In parallel, these texts influence the evolution of the wine cultures they represent through increased interaction and exposure.

‘Text’ as the focus of this disciplinary (or positioning) chapter requires some definition and explanation. Clearly, ‘text’ is not a discipline in the same way that anthropology, business, economics, geography, history and sociology are recognised as discrete fields of academic study. Nor is ‘text’ a particularly stable term, given its broad usage in both mainstream and academic discourses, across practically every discipline, though with differing weight and meaning, because it refers generally to the content rather than the genre of a given work. In cultural studies, following the post-structuralist semiotic approach proposed by Roland Barthes in ‘De l’œuvre au texte’ [From Work to Text] (1971), ‘text’ can refer to any cultural object – not just printed matter – that has representational or symbolic value, offering multi-dimensional layers of understanding and encouraging reader engagement. Texts are therefore semiotic systems, combinations of signs or signifiers, signifieds and mechanisms – like metaphors or metonyms – that can be read with reference to certain cultural contexts in order to decode their meanings.

According to this interpretation, all the ways of representing wine mentioned in the introductory paragraph – from ancient cave paintings to digital media – are considered wine texts. A wide variety
of wine texts are used across all the chapters in this Handbook, ranging from wine bottles and labels to historical archives, from anthropological and sociological data sets to geographical and geological analyses, from interviews to intertextual referencing. Text is arguably the most interdisciplinary thread in this multifaceted series of studies, interwoven into every element of wine and culture and serving as a support for more dominant disciplinary attachments. As a result, it facilitates our understanding of both material and immaterial cultures of wine.

Three textual fields in wine culture

The transversal and ubiquitous presence of the text in research on wine and culture renders attempts to outline core concepts, key thinkers and prominent themes problematic. In lieu of an introduction to a discipline as a cultural field, this chapter offers three textual fields that draw inspiration from and contribute to wine culture: literature, art and film. These fields are constituted through production of texts rather than historical events, demographic categories or marketing practices. They are not included, nor could they be readily classified in the other disciplinary areas of study of this Handbook. Yet they are highly relevant to understanding the ways in which wine is represented across the range of cultural products we are referring to as texts.

Literature, wine and culture

Wine is often interpreted as a muse in literature and the arts. Wine inspires and liberates true creative genius, as Pliny the Elder’s famous quote neatly encapsulates: *In vino veritas* [In wine is truth]. The relationship between intoxication and inspiration has been the subject of many studies in cognitive theory and creativity, which indicate that the disinhibiting effects of alcohol improve divergent thinking, originality and creative cognition, though higher levels of consumption can impair creative productivity (Benedek et al. 2017; Norlander 1999; Norlander and Gustafson 1998). But wine is not just alcohol – it is inspirational in its own creative form and also unleashes creativity by consumption. Some of the world’s best-known writers, artists and composers have articulated their praise for wine through metaphors relating their creative choices, practices and outputs to wine itself. In her novel *Jacob’s Room*, Virginia Woolf’s Erasmus Cowan recites luscious lines from the classical Roman poets Virgil and Catullus ‘as if language were wine upon his lips’ (Woolf 2005: 34). Surrealist artist Salvador Dali renders wine a mystery in *The Wines of Gala*: ‘A real connoisseur does not drink wine but tastes of its secrets’ (Dali 2017). And the memorable metaphor by composer Robert Fripp equates wine with music to fill the void: ‘Music is the wine that fills the cup of silence’ (Fripp 1980: 34–35).

The rich polysemy of wine – its capacity to contain so many allusions, including language, mystery and music – makes it an evocative word for any writer to use. As a metaphor, it flows from the ancient Greek writer Homer’s ‘wine-dark sea’ frequently employed in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* to contemporary French author Michel Houellebecq’s Meursault as a symbol of purity – ‘the perfect synthesis of all wine’ – in his 2015 novel *Submission* (Dutton 2020). ‘Wine as metaphor’ is the subject of another chapter in this Handbook, but here the aim is to present some studies of wine and literature and demonstrate the scope that exists for further work on the literary analysis of wine.

In *Wine Reads: A Literary Anthology of Wine Writing*, published in 2018, Jay McInerney brings together a selection of 27 texts about wine from a range of fictional and nonfictional sources. Announced as ‘the first of its kind’ and edited by a respected wine writer in his own right, *Wine Reads* does fill a gap in English-language publications. Its contents range from Roald Dahl’s sinister story ‘Taste’, about a dinner guest who bets high stakes on his ability to guess the wine served by his host, to an extract from Stephanie Danler’s *Sweetbitter*, the runaway success debut novel of a sommelier’s experience in high-end New York restaurants. There are also texts by well-known wine writers Jancis Robinson, Matt Kramer, Kermit Lynch and Eric Asimov, many of whom incorporate
literary references and allusions into their work. Several wine writers have academic backgrounds in literary studies, like Lisa Perrotti-Brown MW, current editor in chief of *Wine Advocate*, who was a playwright in London before entering the wine world and Hugh Johnson OBE, who read English literature at Cambridge.

Despite this wealth of literary knowledge to draw on, as well as a wide variety of novels, poetry and plays written in English that do feature wine as a dominant theme, most references to and reviews of wine literature are found in the columns of wine magazines such as *Decanter*, *World of Fine Wine*, and *Wine Advocate* or on an established wine blog rather than published in a book or scholarly article dedicated to the subject. *Wine Reads* does not extend the anthology genre to offer any critical insights into wine and literature. There are few academic articles on wine in literature either: Anne Lill’s ‘Wine and a Trial of Character in Horace’s Poems’ appeared in the *Journal of Wine Research* in 2000, and my own work on ‘Wine in Houellebecq’, published in *French Cultural Studies* in 2020, are among the rare examples of such criticism in English. The lack of appropriate venues for publishing on the intersections of wine and literature may be at the root of this lacuna, with specialised academic wine journals catering to more widely accepted areas of interest – viticulture, business, history, geography – and literary journals less open to accepting such trope-focused papers. Studies of wine in ancient Persian poetry and in biblical texts are more readily located, but there is a serious dearth of mainstream and specialist texts on wine in literature in English.

In European winemaking cultures, there is longer-standing and more evident interest in the intersections of wine and literature – and the arts. Interdisciplinary research groups, such as the Centre d’Etudes et de Recherche sur la Vigne et le Vin (CERVIN), created in the humanities section of the University of Bordeaux (Université Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux 3) in 1970 by a professor of geography, Alain Huetz de Lemps, included literature scholars alongside geographers, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and many others. Although geography was the founding and dominant disciplinary attachment of many of CERVIN’s members, conferences and publications also included research on wine and literature (https://cervinbordeaux.monsite-orange.fr/). Today, it is part of the Institut Universitaire de la Vigne et du Vin (Bordeaux), which also embraces interdisciplinary research (www.isvv.u-bordeaux.fr/fr/cervin.html). In 2016, professor emerita of comparative literature Ana Maria Binet and professor of oenology Gilles de Revel launched ‘Les Vendanges du savoir’ [Vintages of Knowledge] in collaboration with the Fondation pour la culture et les civilisations du vin at the Cité du Vin in Bordeaux (www.isvv.u-bordeaux.fr/fr/lsv/les-vendanges-du-savoir.html). Many of the speakers on the monthly programme are academics from literature programmes, as well as best-selling authors such as Amélie Nothomb.

Such interdisciplinary hubs for wine research exist elsewhere in France – including the dynamic UNESCO Chair ‘Culture and Tradition of Wine’ at the University of Burgundy, held by Professor Jocelyne Pérand. The conferences and publications hosted by this organisation since 2007 are internationally renowned and highly prestigious, including literature and the arts as well as philosophy among its privileged disciplines (https://chaireunesco-vinetculture.u-bourgogne.fr/). Burgundy is also home to the only dedicated wine book fair in the world, ‘Livres en vignes’ at Clos Vougeot, dating from 2007, and one of the most well-resourced specialist wine bookshops, the Athenaeum in Beaune (www.athenaeum.com/).

The proximity of major universities and cultural centres to winegrowing regions is key to the cross-pollination of literary text, wine and culture. All these intellectual and commercial supports for publishing a wider range of scholarly and mainstream writing on wine have had an impact on studies in the field of wine and French literature. Anthologies abound, ranging from Sophie Guermé’s *Le Vin et l’encre* [Wine and Ink] (1997), the three-volume *Le Vin des Ecrivains* [Writers’ Wines] series edited by Jean-Noël Mouret for Mercure de France (1999) and Pierre Cordier’s *Lectures du vin* [Reading Wine] (2000) to slightly more critical approaches in recent years, with *Les Ecrivains du vin* [Writers on Wine] by Marc Lagrange and Philippe Lorin (2017). In this illustrated volume,
Lagrange and Lorin associate authors with their preferred wines: Colette and Jurançon, Houellebecq and Gewurztraminer, Rabelais and Chinon etc., and the follow-up volume *Les Ecrivains du champagne* (2021) performs similar pairings with ‘les grandes marques’: Voltaire and Aÿ, Amélie Nothomb and Laurent Perrier, as well as classics like de Gaulle and Drappier and Churchill and Pol Roger. However, there is still very little analysis, except in the specialised interdisciplinary collections such as *Vin et altérité: le vin à l’épreuve des sciences humaines* [Wine and Alterity: Wine in the Social Sciences] (2020), which includes four articles on wine in literature, notably in the poetry of Henriette de Coligny, Countess of La Suze and Baudelaire, and in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* by Rousseau.

As might be expected, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Germany have their own wine literatures, which have not been much studied by academics either. Italian wine writers Giusi Mainardi and Pierstefano Berta’s *Il vino nella storia e nella letteratura: feste, magie, storie e leggende di un simbolo universale: il fascino del vino raccontato attraverso la letteratura* [Wine in History and Literature: Feasts, Magic, Stories and Legends of a Universal Symbol: The Charm of Wine Told through Literature] (1991) is an excellent study of wine in literature, as is Pietro Gibellini’s chapter on wine in the works of Alessandro Manzoni and Giovanni Verga (2003). Regional studies like *La vite e il vino nell’arte nella letteratura del Friuli* [Wine and Wine in the Art and Literature of Friuli] by G. Bergamini and M. Michelutti (2007) are more descriptive anthologies, like Spanish wine specialist Serafin Quero’s *El vino: historia, arte, literatura* [Wine: History, Art, Literature] (2008). Portuguese pharmacist Luis Falcao da Fonseca’s *Aspectos Socio-Culturais do Vinho – arqueologia, literatura, arte* [Socio-Cultural Aspects of Wine – Archaeology, Literature, Art] (2008) is one of many examples revealing wine and literature as the domain of the amateur rather than the academic, while Fernando Pessoa’s much-cited appreciation of wine should surely provide scope for research: ‘*Boa é a vida, mas melhor é o vinho*’ [Life is good, but wine is better].

One of the more unusual literary wine texts is the Japanese *manga* – comic book series – entitled *Kami no shizuku* [Drops of God] by Tadashi Agi and Shu Okimoto (2004–2014), which has been translated into many languages and has had phenomenal success around the world. The series traces the protagonist’s quest to identify and evaluate 12 famous wines – the ‘12 apostles’ – and finally the 13th, known as the ‘Drops of God’. This challenge was created by his famous wine-writer father to ensure that his son would understand the value and power of wine before inheriting his wine collection. *Kami no shizuku* features in much mainstream and academic criticism in several different languages, including two recent articles in English by Nadine Normand-Marconnet and Jason Jones on anthropomorphic wine metaphors and cross-cultural translation (2016, 2020). Mo Yan’s brilliant satirical novel *酒國* (Jiúguó) [The Republic of Wine] (2000 [1992]) is a political statement on representations of wine in Chinese culture as a sign of decadence (Yang 1998), but there is little criticism in English on this novel, despite Yan’s Nobel Prize–winning status.

The range and scope of literary texts on wine are much broader and more diverse than the examples mentioned, whether they emerge from winegrowing regions or from areas that do not produce their own wines. However, the relative lack of academic criticism on literary texts, wine and culture presents a field for future scholarly exploration, following in the footsteps of a few lone researchers and some interdisciplinary teams, notably in France. The value of such enquiry is considerable, contributing to understanding metaphors; (cross)-cultural representations; discourse analysis; and regional, national and transnational identities formed through wine growing, production and consumption.

**Art, wine and culture**

Works of art, including realist works, are narratives to be read like texts, redolent with pictorial semiotics and charged with symbolic messages (Bal and Bryson 1991). One of the most frequently used art wine images is Caravaggio’s ‘Bacchus’ (1596), depicting a young man, who may well be Caravaggio.
himself, dressed in Greco–Roman attire with an almost overflowing chalice of wine, surrounded by decaying fruit and vine leaves. Caravaggio’s painting has prompted addiction specialists Carolina L. Haas–Koffler and George A. Kenna (2013) to diagnose the figure with alcohol use disorder – drawing also on Caravaggio’s earlier portrait ‘Sick Bacchus’ (1593–94). This is one of the more unusual examples of scholarship related to wine art, whereas art historian John Varriano’s Wine: A Cultural History (2010) is much more traditional in its approach to reading wine artworks. The wine god figure recurs frequently – in the form of Bacchus or Dionysus – as in Michelangelo’s sculpture of ‘Bacchus’ (1496–97) and Diego Velasquez’s ‘El Triunfo de Baco o Los Borrachos’ [The Triumph of Bacchus] (1628–29); scholars like Philippe Morel have studied these figures in art in Renaissance dionysiaque: inspiration bachique, imaginaire du vin et de la vigne dans l’art européen (1430–1680) [Dionysian Renaissance: Bacchic Inspiration, the imaginary of wine and vine in European Art (1430–1680)] (2014). However, as art historians like Varriano demonstrate, ancient Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek and Etruscan frescos and medieval tableaux by Dutch, Flemish and Italian masters showed people planting and tending vines, picking grapes and making wine and drinking the fruits of their labours. While Renaissance and Classical artworks tend to focus on mythical representations of wine, Romantic, Impressionist, and Post-Impressionist paintings depict both production and consumption of wine in al fresco scenes by Claude Monet and August Renoir, Joan Miro’s ‘La Bottiglia di vino’ [The Bottle of Wine] (1924) and Jean Dupas’s Art Deco symbolist work ‘La Vigne et le vin’ (1925).

Hellenic amphorae and drinking vessels were often decorated with artworks, beginning the trend of beautifying the receptable for the wine while identifying (and adding prestige branding to) its source. Château Mouton-Rothschild is undoubtedly the best-known contemporary proponent of this trend, commissioning every year since 1945 the world’s finest artists – ranging from Dali, Picasso and Chagall to Warhol, Kandinsky and Xu Bing – to paint a picture for their labels (Ray 1974; Rothschild and Beaumarchais 1983; Herman and Pascal 2003). While there are beautiful books displaying the labels and a few more insightful books and articles (Caldeway and House 2003; Dickinson 2001; Croidieu et al. 2017), there is no significant semiotic or art-oriented research published on this extraordinary corpus. Critical studies of the Leeuwin Art Series labels (Negrin 2015) and decoding cross-cultural images on wine labels (Dutton and Normand-Marconnet 2019) contribute to the emerging scholarship on art wine labels, but there is more research oriented towards reading wine labels as text for marketing and brand positioning (Cellay and Remaud 2018). Art in wine advertising is another important area to be further explored (Unwin 1992; Venturini 1988), with champagne posters being the most closely analysed to date (Guy 2003; Rabaudy Montoussin 1998; Bonal 1990).

Philanthropy is another bridge often observed between art and wine. Many wineries around the world fund emerging and established artists, including residencies and sponsored exhibitions. However interesting these links may be for promotion of art through wine and vice versa, this relationship rarely results in the production of wine texts as wine is not normally a criterion for selection of artists or artworks.

### Film, wine and culture

Hundreds of films feature wine in a starring role, as a meaningful symbol or in many other guises. Sideways (2004) is the most cited, studied and appreciated wine film in the world to date. Its real impact on the sales of merlot, which was derided by the tragic protagonist Miles, versus pinot noir, which he revered, was more anecdotal than evidence based, as Cuellar et al. (2009) have shown. Yet it inaugurated a new trend of wine-focused Hollywood-style films that portray vineyards, winemakers and the wine industry as culturally significant markers in a cinematic dichotomy that attributes value to authentic wine experiences and condemns those that fall short. A Good Year (2006) followed in this vein soon after, then Bottleshock (2008), which presents a fictionalised dramatisation of the 1976 ‘Judgement of Paris’. These filmic texts and many others are analysed by Raphaël Schirmer in...
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‘Holly[wine] ou le vin dans le cinéma américain’ [Holly(wine) or Wine in the American Cinema] (2014), which in turn draws on Bernardo Sanchez Salas’s El Cine del Vino [The Cinema of Wine] (2007) to establish its corpus of 100 American fictional films referencing wine – in a central or marginal way – dating from 1932 to 2012. Schirmer identifies several stages in the journey towards representing American wine appreciation, from the early ‘apprenticeship’ films through democratisation, to develop a new discourse on wine that foregrounds greater connoisseurship, including knowledge of specific varieties, styles and refined practices of production and degustation. He concludes that American cinema’s soft power has initiated and empowered American and global audiences to integrate wine as a positive, glamorous yet accessible product for consumption by all.

The French cinematic tradition contains many fictional films with wine references, but recent examples such as Tu seras mon fils [You Will Be My Son] (2011), Premiers crus [First Growths] (2015), and Ce qui nous lie [Back to Burgundy] (2017) extend the genre in new directions to explore current issues, including identity and heritage, family dynamics and economic pressures, in an increasingly globalised industry. Other European cinemas also include references to their winemaking regions and products, but it is interesting that outside America, there are very few feature-length fictionalised narratives about New World winemaking that focus on vineyards, winemakers and the wine industry.

Documentaries about winemaking and wine drinking are a different category of text altogether. In the same year that Sideways launched a new global discourse via the American wine film, the French-American production by Jonathan Nossiter Mondovino (2004) presented a new challenge to the rapidly globalising wine industry, exposing flaws in a system that seemed to be encouraging homogenisation rather than terroir-based differentiation in winemaking. Nominated for a prestigious competition slot in the official selection of the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, Mondovino quickly became a global phenomenon, even though Nossiter did not win the Palme d’Or, which went to fellow documentary disruptor Michael Moore with Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004). Even more widely analysed than Sideways, Mondovino has attracted Bourdieusian critiques (Halley 2018) as well as psychoanalytical perspectives (Beuvelet 2011) and socio-economic international market studies (Roese 2008). The spinoff ten-part series of the same name released in 2006 was not as successful, but the cinematic storytelling of the wine world had started, and the documentary proved its best medium.


These cinematic texts have found a home in various wine film festivals, the most famous being the mobile feast of Oenovideo, held in a different French wine region each year since 1993 (www. oenovideo.com/). The MOST festival in its tenth edition in 2021 is held in the Vinseum of Catalunya in Barcelona (www.mostfestival.cat/el-festival/), and the online International Wine Film Festival, which began in 2015 in Santa Barbara, showcases short and feature films about wine (http://
Text, wine and culture

There is clearly so much to be written about the burgeoning corpus of fictional and documentary films on wine and the events dedicated to promoting them. And there are also many opportunities to make more films about the rich and complex world(s) of wine.

Conclusion

Text, wine and culture are inextricably linked throughout history and into the present, but there is relatively little scholarly research that focuses on the textual interplay of wine and literature, wine and art or wine and film. To return to where this chapter began, with Roland Barthes and his *Mythologies*, featuring one of the most famous studies of the symbolic significance of wine in French culture, ‘Le Vin et le lait’ [Wine and Milk], in which he wrote: ‘*Le vin est senti par la nation française comme un bien qui lui est propre, au même titre que ses trois cent soixante espèces de fromages et sa culture. C’est une boisson-totem*’ [Wine is felt by the French nation to be a possession which is its very own, just like its three hundred and sixty types of cheese and its culture. It is a totem-drink] (Barthes 1957: 69). Wine is here equated to culture itself – both attributes that the French possess – but Barthes also underscores the links of wine culture with text when referring to the cultural practices and meanings associated with wine: ‘*Tout cela est connu, dit mille fois dans le folklore, les proverbes, les conversations et la Littérature*’ [All this is well known and has been said a thousand times in folklore, proverbs, conversations and Literature] (Barthes 1957: 70). Mythologies represent cultures, and in scriptural societies, they are carried across the centuries by texts of different kinds – including literary, artistic and filmic manifestations. To understand wine cultures in their depth and breadth, we need to pay more scholarly attention to these evocative and informative literary, artistic and filmic texts from around the world.

References


