

Should Wine History Have a Post-colonial Future? British Imperial Viticulture and Settler Colonialism

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Article abstract

As the history of wine emerges as a field of scholarly study, scholars may wish to consider the historiographical and theoretical approaches best suited to its study, particularly in regards to recent research into the central role of colonization in the global spread of viticulture. This article gives an overview of some major historiographical approaches to wine history, noting the general absence of overarching discussions of imperialism and colonialism. Then, to illustrate some of the complexities of applying these frameworks, it considers two related stories, and briefly retells them through each of three theoretical lenses. The first story is of the creation and operation of the Burgoyne Company, the major British importer of Australian and South African wine from the 1870s through the 1950s. The second story is of Burgoyne, and others, importing their wine into the Irish market. These microhistories illustrate what is potentially at stake, and what is complicated, in incorporating colonial and post-colonial frameworks into our understanding of wine history.

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JENNIFER REGAN-LEFEBVRE*

Abstract

As the history of wine emerges as a field of scholarly study, scholars may wish to consider the historiographical and theoretical approaches best suited to its study, particularly in regards to recent research into the central role of colonization in the global spread of viticulture. This article gives an overview of some major historiographical approaches to wine history, noting the general absence of overarching discussions of imperialism and colonialism. Then, to illustrate some of the complexities of applying these frameworks, it considers two related stories, and briefly retells them through each of three theoretical lenses. The first story is of the creation and operation of the Burgoyne Company, the major British importer of Australian and South African wine from the 1870s through the 1950s. The second story is of Burgoyne, and others, importing their wine into the Irish market. These microhistories illustrate what is potentially at stake, and what is complicated, in incorporating colonial and post-colonial frameworks into our understanding of wine history.

Résumé

Alors que l'histoire du vin émerge en tant que domaine d'étude scientifique, les chercheur.e.s peuvent souhaiter considérer les approches historiographiques et théoriques les mieux adaptées à son étude, en particulier en ce qui concerne les recherches récentes sur le rôle central de la colonisation dans l'expansion mondiale de la viticulture. Cet article donne un aperçu des principales approches historiographiques de l'histoire du vin, en notant l'absence générale de discussions globales sur l'impérialisme et le colonialisme. Ensuite, pour illustrer certaines des complexités de l'application de ces cadres, il examine deux histoires liées, et les raconte brièvement à travers chacune des trois optiques théoriques.

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La première histoire est celle de la création et du fonctionnement de la Burgoyne Company, le principal importateur britannique de vin australien et sud-africain des années 1870 aux années 1950. La deuxième histoire est celle de Burgoyne, et d'autres, qui importaient leur vin sur le marché irlandais. Ces micro-histoires illustrent ce qui est potentiellement en jeu, et ce qui est compliqué, dans l'incorporation des cadres coloniaux et postcoloniaux dans notre compréhension de l'histoire du vin.

The emergence of wine history as a rigorous academic study demands a sustained and deeper level of theoretical engagement from scholars. Until relatively recently, wine history was largely the preserve of wine enthusiasts, individuals with deep wine expertise who were unburdened by the methodological baggage of academic debate. For expert-enthusiasts, the growth of viticulture throughout the world has been something unequivocally positive, bringing the joys of wine consumption to the global masses. The creation of a “New World” was wine’s manifest destiny realized, an achievement that seemed only natural and that was to be celebrated. Knowing how difficult it is to extract excellent wine from grapes and soil — and it is challenging, and requires patience and great investment — entrepreneurial winemakers who have struck out in new climes have won the admiration of many wine-writers.

Yet one can love wine, in all its diversity, and still bring a critical historian’s perspective to understanding its past. Wine-writers’ delight in the historical growth of viticulture has largely ignored the power dynamics that fostered viticulture in the New World. In contribution to the growth of wine history as a field of rigorous academic study, this paper examines and weighs the theoretical positions and commitments historians might take in analyzing the importance of settler colonialism to new viticulture in the British world, and indeed to the “New World” or wine as a whole.

The “British world of wine” might seem to be a contradiction in terms, because Britain is not a long-established wine producer, but there was indeed such a thing. By “British world of wine” I refer to the regions where the earliest wine vineyards were planted, expanded, and nurtured under British colonial/imperial oversight and settlement, and where there is a lasting legacy of British culture (primarily, where English is the predominant language, through the Commonwealth organization, and through the establishment of settler communities). These main settler colonies where winemaking took hold were Australia, South Africa, and

New Zealand, although winemaking was also attempted in India, Virginia, and southern Ontario, and predated the British in the non-settler colonies of Cyprus and Malta. As I discuss at length elsewhere, and as other historians have also argued, the metropolitan British state offered official support for winemaking in these colonies, at least at the outset.¹ Early officials brought vine cuttings to grow grapes, they encouraged settlers to grow grapes through financial incentives and through disseminating educational material, they relaxed migration rules to allow wine expertise into their colonies, and they sanctioned exploitative labour arrangements that benefited wine growers. The same dynamic appears to be true with regard to other European colonial powers, such as with French colons/vignerons in Algeria, or Spanish conquistadores in South America.² In other words, colonialism and winemaking were integral to creating what we now know as wine's New World.

Historiography: Nationalism, Consumption, and Post-colonialism

Academic wine history has largely been dominated by two major theoretical approaches, focused on nationalism and consumption. These approaches employ methodologies from political, socio-economic, and cultural history. There is also a body of literature that examines wine in the past through trade and economic relationships, but which is more concerned with the methodologies of economics than of history.³ Furthermore, there are historians who take environmental approaches, and this is an exciting growth area in wine history to watch over the coming years. By "academic wine history," I refer to scholarship based on original research, published in scholarly journals and academic books, normally emanating from universities.

The nationalism (or nation building) approach has shown how wine has been employed in the creation of national identity and modern nation-states. The most thorough example is Kolleen Guy's *When Champagne Became French*, a fascinating demonstration of the deliberate, nineteenth-century myth-making process that made a sparkling wine, created largely by German families in eastern France, globally synonymous with luxury, excellence, and above all, Frenchness.⁴ This seminal moment in wine history coincided with a longer process of French nation-formation, through the spread of a national French-language press, public education, and transport infrastructure.⁵ Guy's work thus explains how Champagne acquired its reputation, and she contextualizes this process into wider trends in French history.

In a similar vein, Charles Ludington has shown how port and claret became intertwined with social class, gender, and international geopolitics in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, to the extent that port became known as the “Englishman’s wine.” The timing was critical, as Ludington describes this period as just when Britain’s political system was beginning to democratize, and thus port became a proxy for larger debates about the nature of Britishness and the state.⁶ One of Ludington’s most startling and powerful conclusions is that wine came to symbolize national character in a period of state building, even though that wine itself was created in a foreign country. Given that the United Kingdom was a state made of islands, though, it was not unusual that Britishness was defined through and against identities in neighbouring European countries.⁷

Wine also played a role that was logistical, and not only symbolic, in European nation-states. For the early modern period, Thomas Brennan has demonstrated how the business of wine in the Champagne and Burgundy regions actually created the human and physical trade networks that would modernize France and, even, prepare the terrain for later revolutionary activity. In other words, Brennan demonstrates that wine was critical rather than incidental to the creation of modern France, although it was the commerce of wine, not the symbolism of imbibing it, that was formative. For Portugal, Marta Macedo has shown how the needs of the port wine industry, and the engineering projects undertaken to facilitate the wine’s transportation out of the inland Douro region, both created and reinforced Portugal’s national infrastructure and evolving national identity.⁸

A second, related approach to wine history has been to emphasize consumption: how wine has been consumed, the culture surrounding that consumption, and the meaning that people took from that consumption. A fascinating recent example is Stephen Bittner’s *Whites and Reds*, which shows in great detail the shifting “cultural valences” surrounding wine and its consumption in tsarist and Soviet Russia. One example is his discussion of how writers in late-tsarist Russia used wine as a literary trope to amplify and signify social fissures.⁹ David Hancock’s *Oceans of Wine*, a history of the production and trade in Madeira wine in the eighteenth century, delves in great detail into the ritual and role of Madeira in the culture of the Atlantic world.¹⁰

These two approaches have been illuminating and fruitful for wine history in many contexts, but they are insufficient to understand the British world of wine. The glaring theoretical problem, which has

been hiding in plain sight, is that the British world of wine was created through settler colonialism, and that neither of these two theoretical approaches necessarily addresses or adequately accounts for the colonial experience.

How has this historical fact been so rarely mentioned in any of the literature on wine? The European nation-based identification of wine — the one that Kolleen Guy has so painstakingly analyzed and dismantled, for example — is the dominant taxonomy for modern wine consumption and comparison. When wines are classified by country — in shops, in wine-writing, in wine education courses — this carries through to wine history. Some serious wine histories clearly anticipate the creation of modern states, even as they examine the place of wine before those states were created.¹¹ These national categories speak powerfully to writers and to consumers, and indeed, as we have seen, they are very useful categories, when historians study them critically. That is to say, it is a historically useful question to ask what is “Australian” about Australian wine, and how our concept of Australian-ness has, indeed, been constructed over time. The same would be true of any other wine-producing country.

Furthermore, advanced training in both history and in wine expertise traditionally took a nation-state perspective. Although graduate history training has shifted to more comparative, transnational, and thematic approaches, many of us were not trained to adjust our lens, zoom out, and think globally and comparatively. Barriers of language, travel, and archival access make it even more difficult for historians to feel comfortable drawing comparisons across the worlds of wine. However, stepping back to consider the breadth of the British world of wine, the need to explain the colonial aspects of winemaking become obvious and urgent to our practice. This urgency perhaps only becomes apparent when British viticultural territories are taken in comparative perspective. Certainly, there are many aspects of Australian wine history that are illuminated — and indeed, that remain to be analyzed — using a nationalism or consumption approach. The same is true of New Zealand, or South Africa, or southern Ontario, or even Virginia or India. However, the extent to which we historians have underestimated the role of colonialism becomes apparent once we enumerate the number of winemaking territories where there was a major (European) colonial machine.

There are three main reasons to adjust our lens to imperialism. The first is because of the obviously exploitative nature of colonialism.

By not considering colonialism in the history of wine, we have effectively erased the impact of viticulture on Indigenous communities. We also have denied ourselves a lens to recognize and appreciate the roles that Indigenous peoples undertook in wine production and consumption. Once we recognize this fact, our history of wine inevitably looks different. The second reason is because the logistics of the creation and consumption of wine might be explained differently if we acknowledge colonial relationships. Debates about tariffs in the British Empire often hinged on whether winemakers in British colonies should be subject to different (lower) tariffs than European countries — which European neighbours protested as an unfair market advantage, and which colonial producers strenuously lobbied for. The cost of making wine and exporting it in a colonial (and post-colonial) context therefore was dependent on the specific market conditions created through imperial trade. But if we want to understand the real costs and profitability of winemaking in eighteenth-century South Africa, we must also acknowledge that winemakers relied heavily on African and southeast Asian enslaved peoples. The third reason, perhaps the most obvious, is the presence of European settlers. The three major wine producing countries of the British Empire were settled by large numbers of Europeans, mostly British and Irish in origin. Wine was a creation of settler-colonial communities. Even if Indigenous peoples were drawn into producing wine, willingly or through coercion, it was European settler communities that owned and operated the wine industries, and reaped any eventual profits. To a great degree, they still do.

A post-colonial theoretical perspective can help to illuminate some of these issues and actors, although it brings its own complications and drawbacks. By “post-colonial,” I refer to the very broad category of scholarly work that considers European colonialism to have had a pervasive, enduring, and negative impact upon colonized peoples and societies. This is an approach that sees colonialism as the key to understanding lived experience both during and after formal European rule, and that reads both past and current events through this lens. For the purposes of this paper, I consider post-colonial to be an umbrella term that can encompass anti-colonial and decolonial positions, and I am deliberately generalizing (and, perhaps, over-simplifying). Because post-colonialism is so conspicuously absent from wine history writing, I offer a very simplified version here, as a means of opening discussion of its merits as an approach. The contrast should

demonstrate how a view of wine history that ignores colonialism has, in fact, already become canonical, and is thus ripe for criticism.

Post-colonial reading is often difficult to do, especially for historians who have been trained in empirical methods of archival analysis, when the archives themselves were created by the imperial state.¹² Post-colonial history sometimes uses literary and anthropological tools to deconstruct archival material that was created by the imperial state in order to extract information about Indigenous populations that the archive's creators had ignored or intended to suppress. In this regard post-colonialism is broadly postmodern in how it destabilizes knowledge and texts, but whereas postmodernism's most famous thinkers were from European academia, post-colonialism's have been from the Global South and its diasporas.

Reading a text as a post-colonial scholar, a historian becomes attuned to the nuances of the colonial experience, and conscious of the ways in which imperial states marginalized (and often dehumanized) Indigenous peoples. By reading against the grain, historians can seek and find information that gives a fuller picture of lived experience. Providing a fuller, richer account of the past through careful primary source work is, ultimately, the historian's aim. Post-colonial scholars are not, however, merely interested in truth and accuracy, but also in ethical and moral redistribution. Rewriting history through a post-colonial lens does not simply make our historical narrative more detailed: it helps to right a wrong. Elizabeth Carlson, a scholar of social work, urges those who study settler colonialism to "seek to disrupt rather than enact colonial values and practices, and engage in anti-colonial actions within the academy."¹³ This activist positioning makes some historians uncomfortable, because it would appear at odds with the historian's commitment to detached objectivity. A post-colonial scholar might respond that the historian's discomfort must be weighed against the oppression of Indigenous communities and put into perspective. A post-colonial scholar would also question the very existence of detached objectivity, and situate it as a value system promoted by the colonial state itself. Furthermore, post-colonial scholars would note that such supposed objectivity is the product of a historically specific intellectual tradition, namely, that which is known as the European Enlightenment, and not necessarily a universal methodology or truth. These ethical discussions are further complicated by the political situations in which scholars actually live and work, and the urgency of public discussion around colonialism and its contemporary legacies.

The Burgoyne Company: Three Readings

To demonstrate some of the differences in these theoretical approaches, I will begin briefly with a relatively straightforward example: how we might explain the experience of an English importer of Australian wine in the late nineteenth century. I tell this as a continuous narrative, but changing the theoretical lens three times: the identity and nation-state approach, the consumption approach, and finally a post-colonial approach. Then, however, I will purposefully muddy the waters by introducing another example: how to think of that same Australian wine once it entered the contemporary Irish marketplace.

Identity and Nation

The Burgoyne Company was established by Peter Bond Burgoyne, a native of Devon, southwest England, in 1872. The family's surname appears to be an anglicization of the French word *Bourgogne*, or Burgundy, which might tempt us to read a historic link to French wine trading, but all evidence suggests the Burgoynes had no outstanding links to France in the nineteenth century. Peter Bond Burgoyne quickly became the chief importer of Australian wine in Britain, with his headquarters in London and eventually an office in Melbourne, Victoria.¹⁴ Although wine was far more marginal to the British diet than coffee or tea, Burgoyne's efforts helped to establish "colonial wine" as one of many food imports from the Empire. Together, these food imports changed both the British diet and the British economy over the nineteenth century. The Industrial Revolution happened in tandem with a consumer revolution; urbanization further led most Britons to purchase their food in the marketplace, rather than produce it themselves. Furthermore, the expansion of imperial trade, and technological changes that made shipping fresh food more practical, meant that many British staple foods could be produced in colonies, freeing up the British labour force to focus on the industrial and service industries. Wine was thus part of the "modernization" of Britain in the nineteenth century, in which lamb was imported into Britain from New Zealand, wheat from Canada, raisins from South Africa, cocoa from Ghana (then called the Gold Coast), and all washed down with tea from Ceylon.¹⁵

Burgoyne was one of thousands of merchants who took advantage of imperial trade opportunities in the late nineteenth century and helped create the British global economy. In the nineteenth cen-

ture most of the wine consumed in Britain came from three European states: France, Spain, and Portugal. Given that France, in particular, was an imperial rival, the consumption of French wine was sometimes fraught for British consumers.¹⁶ In the first half of the nineteenth century there was a robust market for Cape (South African) wines in Britain, and the popularity of these wines was likely because they were both well priced and a “British” rather than “foreign” product.¹⁷ Burgoyne, too, was keen to emphasize the Britishness and imperial pride of his Australian wines, and his company’s advertising crowed about its contribution to “a great British Empire Industry.”¹⁸

Exporting wine also shaped the evolving sense of identity in Australia, as both a sovereign dominion and a loyal member of the British Empire. Wine was introduced to Australia by European traders and vines were first planted by the British in the late eighteenth century. Since most nineteenth-century Australian winemakers had small operations, and most wine was shipped for blending and bottling on arrival in Britain, winemakers were conscious of producing “Australian” and “colonial” wine as much as their own personal product. Making wine for export to Britain (and other British colonies) was, therefore, an identity-affirming act for Australians, and may even have helped foster a sense of shared Australian identity before the federation of 1901, as Australian wines were often presented and promoted together in international wine exhibitions and colonial displays.¹⁹

Consumption and Culture

Burgoyne’s wines were imported into Britain where they appear to have been consumed by a burgeoning middle class and the upper reaches of the working classes, probably on an occasional (rather than frequent or daily) basis. Burgoyne’s advertising strategies, which for c. 1870–1920 focused on large public exhibition events, advertisements in daily provincial newspapers, and posters in public transportation, emphasized the affordability and approachability of colonial wines. Many advertisements listed the prices of the wines as well as their imperial origin. These indicate a perceived consumer base that was open to drinking wine, but perhaps worried that wine was too expensive for their means, or was suspiciously “foreign” and fancy.²⁰ Australian wine thus has a cultural role in British history that reveals a changing consumer society, one that was largely urban, that celebrated life’s rituals with alcohol consumption, and that was class-conscious. This deepens our understanding of British social history, which has been dominated

by beer and the place of the public house (pub), both of which, in the nineteenth century, were predominantly male spaces of consumption. When we also study the trade trajectory of Burgoyne's colonial wines in the British marketplace, we learn more about the habits of British women, and of domestic alcohol consumption.

Looking at wine advertising further reveals the public sphere in which ideas circulated, and in which British people were increasingly confronted with consumption choices. Burgoyne's wines were also promoted as "wholesome" and clean, which is both a reference to broader debates about food and drug safety in Victorian Britain, and a means of hawking wines as a health product which could be used medicinally. Many household guides and medical primers from the period instruct middle-class housewives on how to make wine punches, serve wine with special dinners, and dose wine as medicine for ill family members.²¹ This is how Burgoyne's advertisements could claim that "the medical profession invariably recommend" their wines, which "possess high tonic and invigorating properties, and have few equal restoratives in cases of Nervous Exhaustion and Anemia ... they reinstate and tone the system, and are helpful to digestion."²²

Post-colonial Reading

The Burgoyne Company acquired its own vineyard, Tintara, from the Scottish settler colonist Alexander Kelly. Tintara was located in McLaren Vale, in South Australia, on land that had been forcibly taken from the Kanyanyapilla nation. Archaeological evidence shows that the Kanyanyapilla remained in the region and led resistance to the settler expansion, not that they were merely displaced. Despite the deprivations they experienced due to European extractive practices, as land was seized for vine-growing and other forms of fixed agriculture, evidence points to the resilience of the Kanyanyapilla in adapting a mixed economy that incorporated but did not solely rely on traditional practices.²³ This should not be interpreted as mimicry of settler culture — meaning, that Aboriginal Australians, impressed by European life-style, attempted to imitate it — but rather that Aboriginal cultures were resilient, accommodating, and adjusting to this oppressive new economic reality.

British settlers in Australia regarded Aboriginal nations as savage and lacking, and expressed surprise at the refinement of certain Aboriginal leaders who were willing to taste European wine. Settler-colonial winemakers thus sprung from a society with a deeply ingrained sense

of racial hierarchy, with white British people at the top, and those that they colonized at the bottom. This was most clearly reflected in the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from any political rights or representation in settler colonies. However, while European settlers drank wine in self-assurance of their own civilized taste, their own ideology of European supremacy was undermined by their bungled early attempts at winemaking. Burgoyne claimed frequently to his Australian suppliers that the wines they produced were too thin, too young, too hastily made, and, overall, of insufficient quality to sell on the London market.²⁴ Rather than visionary pioneers with superior skills and competencies, the early settler-winemakers show the experimental and haphazard reality of colonial winemaking. Burgoyne's correspondence with his Australian agents and suppliers does not simply point to individual examples of bad winemaking; it destabilizes the very notion of a top-down, confident, and smoothly administered imperial project which the British tried to project and which historians were, for too long, willing to accept uncritically.

The very name of Burgoyne's best-known wine was appropriated from an Indigenous language, while simultaneously showing the casual derision British settlers bestowed on Aboriginal Australians. In a newspaper article documenting settlers' pseudo-scholarly investigations into the place names they had bestowed on Aboriginal lands, the name "Tintara" is explained as having "Honoured a Blackfellow." First, the article establishes settler ownership, technological prowess, and improving tendencies, noting that Tintara is "a locality which has come into cultivation largely through the scrub-clearing operations conducted with the aid of traction engines." This description erases the land's previous usages and reveals the assumption that scrubland is uncultivated, in every sense of the word, and only acquired any value through the deliberate machinations of European settlers. Rather, scrubland had its own rich biodiversity and both the native plants and the wildlife they supported sustained Aboriginal foodways.²⁵ These food sources were eliminated through European clearances.

The name Tintinara, the article relates in a whimsical tone, was chosen by the wife of a settler farmer: "Mrs. Boothby suggested that Tintinara, the cognomen of a black-fellow who used to loaf about the hut, was a pretty one, and so it was adopted." When the Tintinara property became a commercial vineyard, the shareholders specifically sought a "native name," but Tintinara "was considered to be too long for trade purposes, and accordingly was shortened to Tintara."²⁶ Tin-

tinara, if that was his name, likely did not know that this part of his identity had also been usurped and extracted, used to enrich British businessmen in selling wine from the land on which he had previously gained his livelihood. The description of Tintinara “loaf[ing] about the hut” shows how settlers viewed him as harmless, perhaps comic, and probably lazy. The trope of the “lazy” or “indolent” native is persistent in late-Victorian British colonialism, although it has a much older history.²⁷ Rather than take this at face value, we should recognize it as evidence of European racial condescension and an act of resistance on the part of the colonized, to refuse to conform to the European exploitative work model.

Exporting to the Colonized? The Irish Market

These three readings are all equally accurate, and yet they provide very different perspectives on wine history and of how we should understand a company like that of Burgoyne, a major figure in the British world of wine. The post-colonial reading has the advantage of revising the heroic narrative of a growing enterprise, to also account for the pain and dispossession that the settler project caused in general, and one to which Burgoyne contributed. It exposes a one-versus-the-other mentality: the poor oppressed native, the greedy cruel settler. While this might be true, it could be a distraction from pressing further in our analysis. In exposing this binary in the past, we also run the risk of ossifying it, and preserving our historical actors as simple and flat rather than as multi-faceted individuals.

To add complexity without getting into the theoretical weeds, we could consider how to read Burgoyne’s wine once it arrived in the Irish market. Nineteenth-century Ireland was a constitutional and political anomaly. Ireland became an integral part of the United Kingdom in 1801, when the Act of Union went into effect, but it retained some colonial features, such as a Lord Lieutenant (similar to a colonial governor) and a militarized police. Moreover, Ireland lagged far behind the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of social, economic, and industrial indicators. Ireland was much poorer and more agricultural than neighboring Great Britain, and it was also predominantly Catholic and Gaelic in identity and ancestry, in contrast to Britain’s Protestant and Anglo majority. For these reasons, and because of the strong Irish nationalist narrative of colonialism and oppression, there is a vast literature that has been interrogating Ireland’s place in the Empire. Ireland

was both colonized and colonizer, was both imperial and colonial.²⁸ The victim-versus-oppressor narrative is thus of limited analytical value.

Much of the foundational work of harmonizing Irish history with imperial and colonial history has emphasized identity and politics, not food. This contrasts with an important area of inquiry in British history which has been the ways in which commodities from the Empire changed cultural and economic practice in Great Britain. Some of the most interesting work, in my opinion, has been on food: on how the Empire dramatically changed what people in Britain ate over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Troy Bickham has argued, imported foods became “not only the most abundant products of imperial trade, but also the empire’s most prevalent symbols” in the lives of ordinary British people, regardless of locality, gender, or social class.²⁹ Such studies of imperial culture “at home” generally exclude Ireland and focus primarily on Great Britain. But this line of inquiry has not been taken up by Irish historians either for several reasons, which indeed mirror the trends in wine history scholarship.

As with wine history, our understanding of the degree to which Irish diets under the Union were shaped by imperialism has certainly been shaped by the character of nineteenth-century Irish nationalism — only here, it is the historical sources themselves that boldly claim food as a national trope, and not the historians who have analyzed it later (for there is not a great deal of scholarship on Irish food history). This is, of course, because the most significant event in Ireland under the Union was a major famine, caused by the failure of the potato crop, and leading to the death or departure of one-quarter of the Irish population. Food, and consumption, were thus politicized: a subsistence economy had collapsed in a part of the United Kingdom that felt culturally at odds with the rest, and which had comparatively low levels of democratic representation in the so-called Imperial Parliament. This haunting crisis fueled the Irish nationalist movements, which decried the hypocrisy that the powerful British Empire had allowed such suffering within its own four kingdoms. The Irish nationalist Member of Parliament J.F.X. O’Brien, writing in the 1890s, composed a scathing account of how Irish food was exported during the Famine; he blamed London for this humanitarian disaster. Irish people were starving, he wrote, while the foreign government in London allowed food to leave Ireland. With a startling lack of self-awareness, though, he reveals a few pages later that he was engaged in his family’s butter export business during the Famine years.³⁰

Far more sophisticated thinkers than O'Brien shared his intentions, though. Indeed, what we think we know about Irish food in the nineteenth century has probably been shaped by such accounts, which were written when it was politically expedient to emphasize the suffering of the Irish peasant, their meagre meals, their simple provisions, and to condemn the political situation that had created this shameful situation. The narrative of the oppressive forces of British colonialism is therefore not difficult to find in Irish historical sources. Modern historians are usually more circumspect in their analysis, although one historian's recent conclusion of Ireland during the Famine was that "it's not just that Ireland was starving as England was thriving — it's that Ireland was starving *in order* to feed England."³¹ The merits of Irish nationalist arguments aside, we should recognize that nationalist texts about food and drink were not intended as inventories for future historians, but may purposefully obscure information about food and empire.

The nationalist narrative around Irish consumption extended to wine. Because wine was an import and was often expensive, it became associated with a particular social class (wealthy, Anglican, settler), and in turn it was politicized. In Ireland the socio-economic division of social wine consumption was inevitably projected onto national political questions: for nationalist polemicist Daniel Corkery, "the wine-flushed revelry of the alien gentry" was a marker of deep social divide and inequity.³² While it is undoubtedly true that Ireland under the Union was poor, and that there was tremendous suffering among the poorer tenant farmers, this does not necessarily mean that Ireland was a food-import desert, cut off from global trade and the literal fruits of empire. Furthermore, folklore sources that document the foodways of the deeply impoverished Irish peasantry are part of their own system of representation and may present what appear to be inconsistencies; again, they were not intended as records for empirical historians.³³

Corkery's association of wine with an alien gentry does not necessarily mean that Irish Catholics in pre-independence Ireland did not drink wine. He was not documenting consumption patterns, but attempting to portray a ruling class as frivolous and inadequate. As source evidence for what Irish people consumed, his description points to a strong urban-rural divide, and of a large consumer underclass that was simply unable to purchase food.

It is perhaps surprising, then, to find qualitative evidence of Burgoyne's colonial wines throughout late-Victorian Ireland. They appear

in advertisements in Irish newspapers, and in street signs in shops. Despite the nationalist bluster that tried to distance the Irish from imperial food imports, there is no particular reason to believe that Irish wine import and consumption levels were that different from British levels, with adjustments for poverty and purchasing power. Indeed, there is also evidence that Ireland imported and consumed a range of foods from across the Empire, just as England, Wales, and Scotland did. Tea had become a dietary staple of even the poorest peasants by 1900, chocolate was imported and processed by Irish firms like Jacob's, and Irish people rode bicycles with rubber tires. Irish people who considered themselves to be living under colonialism were also, simultaneously, consumers in networks of global colonial-capitalism. The products that the Irish consumed were produced under settler-colonial regimes that were violent and dangerous for Indigenous peoples.

The quantitative evidence for colonial imports is difficult to summon because of the way in which data was collected about semi-colonial Ireland. Under the Union, Ireland was included, of course, in the official reports of total imports into the United Kingdom. Sometimes parliamentary trade accounts break down imports by port, so we can see what was arriving directly to Irish ports. We often cannot see what percentage of total UK imports that entered via a major English port, were then sold on to Irish ports and channels — which was a form of internal distribution, not external trade. In other words, if we just look at accounts of Irish imports, we are certainly under-counting the amount of colonial foodstuffs that entered Irish markets.

The qualitative evidence, though, is hiding in plain sight, for example in the National Library of Ireland's recently digitized collections of photographs of Irish towns at the turn of the twentieth century. One image shows a victualler's shop in Carlow, around 1901.³⁴ As well as advertising tea and coffee — two products produced overseas by colonial labour and transported by imperialists — the shop also had prominent placards for Burgoyne's Australian Wines. We have already seen how Burgoyne sold his wines across Great Britain, and here was evidence that he sold them in Carlow, too, which, to be fair, was a bustling town of six thousand people in 1901, and one of the earliest Irish towns to be electrified. But it was not a capital city, nor a port, nor a convenient victualling station. Australian wine did not arrive in Carlow by accident; nothing does. What this suggests is that Burgoyne's trade network reached deep into provincial Ireland, and into regions that were overwhelmingly Catholic and Irish in identity. Burgoyne

was not the only one: for example, W.A. Gilbey, another prominent wine-seller who also stocked colonial wines, crops up in a general store in Roscarbery, Cork, in the early 1900s.³⁵

Furthermore, Burgoyne's wine advertisements appear in a range of Irish newspapers, as did articles about the progress of the Australian wine industry. To some degree this reflects the integration of newspapers across the United Kingdom and their tendency to fill column space with shared or syndicated articles and reprints. This was as true of English newspapers as Irish, and the result was the same: readers were exposed to information about Australian wine, most of it promotional. The *Freeman's Journal*, one of nineteenth-century Ireland's most prominent newspapers, associated with the respectable Catholic middle classes, ran advertisements for Australian wines, as did its opposite, the *Belfast News-Letter*, a Protestant publication. The centrality of these wines in late-Victorian Belfast is seen in

Boucher and Sons' frequent ads in the *Belfast News-Letter* in the 1880s for Australian wines, which it sold from its premises on Belfast's Lombard Street (which is bisected to this day by a narrow alley called Winecellar Entry, leading to the historic White's Tavern).³⁶ The *News-Letter* was unusual in that it had its own "special correspondent" who reported from across the Empire, writing in one column of how he (presumably) had visited South Africa and tried Cape wines, finding them superior to Australian wines — a comparison that evidently would have had some resonance with readers.³⁷

Where does this leave us in terms of theoretical reads on wine history? Here we have wine, produced in Australia by settlers at the expense of Aboriginal peoples' lands and freedoms, sold to Irish consumers who consider themselves to have been oppressed by settlers, but who are fully conscious of what imperialism entails. We might describe both the Irish situation and the Aboriginal situation as "colonial," indeed as marked by settler colonialism in particular, but they are materially different. Indeed, another surprise of wine history is that one of the most vocal proponents of colonial wine production in the nineteenth century was Irish: an Australian settler, born in Athlone, named James Michael Fallon. Fallon, as I have shown elsewhere, employed themes of imperial pride and loyalty to promote Australian wine to a British audience,³⁸ and he did so as an entrepreneur who was seeking to make a profit from his wine. If post-colonial methodologies hinge on identities — that is, one's political situation and power is derived from another's identity in relation to an imperial state — then

we must factor in how murky identities can become in the intertwined social and trade relationships that create wine, from grape to glass.

Conclusions

Accounting for settler colonialism in the history of wine may appear to be straightforward, and historians might feel initial relief that a post-colonial lens provides a clear way to view social relations. Acknowledging, for example, Aboriginal Australian land claims as a starting point to reconsidering Australian wine history is probably both an ethical and a truthful move. Any acknowledgement of colonialism is a step forward for the canon of wine history, which is largely Eurocentric and celebratory in nature.

However, once we recognize the overlapping and ambiguous identities that develop over the course of the wine trade, it becomes clear that the colonizer/colonized dichotomy is oversimplified. The role of the Irish as winemakers and wine consumers connects them to the Australian land, and complicates any simple narrative of oppression. Certainly, the wrong way to analyze this relationship is by looking for a finger to point, a person to blame. This should reassure historians who are conscientious in their practice, but also wary of entering highly charged public debates about imperial legacies.

Furthermore, we would be wise, in considering all of these approaches, to not forget the existence of wine itself. In the 1990s a major debate took place in the pages of the academic journal *Irish Historical Studies*, in which one scholar accused his colleagues of erasing the “catastrophic element” of Irish history in their pursuit of detached, objective scholarship. Regarding the Irish Famine, scholarship that analyzed detailed data without remarking on horrific suffering had lost the forest for the trees, he argued. On the other side of the debate, scholars seemed to suggest that dwelling on suffering did not advance or broaden our understanding, and could be self-serving and even politically motivated.³⁹

This detailed segue into Irish history and historiography might seem a most unlikely avenue for better understanding wine history, but my hope is that it draws out the complexities to consider as historians approach wine. A post-colonial mindset reveals that there are, indeed, catastrophic elements to the history of wine. These should not be erased or ignored, either for ethical reasons or simply for the pursuit of accuracy. On the other hand, wine history has more often been

about feast, rather than famine. Rather than wallowing in suffering, wine historians could be accused of lingering too long on the joyously intoxicating elements of wine. To simply celebrate wine without studying it critically does little to broaden our historical understanding. But to pursue analytical scholarship without acknowledging both the pain and joy that wine has brought communities would also be a form of denial. Like good winemakers, historians should seek balance, and use a variety of methods to extract the most flavour and complexity from the past.

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Endnotes

- 1 See, in particular, Jennifer Regan-Lefebvre, *Imperial Wine: How the British Empire Made Wine's New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022); Mary Rayner, "Wine and Slaves: The Failure of an Export Economy and the Ending of Slavery in the Cape Colony, South Africa, 1806–1834" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1986); Julie McIntyre, *First Vintage: Wine in Colonial New South Wales* (Newcastle: University of New South Wales Press, 2013); Keith Stewart, *Chancers and Visionaries: A History of Wine in New Zealand* (Auckland: Godwit, 2010).
- 2 Kolleen M. Cross, "The Evolution of Colonial Agriculture: The Creation of the Algerian 'Vignoble,' 1870–1892," *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 16 (1992): 57–72; Owen White, *The Blood of the Colony: Wine and the Rise and Fall of French Algeria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Elizabeth Heath, *Wine, Sugar, and the Making of Modern France: Global Economic Crisis and the Racialization of French Citizenship, 1870–1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

- 3 For example, the American Association of Wine Economists' journal produces a great deal of historical data.
- 4 Kolleen Guy, *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). For a complementary study on how migrants from the Low Countries established themselves in France's Loire wine industry, see Valentin Taveau, "Ackerman-Laurance: Famille, négoce et industrie des vins mousseux en Saumurois au XIX^e siècle (1811–1914)" (PhD diss., Université d'Angers, 2021).
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- 13 Elizabeth Carlson, "Anti-colonial Methodologies and Practices for Settler Colonial Studies," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 4 (2017): 504, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2016.1241213>.
- 14 The Burgoyne papers are held at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), UK.
- 15 See, for example, Troy Bickham, "Eating the Empire: Intersections of Food, Cookery and Imperialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Past & Present* 198, no. 1 (2008): 71–109; Rebecca J.H. Woods, "Breed, Culture, and Economy: The New Zealand Frozen Meat Trade, 1880–1914," *The Agricultural History Review* 60, no. 2 (2012): 288–308; Emma Robertson, *Chocolate, Women and Empire: A Social and Cultural History*

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