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Wine as Represented in Contemporary Cinema

A Semiotic Review

Francesco Mangiapane

1. Films “with” wine

- 1 There are countless film sequences that immortalize the consumption of wine. Whether it is a matter of great feasts or intimate candlelit dinners, of honouring public holidays or taking a refreshment break before resuming the routine of daily life, wine is there, to play the role of mirror of the social world and of silent actor of taste, capable of transforming the moods and flows of passion of the characters, be they individuals, groups or communities.¹
- 2 For instance, champagne becomes for the austere official of the Russian Communist Party Ninotchka, the main character of Ernst Lubitsch’s famous film (*Ninotchka*, 1939), an emblem of levity and opulence, the synthesis of a Western lifestyle far removed from the Spartan ways of the Soviets.
- 3 Moreover, how could we forget the role that wine plays in Hitchcock’s masterpiece, *Notorious* (1946)? In this film, the drink is represented in its double ambition as a portentous elixir and as a poison (*pharmakon*). The film focuses on the alteration of perception first sought in wine and then suffered as a result of poisoning by the young spy Elena: it is precisely the loss of control—induced by alcohol, as well as by poison—that inextricably constitutes both a subtle pleasure and a mortal danger. A completely different setting is created around the wine drunk in Eric Rohmer’s *My Night at Maud’s* (1969). Three friends meet for dinner at Maud’s, a young widow of an upper-class background from Clermont-Ferrand. At the table, they talk about philosophy. At some point, the wine—a Chanturgue—becomes the subject of conversation. While drinking, the Catholic Jean-Louis extols it as an example of gastronomic pleasure and criticizes the philosopher Pascal, whom he faults for not paying due attention to the foods and drinks enjoyed in everyday life. Jean-Louis’ censure of Pascal allows Rohmer to

underline the value of aesthetic experience linked to the worldliness and everydayness of wine drinking, and of gastronomy in general, despite the scarce consideration usually given to these arts by the philosophical tradition.²

- 4 Then there are the wines (e.g. Clos de Vougeot, Amontillado, Veuve Clicquot...) drunk in *Babette's Feast* (1987), Gabriel Axel's film set in a deprived Protestant village in the remote territory of Jutland at the end of the nineteenth century. In a context that does not attach any importance to the pleasures of gastronomy and conviviality, Babette prepares an unforgettable French dinner, impressing her guests but above all managing to manipulate them. Thanks to her cooking skills and ability to adroitly use the intoxicating properties of the wines served at her table, Babette succeeds in dissolving the fears and rigidity of the quarrelsome members of the devout Protestant community and in creating an atmosphere of sincere conviviality and friendship between them (see Mangiapane 2013, pp. 227-259). Another film—this time a horror movie, *The Invitation* (2015), directed by Karyn Kusama—stages a wine party. Will is invited by his ex-wife Eden to an old friends' reunion at the house where they lived together and which she now shares with her new husband David. Amid tasting fine wine and, between one sip and the next, reminiscing about the good old times, the two hosts Eden and David reveal to their guests the reason for the gathering. Their goal is to introduce an ambiguous sect they joined in the period following the divorce, and which they now propose as offering a chance of recovery from trauma, of redemption and happiness. During the evening, everything tends towards the creation of a common and exclusive "us", achieved by getting the guests to share their most intimate secrets. The moment of the toast arrives, which is supposed to seal the group's newfound communion and intimacy. It is a solemn moment, which however hides an attempted poisoning fortunately unmasked by Will. Thus begins the strenuous resistance of the survivors to the aggressions from the members of the sect in a succession of horrifying scenes. In this case, wine is characterized in its anthropological and religious function as a sign of community adherence, linked to rituality and deep consciousness; it represents a starting point offered to spectators to better frame the mystical exaltation combined with the murderous madness of the killers at the centre of the plot.
- 5 These cinematographic examples, arbitrarily plucked from a much broader and varied inventory of instances that run through the history of cinema, usefully highlight a small part of all the virtualities of meaning that wine can play as an actor of taste in the films in which it is consumed.

2. Films about wine

- 6 For some time now, with the progressive saturation by the cultural industry of every possible narrative pretext attributable to so-called "gastromania",³ wine has gained visibility as an autonomous cinematographic subject, indeed inspiring films entirely dedicated to it. This is the case of an emblematic production like *Sideways* (2004), the progenitor of the genre, and others, such as *A Good Year* (2006), *Bottle Shock* (2008), *The Vintner's Luck* (2009), *Days of Harvest* (2010), *The Chateau Meroux* (2011), *Tu seras mon fils* (2011), *Wohin der Weg mich führt* (2012), *Vinodentro* (2013), *Saint Amour* (2016), *Bianco di Babbudoiu* (2016), *Sour Grapes* (2016), *Back to Burgundy (Ce qui nous lie)* (2017), *The Last Prosecco* (2017), *Wine to love* (2018), up to the more recent *Wine Country* (2019), *From the Vine* (2019), *Uncorked* (2020), *Another Round* (2020). To this ever-expanding list of fiction

films may be added numerous documentaries—some of them very successful—that were released in parallel, first of all *Mondovino* (2004), followed by *Rupi del vino* (2009), *Blood into Wine* (2010), *El Camino del Vino* (2010), *Red Obsession* (2013), *A Year in Burgundy* (2013), *Natural Resistance* (2014), *A Year in Champagne* (2014), *Barolo Boys* (2014), *SOMM: Into the Bottle* (2015), *Our Blood is Wine* (2018) and more. This article aims to identify the political rhetoric recognizable in many of these films, choosing to pay attention to the overall proposal that arises from their comparison rather than digging deep into the analysis of any of them.⁴

- 7 The epistemological framework adopted for this comparison moves from the idea that stories circulating in the media⁵ work as myths of daily life (cf. Barthes 1957), endlessly reshaping the forms of sociality. More precisely, at stake is the definition of myth contributed by Lévi-Strauss (1958, pp. 227-255). Following his point of view, the function of the myth is that of dramatizing some profound dilemmas, perceived by the social body as lacerating. The case of the myth of Oedipus is taken as an example of such mechanism by Lévi-Strauss himself. The story of Oedipus may, indeed, be explained as the attempt to solve the irreconcilability between two contradictory cosmogonic models both held to be true, that of the denial of the autochthonous origin of man (by virtue of the fact that man would have been generated by the defeat of the dragon and sphinx monsters) and that of its affirmation (the lameness of Labdacus, an impediment also evoked in the name of Oedipus—“swollen foot”—connected to the idea that man can be considered an autochthonous being). Lévi-Strauss (*Ibid.*) considers that myths are entrusted to provide a plausible explanation of such kinds of contradiction, thus offering a reconciliation of them. It is as if to say that myths are characterized by the fact that they take position on foundational conflicts deemed irresolvable by the social body, providing a solution to their contradiction, with the aim of freeing the social body from anguish. Keeping faith with this approach, it can be recognized that the stories carried out by films on wine perform as myths precisely because of their ability for calling into question some lacerating paradoxes of contemporary daily life, enabling their reconciliation. As it will be argued in the following paragraphs, many contemporary stories on wine call into question the dialectics between city and countryside, dramatizing the clash among these two horizons. Many heroes of wine stories in cinema typically fall into such a clash by chance. At first glance, they appear integrated into the life they carry, characterized by being urban and cosmopolitan. This is until a rupture in their existential balance comes with the notice of having been designated as heir of a vine in some faraway countryside. Such fortuity is exactly what forces them into a period of incertitude, spent questioning their own existence and deepest desires. It will be at the end, as they get to find their own solution to the dilemmas raised by the inheritance, that the mythical proposal as traced by their existential itinerary finds its fulfilment and appears ready for the viewers to make it their own. In other terms, when considering such stories as myths, they must be questioned for their ability to give their own local solutions to general dilemmas. Examining the imagery of wine as reflected in films may hence appear as an original way of entering the social discourse. In such an epistemological framework, this article aims, in particular, to give a first overview of the contradictions upon which the consumption of wine insists, and, on the other hand, to give a picture of the competition for hegemony between the “mythical” solutions proposed by the characters to overcome such contradictions.⁶

- 8 This is why, through a comparative analysis, we will seek to uncover the common issues of a discourse on wine that can be read within a broader horizon linked to gastronomic cinema. We shall refer to the category of films that put food at the centre of the narrative, which has become an actual film genre. Among the most famous and representative examples of this genre we can mention *Babette's Feast* (1987), *Big Night* (1996), *Chocolat* (2000), *A Touch of Spice* (2003), *Ratatouille* (2007), *Julie & Julia* (2010), *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014), to which many others could be added. What these films have in common is that they postulate the background of a society governed by an abstract, disembodied ideology, that favours the intelligible dimension to the detriment of the sensible one. Thus, the predominance of a radical interpretation of religion (such as the Protestantism in the Denmark of *Babette's Feast*), or that of a logic of profit that privileges the abstract values of economic rationality at the expense of gustatory pleasure (*Ratatouille*), are undermined by the arrival of strangers who cook and eat differently from the members of the community to which they present themselves. It is indeed facing their scandalous presence that society is called to take a stand: what to do with otherness? Accept it? Reject it? Assimilate it? Ghettoize it? Many culinary films call into play the issues of interculturality and affiliation, staging identities confronting otherness and characterizing foreign chefs as agents of change (see Mangiapane 2014).
- 9 If it is true that much gastronomic cinema, with its stories, poses the problem of otherness and of the coexistence between different subjects—making characters that carry heterodox culinary/cultural identities (*Ibid.*) interact in the same context—the films that put wine at the centre of their plots seem to tread a different path. Rather than evoking otherness, many of them are configured as great return narratives in which the heroes are called upon by destiny to retrace their life path, and to reunite, through wine, with their own deepest identity.

2.1. Stories about production

- 10 Let's deal with the aforementioned tension between the city and the country. Wine circulates in the city but acts as a lure that can only attract its consumers to an elsewhere that is the vineyard. This is a fundamental opposition that concerns both the positioning of entire communities and the existential choices of individuals. The films portray the establishment of viticulture in a specific area as a lifeline, embodying the prospect of a more liveable environment than the alternative one of the factory. *The Last Prosecco* (2017) by Antonio Padovan, based on a novel by Fulvio Ervas (2010), dramatizes the dialectic that opposes the cultivation of Prosecco (which has considerably developed as a result of the international success of this type of wine) and a cement factory (symbol of the forced industrialization suffered by the same territory). Industrial settlements such as the cement factory are blamed for destroying the landscape and causing so much pollution as to poison the workers and the locals. For these people, wine represents a promise of change and progress⁷ that reformulates the identity and way of life of the territory, presenting itself as a viable alternative to the factory and to the industrial exploitation that has been perpetrated up until that moment.
- 11 This dialectic is also reproduced on a personal scale. Many wine films highlight the benefits of moving to the countryside after having lived in the city. Eric Rohmer's *Autumn Tale* (1998) frames this type of situation in the character of the no-longer-young

Magali. Newly widowed, Magali moves to the home of her deceased father, from whom she has inherited the vineyard. From that moment on she will dedicate herself to making good wine in a region unfairly considered minor, the Côtes du Rhône. The leading character's personality traits mirror that of the surrounding countryside: Magali is tough but sanguine, lonely but generous. Her choice to move to the country allows her to refocus her identity, endowing her with a passion and a job that can fill her day. The modernity of her approach is unsettling, characterized by contrast with that of the neighbouring farmers. They indeed regard her as a "fanatic" for the sole fact that she has chosen to produce her wine without using chemical agents. At one point, Magali takes her friend Isabelle to visit her vineyard. Here, she takes the opportunity to explain her oenological philosophy ("Listen, you'll say I'm pretentious, but I think of what I do as a craft... not as a trade. I hate that word trade! I don't trade in the fruit of the soil, I honor it!", 9' 45" – 10'02"). It is to better clarify her method that, shortly after, she takes Isabelle to the boundary between her land and that of her neighbour. Once there, Magali invites her to notice the difference between the two vineyards: on one side, plants "smooth without a blade of grass and, on the other, its soil forming a proper vegetal ecosystem populated by various grasses.

- 12 The gesture of the stubborn viticulturist (showing the difference in terms of vegetation between the two adjacent vine fields) anticipates what Stefano Bellotti, pioneer of the new natural wine⁸ growing movement, will accomplish almost twenty years later in another film, *Natural Resistance* (2014), a documentary dedicated to winemakers who choose not to bow down to the standardization imposed by the territorial branding system or by shaping the taste of wines based on the judgment of a few international critics. In a famous sequence (also immortalized on the film poster), just as Magali does with Isabelle, Bellotti takes the director Jonathan Nossiter to the border of his vineyard, showing him the differences in consistency and composition between its soil and that of his neighbour's. This gesture, which makes us take note of the impoverishment of the soil resulting from the intensive cultivation of vines carried out by most industrial viticulture, was anticipated by the fiction of a subtle and perceptive film like *Autumn Tale* (1998).
- 13 We have remarked how gastronomic cinema often focuses on the problem of the coexistence of characters who cook and eat in different ways. Many films dedicated to wine pose a different problem, calling upon the protagonists of their stories to come to terms with the past (what to do with an inherited château or a vineyard in the French countryside?). This premise originates multiple political approaches aimed at dissolving the conflict between past and present and at relaunching towards the future. Let us take one of the best-known films among the cases in point, *A Good Year* (2006), directed by Ridley Scott. The film opens with a flashback in which we see the protagonist, Max Skinner, as a child, in front of a chessboard on the terrace of a vast château immersed in the warm colours of the French countryside. Opposite him sits his uncle Henry. As his guardian, Henry takes care of the child, seeking to provide him with an education appropriate to their common rank as landowners and passionate wine growers. At this point, the story moves into the present. We are in a sidereal London, all mirrors and cold colours. Little Max is now a wealthy broker, well known for his ruthlessness in business. He leads an enviable life and is completely at ease in the metropolitan environment: he is successful, has money, women, a secretary who takes care of his every need, and a close friend with whom to share expensive nights out. It is the death of his uncle—with whom he had lost all contact for years—that

marks the initial break: Max learns that he has inherited his estate. This event requires him to leave for France to complete the paperwork as quickly as possible and sell the property, before going back to his job. It is an understandable choice, as Max grasps neither the value of the estate nor its possible use for his life as a manager.

- 14 At the heart of every film dedicated to wine is precisely the inability to understand its message: the many heirs who animate the stories fail to recognize the value that the vineyard holds for the family identity and for the territory in which it is inserted. Consequently, at first, they always want to sell, to dispose of the onerous burden, hurrying to convert this heritage into monetary value. It is precisely while they are engaged in disposing of the property that, forced by events, these characters find themselves embarking on a path of personal growth, progressively maturing an awareness that takes the form of an art of situated living, appropriating their new horizon of existence, until they become part of it. Thus, inheriting a vineyard requires a real conversion: understanding the value of this inheritance means, in fact, already changing, it means converting. Walking through the vineyards, relating to the longstanding workers of the estate and to the inhabitants of the surroundings (including the woman he will fall madly in love with), interacting with his uncle's daughter who has come over from California in search of her roots, Max slowly finds himself and the sense of belonging that binds him to his land, recognizing the profound character of his uncle's teachings as fundamental traits of his own existence. Wine becomes the measure of this rediscovery: the wine produced by the castle is bad and calls for a landlord to take the reins, continuing the interrupted family tradition.
- 15 Many films focus upon the issue of the inheritance of the vineyard and the conversion of its heirs, among which *Autumn Tale* (1998), *The Vintner's Luck* (2009), *The Chateau Meroux* (2011), *Tu seras mon fils* (2011), *Return to Burgundy* (2017), *The Last Prosecco* (2017), *Wine to love* (2018), *From the vine* (2019).

2.2. Stories about consumption

- 16 Other films pose the problem of wine consumption and of the attitude to be adopted towards it. Two significant titles in this regard are particularly worth dwelling upon. These are the famous *Sideways* (2004) by Alexander Payne and the lesser-known *Saint Amour* (2016) by Gustave Kervern and Benoît Delépine. Both films, one American and the other Franco-Belgian, revolve around a trip through the wine regions of their respective countries undertaken by two pairs of characters, two friends in the first, and a father and son in the second. As we said, if there is one thing that is evident from watching films about wine, it is that the wine cannot be considered as a mere drink and as an end in itself. If wine strikes a note, if it really leaves a mark on one's consciousness, one should not resist its call but rather reach out to it in the lands of its production, immersing oneself within its environment. This is precisely what Miles and Jack, the protagonists of *Sideways* (2004), do by setting out to the Santa Ynez Valley wine country in California. It is interesting to note how the two characters embody completely different types, one a hypersensitive and introverted teacher with an obsession for becoming a writer, the other a low-level actor, gymnast, and unrepentant womanizer. Such an assortment makes it possible to bring out their characters by difference. This is also evident in their opposite approach to tasting, of which Miles, unlike Jack, demonstrates solid mastery. The issue of attributing meaning to wine

returns. For Miles, wine tasting means recognizing the visual, gustatory, and olfactory qualities of wine, in spite of their lack of immediacy. For him, approaching a wine is a complex operation. For one thing, it presupposes prior knowledge of the vines and of their organoleptic characteristics. To this, we must add the assumption of a peculiar epistemic stance, which consists in making oneself open to be impressed by the emerging sensations that stem from tasting. At the same time, one must also find words to describe one's perception by putting it in the form of a narrative. This is what Miles does, reveling in his ability to assume such an attitude, the predominant trait of which is hypersensitivity. Miles delights in being able to recognize every slightest scent arising from the wine, presenting himself as a hypersensitive taster: a peculiar quality that can easily be made to shift from his specific competence to a general way of being. In short, wine endows him with a *modus percipiendi* that becomes a *modus vivendi*, a hypersensitive and attentive way of relating to others. All this stands out, as we said, by difference: the casual attitude with which his friend Jack approaches others goes hand in hand with his inability to taste. The two friends' tour of the wineries of the valley, interspersed with flirting and drunkenness, will only clarify this difference in sensibility that has the effect of glorifying Miles' personality to the detriment of Jack's, whose irresponsible obliviousness is considered through a paternalistic and indulgent gaze.

- 17 Alongside *Sideways*, another fundamental film was released in 2004, *Mondovino*, by Jonathan Nossiter. This documentary proposes a close critique of the world of wine globalization, spurred by the economic success achieved by Californian wines and in particular by the Mondavi family of entrepreneurs. Californian viticulture has founded its fortune on the emulation of the French model, planting French vines (not incidentally, on their journey, Miles and Jack embark upon a search for Pinot Noir, extolling its praises) and choosing to compete with it without questioning either its formulation or its aesthetic criteria. The power attained by these wines is wholly based on their ability to conform to their French models to such an extent that they are indistinguishable from them, and indeed gain a victory over them in the blind tasting competition (as seen in another film, *Bottle Shock*, from 2008). *Mondovino* explains very effectively how the taste of an extremely small network of oenologists and tasters has ended up constituting a powerful and supranational model that only apparently glorifies the French intangible cultural heritage, while in fact supplanting and even trivializing it. In a nutshell, a sort of winemaking imperialism is established that imposes its own taste on very distant territories, from France to California, passing through Italy (Tuscany in particular), South America, Australia, and so on. Conversely, there has gradually spread a sensibility towards the diversification of vine cultivation, the relinquishment of intensive cultivation methods, and towards the characteristic tastes of vineyards that, from the point of view of territorial regulations, would be considered imperfections to be eliminated. Natural wines are such in that they are less elaborate⁹ and released from obedience to the rigid parameters developed by classical oenology.
- 18 The idealization of the figure of the taster embodied by Miles (and criticized in films such as *Mondovino*) would appear to be challenged by another film that was released twelve years after *Sideways: Saint Amour* (2016). The protagonists of the story—two bull farmers, Jean and Bruno, father and son, respectively—take part in the agricultural fair in Paris. The two are characterized by their *bêtise*. Their way of interacting is off-

putting: they are burly, rude, rough and ignorant, and not ashamed of it. They are also unhappy, however. Jean is still mourning his deceased wife and Bruno is frustrated because he does not have a partner and is sick of working on the farm with the animals. Bruno also drinks too much. At the fair, their greatest expression of freedom is going around the wine producers' stands getting drunk, virtually travelling all over France without leaving the exhibition hall. It is precisely from the frustration they experience in the *non-place* of the fair that, after hiring a taxi driver to drive them around, the two decide to travel along the French wine routes. The two protagonists' relationship with wine is the opposite of that of Miles and Jack: rather than tasting it, they quaff it. Even the Saint-Amour that gives the film its title is served without their realizing it. The wine restores their bodies during their innocent forays far and wide among the most important wine regions of the world, but all this happens placidly: no sophisticated tasting, no touring of exclusive wineries and restaurants, but rather running into different people along the road and above all the encounter with a female figure, that of Venus, who will be relied upon for consoling their despair and accepting, as well as lovingly satisfying, their sexual needs. All this will have the effect of restoring balance in the lives of the restless farmers and even the taxi driver to such an extent that, at the end of the journey, they will decide to start a new life together.

- 19 In this journey of recovery, wine seems rather uninfluential. In this regard, we can reflect on how the touristic discourse around wine promoted at the *non-place* that is the fair—as well as by tourist itineraries and maps—does nothing but abstract this drink from the dense network of relationships in which it is enmeshed and by virtue of which it makes sense, glorifying it as the absolute protagonist of the aesthetic experience, so much so that it is worth the journey. We can picture Miles and Jack from *Sideways* peering through their glass, in search of the right balance between tannins and acidity, celebrating this very notion. *Saint Amour's* response to this attitude is the *bêtise* with which their French counterparts approach wine: their aphasia in front of it coupled with a lack of interest in extolling its virtues goes hand in hand with the emergence of their humanity, with the poetry of their rough but lyrical corporeality. In their veins, wine does its job by slowly transforming their perception of things, even if this role is neither recognized nor is such recognition exhibited. As they have no notion of oenology and are unable to boast any ability to identify the aromas and flavours of their drinks, wine acts on them on the “plastic” side, “that of sensory ‘reasoning’” (Marrone 2016b, p. 168), which operates through perceptive processes no longer associated with prior cognitive schemes but, if anything, with a direct assumption of the sensitive qualities of gastronomic substances. This profound dimension of wine—which we describe as “flavorful”, following the work of Gianfranco Marrone (2016b, pp. 109-126; cf. Marrone 2022, pp. 99-109)—can emerge thanks to their inability to talk about it. And it is understandable how emphasizing the strength of Jean and Bruno's adventure appears as a reversal of the approach exemplified in *Sideways* by its protagonists: Miles and Jack, in the eyes of the spectators conquered by *Saint Amour*, can only appear as incurable and maybe even slightly ridiculous snobs.¹⁰

Conclusion

- 20 From this brief overview, it can be appreciated how cinema represents an ideal medium for the dramatization of some strongly political aspects of the contemporary discourse

on wine. It is precisely through cinema that the conflicts underpinning this discourse become recognizable and can be presented to viewers as political options on which to test themselves in everyday life. Just think of the hype created by films like *Mondovino* (2004) or *Natural Resistance* (2014), capable of mobilizing groups of new producers that are sensitive to the demands they raise and equally large groups of consumers eager to adopt a critical and committed—as well as philosophically aware—attitude towards wine consumption. Still, films like *Sideways* have played a crucial role in popularizing a philosophy of approaching wine based on wine tasting across wine routes.

- 21 Exploring the films that revolve around the production and consumption of wine allows us to describe the coordinates of its discourse, recognizable from an eminently political standpoint. On a more general level, for example, we have observed that all the films reviewed are positioned on an axis that opposes the city to the countryside. The fundamental meaning proposed by wine is linked to the refusal of the factory and of the homologation it imposes and finds its reason in a re-evaluation of the countryside and its collective and individual rhythms, focusing on an existential stance promoting slowness and the search for a renewed and more conscious balance between nature and culture. Loving wine means—as the films about it seem to suggest—taking a stand on this dialectic in favour of a lifestyle that repudiates fast food and fast living.
- 22 There is more. Most of the characters in these films can be comprised in the thematic role of the heir. Inheriting the vineyard calls upon its owners to assess its value. How much is a vineyard really worth? This appraisal leads the characters to engage in profound soul-searching, to think about their happiness (what is more political than happiness?) and to reflect upon whether it is even sensible to continue supporting the lifestyle they have led up to that moment. In short, they reason on the “value of values” (see Greimas & Fontanille 1991, pp. 36-37; Fabbri 1991; and the systematization offered in Fontanille & Zilberberg 1998, pp. 11-27). Is it worth being rich if the only freedom you are allowed is to hang on the walls of your office a reproduction of a Van Gogh painting that you have to keep locked up in a vault for fear of it being stolen? This is the question that Max, the protagonist of *A Good Year* (2006), asks his boss, when he has already decided to change his life. As a sign of his conversion, he will choose to use his pension bonus to buy that very painting, and candidly display it on the premises of his new restaurant in France. Like Max, when faced with a similar life decision, the protagonists of the films dedicated to wine can only overturn the table, and choose to return *home*. As a matter of fact, it is a real return, as their newly acquired awareness comes from a critical rereading of the past. There is always the spirit of some grandfather, uncle or father who passed away to inspire them, suggesting the way to overcome the bleak feeling of uprootedness imposed by the city.
- 23 However, on closer inspection, the specific terms of such a turnaround are not always the same. While in 2004, that of Miles and Jack in *Sideways* was seemingly presented as an adequate choice of *critical consumption*, ten years later, the new winemakers of *Natural Resistance* developed a severe critique of the oenological model that the two characters ended up symbolizing. It is precisely from such a shift in sensibility that a film like *Saint Amour* can be explained: it is precisely the way in which the two farmers portrayed in the film will beat the same routes already traveled far and wide by enophiles from all over the world to point to the emperor with no clothes and in which the film configures itself as a critique of oenological discourse. But their example will also represent an opening towards the acknowledgment that “We are elements in

motion that perceive. We perceive by moving ourselves, and while we perceive we live and flow, changing by transforming ourselves through that which we encounter” (Perullo 2021, p. 43). *Saint Amour* is very keen to show, once again controversially, how, along the road travelled in these journeys and in the stories they incessantly weave, wine still plays a role—and this is the important thing—emotionally marking our life.

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NOTES

1. Massimiliano Coviello refers to the ability of wine to play narrative roles: “Wine is not just a scenographic element: the bottle of wine that decorates the various social ceremonials is also a narrative ‘actor’, a ‘helper’, capable of modifying the skills of those who use it, of advancing plot development, even of reversing narrative situations, informing, at the same time, the viewer’s vision” (2012, p. 24, my translation). On the subject of food in cinema, see also Bragaglia (2002), Giorgioni, Pontiggia & Ronconi (2002), Lapertosa (2002), Bower (2004), Visalli (2010), Bianciardi (2011), Colombo & D’Aloia (2014), Mangiapane (2014), Lindenfeld & Parasecoli (2017), and Stano (2018).
2. For a study on the relationship between aesthetics and gastronomy, see in particular Perullo (2014).
3. “What is gastromania? It is easy to say: the obsession with food, cooking, taste, good fare. The gastronomy craze. Today, nutrition has gone beyond [...] its own longstanding, fairly wide sphere [...] and has invaded every other dimension of our individual and collective existence. We eat, drink, savour, taste, try, sip, appreciate, revel, but also and above all, we talk about it, describe it in full, we tell of it, comment on it, judge it, portray it, photograph it, film it, share it, imagine it and dream of it, in a vortex where the experience of food and the discussion about it become one thing: gastromania” (Marrone 2014, pp. 5-6, my translation).
4. As it has been done in another contribution (cf. Mangiapane 2023), dedicated to an in-depth analysis of *A Good Year* (2006) by Ridley Scott.
5. We consider this enquiry over wine in cinema as part of a broader mission of monitoring the discourse on food and wine led by the media.
6. This peculiar way of proceeding has been methodologically articulated in Mangiapane (2022) with reference to another fictional text, the TV series targeted to early childhood *Peppa Pig*.
7. Count Desiderio Ancillotto, protagonist of the film and a staunch defender of organic farming, would not have been proud of the practice of using chemical herbicides in the Prosecco production area. The issue was raised causing a great stir by a journalistic investigation appearing on the television program *Report* of 11/14/2016, available on <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2016/11/La-frazione-di-Prosecco-e7aa7183-4c34-4f3b-9e0d-b84e4e409d7f.html> (Last Access: 05/29/2024).
8. On the issue of natural wine and what attitude one should adopt towards it, see in particular Mangano (2014), Marrone (2016a, pp. 109-126, 2014), Perullo (2012, 2021), and Sangiorgi (2011).

9. Rereading Lévi-Strauss, Marrone (2016a, pp. 18-23) argues that it would be more correct to understand the distinction between nature and culture in terms of a difference between “elaborate” and “less elaborate”.

10. At some point, referring to the practice of wine tasting celebrated by films like *Sideways*, Perullo aptly observes: “I have absolutely no interest at all in describing its aromas: What is in the wine? It’s the wrong question or, at the very least, it’s a ridiculous question, because why look for something in the wine instead of actively participating in that which we are creating with it?” (Perullo 2021, p. 87).

ABSTRACTS

Celebrated gastronomic films like *Babette’s Feast* (1987), *Big Night* (1996) or *Ratatouille* (2007) and many others pose the problem of otherness by calling their characters, as holders of heterodox culinary/cultural identities, to seek integration to the social environment. Many films dedicated to wine take a different path. For some time now, along with the progressive saturation of every possible narrative grip within so-called *gastromania*, wine has acquired a certain visibility as an autonomous cinematographic subject, inspiring films entirely dedicated to it. This is the case of some emblematic titles: *Sideways* (2004), a progenitor of the genre, and other titles such as *Saint Amour* (2016), *Return to Burgundy* (2017), *The Chateau Meroux* (2011), *Days of Harvest* (2010), *A Good Year* (2006), up to the Rohmerian *A Tale of Autumn* (1998). These films are configured as great narratives of return (*nostos*), whose heroes are called by fate (the death of a relative, for example) to retrace their life path, backwards, reuniting, through wine, with their own deepest identity. While a clear trend in culinary movies insists on the spatial problem of the coexistence of characters who cook and eat in different ways, many films dedicated to wine pose the problem in temporal terms, calling the protagonists of their stories to come to terms with an inheritance received from the past (what to do with a *château* or an inherited vineyard in the French countryside?). Thus, multiple political forms are constituted, aiming towards the dissolution of the conflict between the past and the present, making it possible to reconcile this conflict and to relaunch it towards the future. Following this macro-movement backwards, my paper intends to investigate the political forms that involve the *terroir* and the vineyard by taking into consideration both the side of production and that of wine consumption (with a specific interest towards food and wine tourism) as they are represented in some emblematic movies: *A Tale of Autumn* (1998), *Sideways* (2004), *Mondovino* (2004), *A Good Year* (2006), *Natural Resistance* (2014), *Saint Amour* (2016), and *The Last Prosecco* (2017). These films will be taken into consideration for their aptitude to complement one another within a systematic set and as instances of a wider trend that is obviously not exhaustive of all the virtualities that wine may open up in stories. The *terroir*, in these representations, tends to fade as an ineffable, multi-sensorial and stratified semiotic machine, of which wine, although commonly understood as its main emanation, ends up representing only one of the areas of emergence and perhaps not even the most important one. That is why, in order to experience the “true meaning” of their wine, the heroes of these films can only move to the vineyard, experimenting with its daily customs and practices, for a while... or for a lifetime.

Des films gastronomiques célèbres comme *Le Festin de Babette* (1987), *Big Night* (1996) ou *Ratatouille* (2007) et bien d’autres posent le problème de l’altérité en appelant leurs personnages, porteurs

d'identités culinaires/culturelles hétérodoxes, à rechercher une intégration dans le contexte social. De nombreux films consacrés au vin prennent un chemin différent. Depuis quelque temps, parallèlement à la saturation progressive de toutes les prises narratives possibles au sein de la soi-disant *gastromanie*, le vin a acquis une certaine visibilité en tant que sujet cinématographique autonome, inspirant des films qui lui sont entièrement consacrés. C'est le cas de quelques titres emblématiques : *Sideways* (2004), ancêtre du genre et d'autres titres comme *Saint Amour* (2016), *Retour en Bourgogne* (2017), *Château Meroux – Le vin de la vie* (2011), *I giorni della vendemmia* (2010), *Une grande année* (2006), jusqu'au rohmérien *Conte d'été* (1998). Ces films se configurent comme de grands récits du retour (*nostos*), dont les héros sont appelés par le destin (la mort d'un proche, par exemple) à retracer leur chemin de vie à rebours, retrouvant, par le vin, leur identité profonde. Alors qu'une nette tendance dans les films culinaires insiste sur le problème spatial de la coexistence de personnages qui cuisinent et mangent de différentes manières, de nombreux films consacrés au vin posent le problème en termes temporels, appelant les protagonistes de leurs histoires à composer avec l'héritage reçu du passé (que faire d'un château ou d'un vignoble hérité dans la campagne française ?). Ainsi se constituent de multiples formes politiques, visant à dissoudre le conflit entre le passé et le présent, qui permettent de concilier ce conflit et de le relancer vers l'avenir. Au sein de ce macro-mouvement à rebours, cet article se propose d'investiguer les formes politiques qui impliquent le terroir et la vigne en prenant en considération à la fois le versant de la production et celui de la consommation de vin (avec un intérêt particulier pour l'œnotourisme) comme ils sont représentés dans quelques films emblématiques : *Conte d'été* (1998), *Sideways* (2004), *Mondovino* (2004), *Une grande année* (2006), *Natural resistance* (2014), *Saint Amour* (2016), *The Last prosecco* (2017). Ces films seront pris en considération pour leur aptitude à se compléter dans un ensemble systématique et comme exemples d'une tendance plus large qui n'est évidemment pas exhaustive de toutes les virtualités que le vin peut ouvrir dans les histoires. Le terroir, dans ces représentations, tend à s'effacer comme une machine sémiotique ineffable, multi-sensorielle et stratifiée, dont le vin, bien que communément entendu comme son émanation principale, finit par ne représenter qu'un des espaces d'émergence et peut-être même pas le plus important. C'est pourquoi, pour ressentir le « vrai sens » de leur vin, les héros de ces films ne peuvent que se déplacer à la vigne, expérimenter ses us et coutumes quotidiens, pour un temps... ou pour la vie.

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Mots-clés: cinéma, nourriture, patrimoine

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