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**WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR WINE ?**

by

**René BROUSSE**

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**Overview**

Wine, in so many different ways, gives meaning and stimulates social activity. This is engendered whether the drinking of wine is in order to quench one's thirst, or to provide the intellectual satisfaction of recognising a particular *cru* and its vintage at a blind tasting, or simply to give the pleasure of gourmet tasting (accompanied by the discreet euphoria which comes from being slightly drunk). The cultural richness of wine is epitomised in the '*vins de terroir*', wines which reflect the soil and the area where they are grown. René Brousse, a journalist and wine taster for the magazine *Le Rouge et le Blanc*, refers to these wines as '*vins d'identité*', "identity wines". Because of market pressure, these '*vins d'identité*', whose production is limited, are threatened today by the '*vins de qualité*', quality wines, in other words, wines of impeccable technical quality but which are more or less standardised and capable of being made all over the world in ever-increasing quantities.

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## TALK : René BROUSSE

The title of this talk, “What is the future for wine ?”, must have intrigued a number of you. I should point out straight away that there is no doubt that wine has a future. It would be more precise to ask the question “To which wines does the future belong ?”

In order to answer this question, firstly one should stress that wine is not an ordinary drink, even though it can be drunk, of course, purely to quench one’s thirst. Because of its physical characteristics, one can analyse wine from four different perspectives, which I will divide into two aspects : firstly, from a physiological aspect, wine is both thirst-quenching and uplifting ; secondly, from an aesthetic aspect, it can be full of flavour, and only in some cases, be identified. Of course, flavourful and identifiable wines are also thirst-quenching and uplifting ; it is a case of interpreting the different layers of their composition.

### The cultural richness of wine

It is important to stress that thanks to these different characteristics, wine leads to sociability and generates meaning. As a thirst-quenching drink, it evokes conviviality, just people having a drink together. As an uplifting drink, it is a case of “*in vino veritas*” : wine takes away our inhibitions and we talk more freely. A wine full of flavour, whatever its origin, is an excuse to indulge in a gourmet experience which brings into play the senses of smell and taste. When, additionally, a wine can be identified, we develop a complete cultural background which enables us to talk about it, to analyse it and make comparisons with other wines, while benefiting from the other previously mentioned perspectives. When I drink a 1985 Clos Vougeot, I can identify it and recognise its special features, but at the same time, I savour it, I am content, and I quench my thirst.

It is only when tasting what I call the ‘*vins d’identité*’ (“identity wines”), that one can really enjoy all the cultural richness of the wine. This encompasses not only references in terms of mythology, religion, literature or even medicine which are common to all wines, but also history, geography, geology of the soils and the *crus*, ampelography (in other words, the knowledge of different grape varieties and of the *savoir faire* of developing the vine by grafting and pruning, and so on), empirical oenology until Pasteur and scientific oenology thereafter, and finally, all the learned, aesthetic and poetic vocabulary used to describe the quality and the identity of wines. This cultural richness, related to the ‘*vins de terroir*’, gives its real meaning to drinking wine, not only in France, but also in other countries where this model exists or has been exported.

I would like to show you today that in spite of the excellent health of the wine economy in our country, or more precisely because of this excellent health, these ‘*vins de terroir*’ are under threat at the present time.

## What is a ‘terroir’ ?

A ‘terroir’ is defined according to three essential criteria : soil, climate, and the traditionally used grape varieties.

### *Soil*

A ‘terroir’ is defined as the interaction between a soil conducive to viticulture, and the know-how of the growers who use it : such soil existed in the past, but was overrun by forest or undergrowth. It had to be discovered, cleared and prepared for use. ‘Terroir’ is characterised firstly by the geological composition of the soil (clay, chalk, silica, iron or magnesium-rich, etc.). Generally speaking, the vine does best in relatively poor soils. The lie of the land is also important : the position of the plot on the hillside, the presence of gravel, pebbles, or small stones, all influence both the water flow and the amount of sunshine received.

### *Climate*

Climate and micro-climate also play a role in the definition of ‘terroir’. The amount of sunshine should be important but should profit from good air hygrometry, which itself plays a role both in photosynthesis (and therefore the ripeness of the grapes), and also, as far as mellow wines are concerned, in the development of noble rot. Moreover, most of the great French vineyards are located near large rivers. Rivers have a steadying influence on heat and the presence of water in the air ; this is exactly what is missing in some areas which are very sunny.

### *Traditional grape varieties*

Lastly, ‘terroir’ is defined by the kind of grape varieties used. These have been chosen through the centuries because of their capacity to express the characteristics of the ‘terroir’. Far from being the most productive, these varieties often give very small yields which give rise to a greater concentration : the less a vine produces in terms of juice (in normal cultivation, excluding frost, shatter or hail), the greater are the chances that this juice will bring out the characteristics of the ‘terroir’.

## Nature and virtue

The excellence of a ‘*vin de terroir*’ is not by chance nor is it a vague notion : it is partly due to very precise, conducive physical conditions which are a ‘gift of nature’, and partly due to the know-how of the wine-grower.

However, the development of wine-growing, in permitting very large yields, has brought with it a new element in the production of ‘*vins de terroir*’. In the past, if the wine-grower was at all competent or honest, (in other words, if he knew how to grow his vines and did not deliberately mix one wine with another or add water), then the fact that the yields were naturally limited made him produce, at least in the good years, a wine which reflected its origins in the ‘terroir’. Today, however, the possibilities which modern agronomy has to offer are numerous and mean that a wine-grower who wants to produce a ‘*vin de terroir*’ has to be not only competent and honest, but also virtuous : he has to go to a lot of trouble in order to obtain even small yields by planting

a large number of vines per hectare, not using rootstocks which are too strong and by severely cutting back the shoots. He cannot always fully reflect the cost of these measures in his selling price.

Let us take an example. With a certain *cru* of pinot gris from Alsace, whose average selling price is fifty Francs a bottle, some wine-growers have yields of sixty-five hectolitres per hectare, whereas others have twenty-five. The former have a cost price of twenty-five Francs a bottle which leaves them a comfortable margin compared with the average selling price. The latter have a cost price of sixty-five Francs which forces them to sell at a higher price with a smaller margin, and more importantly, fewer bottles. Not only do the virtuous wine-growers, those who really 'save' the *appellations*, go to a lot of trouble to obtain even small yields, but, during an easy sales period, they earn less money than those who are quite happy to let the vine yield as many grapes as possible.

### **The development of the AOCs (*Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée*)**

Even before the boom in yields, an important turning point came with the phylloxera crisis which, from 1865 onwards, destroyed the entire French vineyard and, for some decades afterwards, seriously disrupted the map of the '*terroirs*'. The owners, who were looking for plants resistant to the disease, turned to unreliable grape varieties, as well as hybrid varieties, which never produce quality wines. The market became mostly a merchant-dominated market, which supposedly 'improved' the wines by blending them, for example, with wine from Algeria or other very florid wines. The '*terroir*' names were used in a totally random fashion.

The *Appellations d'Origines Contrôlées* (AOC) were created in 1935 on the initiative of the wine-growers, in order to restore some stability. The AOC defined precisely the territory reserved for a certain *appellation*, determined the grape varieties which should be used and established some safe-guards in terms of quality. In the beginning, the aim essentially was to protect the big '*terroirs*'.

An initial batch of '*terroirs*' was awarded these *appellations contrôlées* in 1936, and the list continued to grow during the years which followed. Up until about 1970, the system worked well as the registered '*terroirs*' had already been known for several centuries. The yields were still limited and therefore the quality of the wines was satisfactory, unless the wine-grower had been inept or dishonest.

However, from 1973, the system somehow got out of control : more and more '*terroirs*', even those which were very recently created, were awarded an *appellation*, and '*terroirs*' which had already been registered were extended in size. Today, there are four hundred and fifty different *appellations*, which cover 52 % of the French vineyard, in other words four hundred and sixty-two thousand hectares.

Such an extension of AOCs naturally leads to the 'dilution' of the notion of '*terroir*'. While I was preparing this talk, I received a brochure from the wine merchants *Nicolas*, which presented about ten wines ranging from between twenty to thirty-eight Francs a bottle, with the slogan "A new collection : 100 % *terroir*". When one says '*terroir*', one thinks 'origin', a recognisable identity, and therefore limited yields and high prices, especially if it is "100 %" '*terroir*'. At such

a price, the client runs a high risk of buying a wine, which although satisfactory and representative of the grape variety in question, has a watered-down identity.

### **Lax regulations**

The *AOC* guarantees the origin of the wine, whether it is a generic *appellation*, an appellation associated with a commune, or given to a plot of land ; according to the case, the area involved is one hectare (as is the case for the Romanée) or several thousand hectares (as for the Bordeaux, the Côtes de Provence, the Champagne, or the Languedoc Roussillon). The *AOC* also imposes the choice of certain grape varieties, the way of pruning the vines, a maximum yield, a specific density in the planting of vines, a respect for the “local, loyal and constant practices” and finally, since 1973, the granting of an authorisation.

In principle, all these conditions should enable the preservation of the identity of the ‘*vins de terroir*’. In reality, the fact that it is the wine-growers themselves who make the rules, under the control of the State which in turn has a vested interest for tax reasons that the greatest possible number of wines are awarded an *AOC*, results in great laxity. The rules for plantation density vary between two thousand and seven thousand vines per hectare, whereas it can increase to as much as ten thousand vines in very good estates. The maximum yield varies from thirty-five to seventy hectolitres per hectare and may be increased by 20 % during bumper years : in these years, the climatic conditions may be so perfect that the vine produces enormous amounts of grapes of very good quality. The wine-grower can then ask for permission to reach this ‘ceiling limit’, based on the exceptional quality of his grapes. Currently, many wine-growers ask every year to exceed this ceiling limit, and they are allowed to do so almost systematically. As for the authorisation, which involves the tasting of one’s wine by a jury made up, once again, of wine-growers and representatives of the Administration, less than 1 % of the wines was refused in the past few years. Not only is the *AOC* no longer an adequate guarantee that the wine which benefits from its *appellation* can really express the characteristics of its ‘*terroir*’, but more and more often, the *AOC* does not even guarantee the quality of the wine.

### **The AOCs called into question**

This is why some people today question the very principle of the *AOCs*.

According to regulatory hierarchy, wines are divided into the following categories : table wines, *vins de pays*, *VDQS* (*Vins Délimités de Qualité Supérieure*) and *AOC*. The *VDQS* category has been gradually eroded by the *AOCs* which have thus benefited. This regulatory hierarchy, with the additional subdivision of the *AOCs* in generic, commune-related *appellations* or *appellations* given to plots of land, is supposed to correspond to a hierarchy of quality : at the top, the Romanée Conti, at the very bottom, the most ordinary table wines.

However, according to an article, published in 1995 in the magazine *Revue des œnologues*, which reflects an idea increasingly widespread, this is nothing of the sort. The professional wine-merchants generally reckon that each of these categories includes in reality four levels in terms of quality : 15 % very good wines, 25 % good wines, 40 % average wines, and 20 % bad wines. This division is artificial, but the analysis in itself is difficult to contest : there are *AOC* wines which are not as good as certain well produced table wines. These *AOC* wines are mediocre not

by accident, but consistently so year after year. This is because the yields are not respected and because subsequently the cellar masters engage in all sorts of fiddling by adding sugar, acids or tannin to these bad wines. The article concludes, like a bolt from the blue : “ *The competition from future markets will revolve around concepts which have nothing to do with the concept of the AOC* ”.

The oenologists who read this revue are not completely neutral in this matter. The existence of oenologists is justified by the notion of quality, and not of identity of wines. They have no influence whatsoever on the nature of the soil or the climate ; but, on the other hand, they have had an essential role to play in improving the general quality of wines in France, whether it be in avoiding accidental catastrophes occurring on very good grape juice, or in skilfully saving dubious juice because there is too much of it or because it comes from grapes which are not ripe enough. Usually they favour quality, as this puts them in a better light, rather than the criterion of identity and of respect for the ‘*terroir*’, over which they have no control and which therefore tends to annoy them.

### **Quality wines and “identity wines”**

Matching quality wines against “identity wines” may seem surprising, but it is this subtle distinction which forms the heart of the problem.

#### *Quality wines*

A quality wine can be obtained from all vineyards which have relatively poor and well draining soils, located between 30°N and 50°N (roughly, from Cairo to the north of Paris), or between 30°S and 40°S, which includes New Zealand, southern Australia, the tip of South Africa, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile.

The quality of the wine depends on three criteria : the absence of technical flaws, the balance between the components of the wine, and the aromatic richness.

The absence of technical flaws is the major contribution of oenology. Grape juice becomes wine and normally stays so for about fifteen days, after which it turns into vinegar. In the past, any wine could be damaged by acetic spoilage if it was badly protected, including renowned ‘*vins de terroir*’. There could also be other flaws, such as a ‘casky taste’, a ‘non-oxidised taste’ due to a lack of airing, or an ‘oxidised taste’ due to too much airing, and so on.

The second criterion is the balance between the components : acidity, alcohol and tannins for the red wines ; acidity, alcohol and sugar for the whites. When the grape has fully ripened, the wine naturally shows this balance ; when this is not the case, the oenologists know how to rectify the flaws, for example by adding sugar to increase the alcohol content (this technique is known as chaptalisation), which can lead them to add some acidity too, if they overdo it, because acidity of grapes which are too green is not good acidity. Some rectifications are acceptable, such as adding sugar by merely one degree, in order to compensate for the loss related to alcoholic fermentation. Beyond the limits of these practices, there are some techniques which are sometimes suspect, but unfortunately frequent.

The third criterion of the quality of a wine is the presence of aromas and pleasant flavours which are more or less intense, diversified and complex : an ordinary wine in general only has a 'vinous' and 'alcoholic' smell.

### *“Identity wines”*

Like all quality wines, a good “identity wine” should obviously be free of technical flaws. Additionally, it should offer an adequate concentration : this means that when yield conditions are sufficiently moderate, the vine can express all the richness and the characteristics of the soil.

In terms of the balance of components, the approach is slightly different from quality wines. Quality wines generally aim to reach a ‘standard’ technical balance between these components, whereas the “identity wines” can possibly offer a ‘particular’ balance, which one can also refer to as an ‘imbalance’. The Médoc wines can be judged to have a bit too much tannin ; the famous Burgundies, a bit too acidic or ‘alcoholic’ and not sufficiently tannic ; the big Rhône wines, a bit too full-bodied, too ‘alcoholic’ and not acidic enough. In reality, these wines, when they are successfully produced, seem to be very well balanced, but it is nonetheless a ‘unique balance’ (as opposed to a ‘standard’ balance).

Another important difference between quality wines and “identity wines” is the analysis of aromas and flavours. There are three sorts of aroma : primary aromas, which develop during maceration of the grapes and fermentation of the wine ; secondary aromas, during the ageing of the wine in vats or casks, which presupposes a ‘controlled oxidisation’ from where their name ‘oxidisation aromas’ comes ; and tertiary aromas, or ‘reduction aromas’, which develop during the long ageing process in bottles which are completely sheltered from oxidisation.

Quality wines have essentially primary aromas, particularly of flowers and fresh fruits, all the more expressive and identifiable as they are simple and few. One cannot, however, say that they have a ‘bouquet’ : this concept supposes a diversity and complexity of multiple aromas which combine together harmoniously, like in a bouquet of flowers.

The best “identity wines”, on the other hand, are characterised by a very rich range of primary, secondary and tertiary aromas which bring into play the sense of smell, olfaction, (for the aromas which can be smelt straight away), then retro-olfaction, (for the aromas which develop at the back of the nose when the wine is in the mouth), and finally the lasting aromas at the finish, which one also calls the ‘peacock’s fan’, and where only the secondary and tertiary aromas are involved. Unlike the primary aromas which characterise quality wines, these aromas are not all immediately perceptible : they need time to express themselves fully and to reach their full development. However, it is well known by connoisseurs that the longer a wine takes to reach its peak, the better it is. The richness and the special nature of these aromas, which vary enormously from one ‘*vin de terroir*’ to another, but also their finesse and their subtlety, help, with the ‘unique balance’ which I mentioned earlier, give each wine its own personality and its unique character.

None of this is very easy to describe, just as it is not easy to describe a person’s face with words : it is akin to the French philosopher Jankélévitch’s expressions “je ne sais quoi” and “presque rien” (“almost nothing”), a feeling of something indefinable. However, the fact is that one would

recognise this face among a thousand others, just as it would be possible to identify at a blind tasting a great '*vin de terroir*'.

In conclusion, concerning the difference between quality wines and "identity wines", I would say that all "identity wines" have the means and the duty to be quality wines, except in the case of ineptitude or dishonesty of the wine-grower. On the other hand, not all quality wines are destined to have a specific identity, besides that which their grape variety gives them, which is very general and which they share with wines from all over the world. Only the original '*vins de terroir*', correctly made, can produce a distinct identity.

### **Why are "identity wines" being threatened ?**

I have already mentioned the important role of oenologists in the relative lack of interest in the notion of '*terroir*', in preference for a notion of quality which is much more likely to flatter their image. The idea that market competition can be organised in the future around concepts which are very far from those of the *AOCs*, has already gained ground with the spectacular boom of the varietal wines (wines of different grape varieties) and the emergence of competitions which take into account criteria which have nothing whatsoever to do with the notion of '*terroir*'.

For example, competitions are organised for Chardonnays the world over, without mentioning whether it comes from Meursault or from Ohio. The 'unique balance' mentioned above might well, in this context, seem like an imbalance, or even seem like technical flaws. Of course, it is the most standardised wines which have the greatest chance of winning, purely because we compare what is comparable and we 'forget' what seems like an isolated anomaly. In these competitions, the wines are tasted young. This suits varietal wines best, because they perform very well from the first tasting on account of their primary aromas, but this penalises the real '*vins de terroir*' which need between five and fifteen years to fully express all their aromas and flavours. There are even competitions which only classify the wines by colour (red, white, rosé) or even judge between wines matured in new casks or without new casks.

The way in which these competitions have changed reflects market pressure, which has a very ambiguous attitude with regards to the '*terroirs*'. As consumers drink less and less wine, they turn away in hordes from table wine in order to buy '*vins de terroir*'. We drink less often, but better. However, on the one hand, the prestige of the '*terroirs*' is even greater because they are limited in terms of land usage. On the other hand, the *AOCs* can well expand their spread but their expansion is bound to reach a limit, and the quantities of the '*vins de terroir*' available are thereby limited. The notion of '*terroir*' therefore slows down the development of the market. The notion of quality, on the contrary, is perfectly 'extensible', since it can be used, to a variable degree, not only in the *AOCs* but also in table wines, in '*vins de pays*', or, the increasing varietal wines, even though they relegate the notion of origin to the back row. This notion therefore opens up much more interesting perspectives for the market.

As far as the consumers are concerned, the threat firstly comes quite simply from the fact that increasingly fewer people have a cellar which is cool and relatively humid in which to store their wine. They are, therefore, forced to drink their wines quickly, a fact which favours quality wines which can be drunk immediately. On the contrary, for "identity wines", one needs to know when to drink them and to be able to lay them down so that their aromas are totally developed. This

situation is exacerbated as there is a current tax measure which encourages wine-growers to sell their stock as fast as possible. This is why old vintages are only sold increasingly rarely. If all “identity wines” were to be drunk under five years of age, then all the efforts and sacrifices which the wine-growers would have made to produce them, would have been for nothing.

Finally, even when consumers have the chance to drink “identity wines”, it is by no means certain that they know how best to appreciate them, because this demands a certain education in terms of taste and smell. Currently, there is a general drift in preference towards sugary and spicy tastes, which favours quality wines (which in general are fruity), rather than “identity wines”. Additionally, serving quality wines is easy and everyone can do it, whereas “identity wines” demand special precautions in terms of temperature, aeration, handling, suitability for certain dishes, etc. Generally speaking, a certain type of culture is required to appreciate “identity wines”. Yet, currently between 70 % and 80 % of AOC wines are sold in supermarkets, ie. self-selected from the shelves, with no-one to advise on how to taste the wine, or to explain the differences between the *appellations*, or to explain why one should want to pay more for one wine than for another.

### **Reasons for hope**

It is true, however, that supermarkets have had the huge advantage of making the consumption of wine more accessible. Not everyone can or dares go to a cellarman, or even directly to a wine-grower. Supermarkets use the great wines as a loss leader for those who can afford them (since they are often less expensive than at the wine estates), or as a brand image for others : when one takes a simple Bordeaux off the shelf just below a Château Latour, one has perhaps the impression of taking a part of Château Latour. This is a sort of fraud but which, at the same time, may be just a stage which makes one want to pay a visit to a cellarman in order to learn more about the great wines.

Another encouraging factor is the increase in the number of tasting clubs in the past few years, even though this is still a minority activity. From the moment when people get together to taste wines and compare them, they very quickly become interested in the idea of ‘*terroir*’ and agree to pay a little bit more in order to taste the real “identity wines”.

Moreover, I think that this is where the rousing call comes from and I would like to say : “ Drinkers, help us to save ourselves ! ” We cannot hope to change the way in which the *INAO* (*Institut National des Appellations d’Origine*) works, at least not in the short term. Neither can we hope to persuade bad wine-growers to change their methods ; but, we can, by the way in which we chose and drink wine, and in favouring virtuous wine-growers, hope to keep the notion of identity alive.

## DISCUSSION

### Wine and art

**Question :** *I very much appreciated the distinction you made between the physiological and aesthetic characteristics of wine, and within these, the qualitative and cultural dimensions. This is similar to the principle of double articulation put forward by Lévi-Strauss with regards to works of art : in painting too, both the technical quality of the picture, on the one hand, and the cultural background, on the other, are taken into account by means of reference to style or genres to which the painting alludes. I imagine that there are a number of wines which are very good but about which one does not talk because they are all the same ?*

**René Brousse :** It's true that there is not a great deal to say about them. However I stress that, with regards to painting, there is nonetheless the contribution and role of nature in the creation of wine, and not simply the talent or the imagination of the artist. There is a soil, a climate and a well defined grape variety, and it is on these foundations, that the culture of wine is built.

### Wine and music

**Q. :** *As far as I am concerned, I can also see an analogy with music : like wine, we can find in each form of music (classical or pop, for example) very different qualities. In addition, like the quality wines, music has become more accessible in the past decades. We may have feared for the quality but, quite the opposite ; today, regardless of the sort of music, the production has reached a degree of professionalism, of rigour and of sophistication which it has never known before.*

**Q. :** *Nevertheless, I feel today that famous musicians all play pretty much in the same way which is very academic ; Alfred Cortot played lots of wrong notes but at least his music had an extraordinary personality. Isn't this the same kind of problem ?*

**R. B. :** Our experience, in the magazine where I write, *Le Rouge et le Blanc*, is that it is increasingly difficult to find wines which have a real personality. The world-wide quality of wines has improved and it is increasingly rare to find wines which are really badly produced. It is also increasingly difficult to find wines which really stand out from the rest.

**Q. ::** *This is true, not only from one estate to the other, but also depending on vintage years. In the past, if certain vintage years were bad, others were exceptional. Today the quality is always good, but there aren't any miracles any more.*

### The role of co-operatives

**Q. :** *Do not co-operatives have a part to play in the decline of "identity wines" ? It is clear that a small owner does not necessarily have the means to make his wine himself which leads to the disappearance of identity in the blend of wine. Moreover, I am not sure that co-operatives can have very strict control in terms of yields, for example, on the grapes which are brought to them. What position does your magazine adopt on this issue ?*

**R. B. :** Our position is determined by the wine itself. There are big disparities from one co-operative to another. In some cases, the co-operative is the only place where one might find a decent wine : I can think of certain *appellations* in Beaujolais or in Alsace, where there are yields of up to one hundred or even one hundred and twenty hectolitres per hectare in private estates. The co-operatives have played a very important historical role with regards to this in many regions. Having said that, of course, as time goes by, their production runs the risk of being of a lower quality, quite simply because, as soon as the wine-growers are trained by technicians from the co-operatives, they become independent, especially those with the rich estates, and the co-operatives then are left with lower quality grapes.

As for the loss of identity which accompanies grapes coming from different estates, we should put this in perspective. Without a doubt, it is not in a co-operative that one will find the strongest territorial identity but if it's a question of an identity linked to a commune or a region, it is often the co-operative once again which is best at preserving this identity. At Gaillac, for example, the top-of-the-range wines of the three co-operatives are very representative of what is a good generic Gaillac wine.

### **Difficult strategic choices in market terms**

**Q. :** *I do not think that the problem you raise really concerns the great wines : they have such a network of prescribers, connoisseurs, and people who judge them, that there is little chance that they will lose their identity.*

*The situation of the generic appellations is more worrying. In Burgundy, for example, where the generic appellation consists of only ten thousand hectares, the wine merchants complain that they cannot deal adequately with international invitations to tender or deliver to volume retailers. Quite simply the volumes are too small and because of the fashion of traditional culture with low vines and the small size of estates, the cost prices are high. Should they try to get the rights to bigger plots, in other words, ask the AOC to extend further, increase the size of the estates, or change the ways of traditional culture ? Or should they, on the contrary, profit from the specificity of this appellation "Bourgogne", in the knowledge that the South African producers, for example, have not yet perfected their systems of appellations, and try to get their value products known on a global scale ? This is the real question ; it is not easy to find an answer.*

**Q. :** *How will the decision be taken ?*

**Q. :** *The wine-growers grouped together in producer associations are all-powerful.*

### **The emperor's new clothes ?**

**Q. (an economist) :** *I admit that I don't really understand the distinction you make between quality wines and "identity wines". It seems to me that in all the circumstances, these are both wines which sell well and are expensive. To my knowledge, the AOCs are nonetheless an extraordinary economic success. You denounce the fact that we are able to compare Chardonnays from Meursault with Chardonnays from Ohio, but even if the American Chardonnay gets first prize, the French Meursault is still fifteen times more expensive.*

**R. B. :** Of course, but what is increasingly sold is the label, not the product. On the surface, everything's fine ; I am just afraid that sooner or later we are going to realise that the emperor has no clothes after all, and that the French AOC market will collapse and all sorts of wines which are only interested in this notion of quality will take their place.

### **The virtues of the market**

**Q. :** *Perhaps you don't take into account sufficiently the diversity of consumers and the legitimacy of this diversity. As far as I am concerned, I admit that I do not have a cellar, that I buy my wine in the afternoon for that evening, and that as long as the wine is good, I do not really take much notice whether it has an appellation or not. Your approach is very different : you are a wine enthusiast. However, I think that every sort of client should be able to find in the market the wine he is looking for. Without a doubt, the supply is currently drifting from "identity wines" to quality wines, but inasmuch as wine connoisseurs of "identity wines" are ready to pay the price, they will still find these wines available in the market.*

**Q. :** *Following what has been said, a lot of virtue is needed in any case today in order to continue to produce "identity wines". What will maintain this virtue ?*

**Q. :** *The prices ! For an economist, the only criterion is to know if the producer will manage to sell his production.*

**Q. :** *But what if one can sell a wine of lesser quality at the same price, or even more Expensively ?*

**Q. :** *One can hypothesise (and it is apparently true) that there will always be people who are incomprehensibly honest and virtuous. They will keep doing their work correctly and will sell their production without difficulty, and all the more so because of globalisation. Their potential market will explode : who had ever heard of the Romanée Conti a few years ago ? Today, even the Japanese are connoisseurs and are ready to pay the price for it. We often say that globalisation creates a standardisation of products ; one can argue, on the other hand, that it leads to an extraordinary diversification of clientele and products.*

**Q. :** *The real problem is that on all levels the volume market is overtaking the quality market. It uses the forms, names, and prestige of some products, and in the end destroys their meaning and their value.*

**R. B. :** Many people all over the world know the names and the prices of the great French *crus*. However, will they be able to appreciate them for what they are, if they have not been trained to develop their taste ? There are libraries, music conservatories, and museums for painting and sculpture, open to everyone and offering appropriate training : eyes and ears are educated but not taste or smell. "Identity wines" run the risk of disappearing (or of being standardised) purely because there are not enough palates and noses capable of appreciating them.

Presentation of the speaker :

René Brousse is an administrative assistant at the City of Paris and a non-paid journalist for the magazine *Le Rouge et le Blanc*, which survives solely on its subscriptions and never resorts to advertising. This independence has established its reputation among wine lovers, cellarmen and major foreign importers. The articles are written by a group of amateurs and conclude with the results of blind tastings, including the addresses of the wine-growers and the prices of the bottles.

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