

Fermenting Place

Wine production and terroir in McLaren Vale, South Australia

William Skinner

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Abstract

This thesis provides an ethnographic exploration of McLaren Vale, a wine-producing region lying just south of the city of Adelaide, South Australia. As a near-urban agricultural area, McLaren Vale provides the setting for a number of complex debates about land use, landscape values, cultural heritage and regional identity. Contemporary perspectives on dwelling, place, and landscape contribute to the theoretical background of this study. In particular, this thesis is framed by notions of 'terroir', a term common in winegrowing and used to refer to the 'sense of place' that may be tasted in wine from particular locations. I contend that the particular terroir perspective taken by winegrowers in McLaren Vale is shaped by a globalised wine industry discourse as well as the locally-specific experiences of farming and winemaking in the region. Discourses of terroir describe the ways people and landscape, nature and culture, interrelate to produce geographically and socially-emplaced products. As an anthropological concept, terroir might also be used to explicate the ways by which the processes of production serve not only to produce agricultural products, but places and persons themselves. Terroir is significant not only in the way it is deployed discursively but as a tacit dimension of winegrowing and, indeed, being.

In the body of the thesis I explore different aspects of McLaren Vale's terroir, encompassing local as well as broader regional and global processes, and focusing on the way these are embodied by and in people and places. The six substantive chapters deal with the historical and political-economic construction of McLaren Vale as a region; understandings of 'locality' and being local entails; terroir as it is expressed in winegrowing; the significance of temporality and rhythm; the role of embodied, sensorial engagement in placemaking; and the relationship of 'city' and 'country' in the imagining of McLaren Vale and its boundaries.

Dominant approaches to terroir in McLaren Vale are relational and processual, emphasising an ongoing dynamism of relations between people, landscape, and production, and that this is

the way many people understand, experience and represent their own dwelling. This perspective encourages a view of McLaren Vale as a 'living landscape' imbued not only with productive power but productive potential, in which people, vines, animals, soil, microbes, and a host of other beings are mutually implicated. This, I argue, is reflected not only in regional wine production, but also in the orientations local people take to broader issues relating to landscape and land use.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Figure 1. Map of the areas surrounding Adelaide, showing location of McLaren Vale