

# Re(senhas)

## **Burgundian Vines and Wines:**

### The philosophy of Gaston Roupnel by Philip Whalen

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to demonstrate, through Philip Whalen, in his book "*Burgundian Vines and Wines*", how the culture and history of wine in Burgundy are deeply explored through Roupnel's work. By highlighting the importance of the small villages and vineyards that form the heart of this region, he emphasizes how the terroir, climate, and limestone soil influence the quality of the wines. Roupnel's aim was to describe the challenges faced by winegrowers, from planting to harvest, including the constant battle against mold and adverse weather conditions in Burgundy. The author also speaks of the spiritual and almost mystical connection between the winemaker and his land, stressing the hard work and dedication required to produce high-quality wines. Roupnel celebrates Burgundy wine as an expression of nature and human effort, a product that encapsulates the essence of its terroir and the soul of those who cultivate it. Roupnel argues that Burgundy wine is not just a beverage but a cultural manifestation, a symbol of the region's heritage and tradition. As a result, we can conclude that the book is a tribute to the beauty, complexity, and depth of Burgundian wines, showing how they reflect the unique character of Burgundy and its rich history.

**Keywords:** Burgundy; Wines; Terroir; Harvest; Tradition

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## INTRODUCTION

Gaston Roupnel, in his popular history of early 20th-century regional folklore, *La Bourgogne, types et coutumes* (1936), demonstrates a deep understanding of the lifestyle and traditional winemaking practices of the Burgundian people. Roupnel's analysis of the relationship between human geography and applied folklore aimed to depict romanticized workers and winemakers with rustic qualities (Whalen, 2007, p. 4).

The book “Burgundian Vines and Wines”, written by Philip Whalen, portrays the life of Gaston Roupnel and offers a multifaceted analysis of winemaking in the Burgundy region, one of the world's most renowned wine producers.

It is known that Bachelard read Roupnel's *The History of the French Countryside*, and that this work greatly influenced agrarian scholars of the time. In this regard, this article translated texts (however, as this is a field of research still underexplored in Brazil, there is a need for a policy of acquiring and translating books that currently only exist in France) that mainly provide a deeper reflective analysis of technological courses such as Oenology and Viticulture, for the teaching of the Philosophy and Ethics discipline (Rocha, 2016, p. 16).

This work is not just a guide to the wines of Burgundy but a deep dive into the intersection of history, culture, and philosophy that defines the region's wine production. Burgundy, with its centuries-old wine tradition, becomes fertile ground for exploring how vine cultivation and wine production both reflect and influence local

cultural and historical identity. The authors' approach goes beyond a mere description of winemaking processes; they offer an analysis intertwining the philosophy of “terroir” — the concept that soil, climate, and winemaking practices influence a wine’s character — with the historical and cultural narrative of Burgundy. This perspective allows for a broader reflection on how winemaking practices shape and are shaped by the region's philosophy of life. In this context, wine is not merely a product but a symbol of cultural heritage, expressing the deep connection between humans and the environment. Whalen’s study of Roupnel reveals how Burgundy’s winemaking tradition mirrors the philosophical beliefs and values of local society. The book invites us to study ancient practices and historical transformations that define the region’s viticulture, showing how wine can serve as a lens through which to better understand Burgundy’s cultural and historical evolution. Thus, the production and appreciation of wine become not only a sensory experience but a field of reflection on the essence of regional identity and the philosophy that sustains it.

## **Wine’s History and Philosophy**

Roupnel depicts the simple, passionate lives of wine workers, emphasizing the connection between the land, the wine, and the region's cultural identity. His work as a winemaker and professor extended beyond academic or technical realms, manifesting in a deep dedication to Burgundy's culture and traditions. His friendship and collaboration with

other local winemakers and producers demonstrate his commitment to preserving and promoting the authenticity and quality of the region's wines.

Roupnel sought to construct a new “*rerum natura*”, in which nature, as universal consciousness, is understood through its symmetries and proportions as the light of space. This is the expression of reciprocities — not between particular expansions, but in the harmonious combination of life's form and meaning (Rocha, 2020, p. 42).

Roupnel's legacy as a winemaker and regional writer not only influenced the Burgundy wine community but also enriched the understanding and appreciation of wine and vineyards as integral to a people's culture and identity. His work and love for the land and wine testify to the intrinsic value of viticulture and oenology in history and society. Wines, vineyards, and winemakers are essential elements of a region's cultural heritage, and Roupnel was a staunch advocate and ambassador of this legacy. Amidst the many transformations and innovations in the wine world, it is crucial to remember and honor the tradition and history behind every bottle. Winemakers and viticulturists are the guardians of this legacy, and their passionate hard work keeps the soul and essence of wine alive. May Roupnel's example inspire us to cherish and preserve the rich vinicultural heritage passed down through generations and continue writing new chapters in the story of wine, vineyards, and winemakers. The sensory analysis of Burgundy wine is rich and detailed, describing its aromatic and gustatory characteristics,

likening it to an almost spiritual experience. While this sensory approach effectively conveys the wine's complexity and beauty, it may be seen as overly romanticized. Emphasizing the subjective experience of wine, such as "velvet" and "silk," may not be as convincing for those seeking a more technical analysis.

Improvements in cultivation coincided, in fact, with advancements in winemaking processes. Regulated fermentation produced firmer, cleaner wines with greater market value. Moreover, the association of producers helped stabilize prices. Commerce smartly improved its sales outlets. And a more just esteem was given to our wines, which gained the reputation and prices they deserve (Roupnel, 1932, p. 221).

With advances in technology, it became possible to modify grape management, leading to more controlled winemaking, resulting in wines with greater body, clarity, and added value. Another factor to consider is that marketing evolved, making it easier to promote products.

In the Sub-Middle São Francisco Valley, festive events like the Sertão Wine Fair and the Wine Run take place. The Sertão Wine Fair is an event organized by the wine school, together with the Federal Institute of Petrolina Rural Zone, aimed at promoting wine culture in the São Francisco Valley. The Wine Run boosts the wine market's production chain and strengthens tourism, offering participants a complete experience. Among the various entertainment options are the sparkling wine party, sports tourism through the vineyards, wine-paired pasta dinners, lectures, and a varied buffet of fruits and other foods.

Furthermore, the Sub-Middle Valley offers the only Viticulture and Oenology courses in the North/Northeast, and the city is also one of the largest exporters of table grapes.

In “La Terre”, Roupnel, with his deep-rooted conception of landscape and memory, investigates how the imagination of space transforms everyday, natural experiences into a fertile field for poetic reverie. Through these approaches, we aim to understand geopoetics as a creative process connecting human subjectivity with the world around it. The study also examines the convergences and differences between both authors' concepts of space and imagination, highlighting the importance of lived space and the natural environment in shaping a poetic consciousness.

The article explores Gaston Bachelard's contributions to teaching agronomy and viticulture, reflecting on the importance of imagination and poetics in the technical-scientific learning process. The authors analyze how Bachelard's phenomenological approach, especially his emphasis on reverie and the sensitive experience of the natural world, can enrich the teaching of agricultural sciences. Through this perspective, they seek to integrate critical thinking and poetic reflection into technical education, proposing a more holistic view of agronomy and viticulture training. The study suggests that by valuing lived space and emotional connections with the environment, the teaching of these disciplines can become more meaningful and humanized.

In “Histoire de la campagne française”, Gaston Roupnel explores the historical evolution of rural life in France, highlighting the

deep connection between peasants and the land. The work traces the development of French agriculture and rural landscapes over the centuries, examining the impact of economic, social, and cultural factors. Roupnel emphasizes the historical continuity of rural life, showcasing how the land shaped the character and values of peasant society. The author also reflects on the transformation of villages and fields over time, demonstrating the central role the countryside played in shaping French national identity. Through a humanistic approach, the book presents a rich narrative about the connection between humans and the natural environment, highlighting the land's importance as a shaping force of culture and social life.

“The land retains the memory of men and times; it bears witness to the eternal return of life cycles.” Roupnel suggests that the land, or the natural space, possesses a kind of memory. The landscapes we see today are filled with traces of the past, and they “preserve” the events and stories of the generations who lived and worked there. Nature, with its continuous cycles of birth, death, and rebirth, reflects the cycle of human life. Thus, the land becomes a kind of archive, where the traces of human history mix with natural rhythms.

“The landscape shapes human experience and inspires daydreams.” In this idea, Roupnel proposes that the natural environment, or the landscape surrounding us, profoundly influences how we feel, think, and imagine. Space is not merely a neutral backdrop but an active element shaping how we experience the world. The landscape invites us



to dream and imagine, functioning as a source of inspiration and contemplation, encouraging poetic or philosophical reverie.

“Emotional geography connects human beings to the natural environment.” This quote reflects the idea that there is a deep emotional bond between humans and the space they inhabit. Roupnel acknowledges that the relationships we develop with the places around us are not merely practical or physical but also sentimental. Our emotions and memories influence how we relate to the environment, and space, in turn, can evoke specific emotions and sensations. This interaction between the emotional and the geographical contributes to the construction of a place's identity for each individual.

These ideas from Roupnel highlight how he sees the landscape and natural space as living, active elements that interact with human experience on both practical and emotional levels. He underscores the importance of a reflective and intimate relationship with the land and the natural environment.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of Gaston Roupnel and Philip Whalen's “Burgundian Vines and Wines” is a profound reflection on the importance of “terroir” and tradition in wine production in the Burgundy region. Here are some critical points to consider:

1. **Valuing Terroir:** The conclusion emphasizes how terroir — which includes soil, climate, and topography—is fundamental to the quality and uniqueness of Burgundy wines. Roupnel and Whalen argue that \*terroir\* is not just a geographic concept but a cultural one, reflecting the region's history and agricultural practices.
2. **Tradition and Modernity:** The authors discuss the tension between preserving winemaking traditions and the need for modernization. They suggest that although modernization is inevitable, it should be done in a way that respects and preserves local traditions.
3. **Economic and Social Impact:** The conclusion also addresses the economic and social impact of viticulture in Burgundy. The authors highlight how wine production is a vital part of the local economy and influences the region's social and cultural life.
4. **Sustainability:** Another important point is the discussion on sustainability. Roupnel and Whalen emphasize the need for sustainable agricultural practices to ensure the longevity of vineyards and the quality of future wines.
5. **Philosophical Reflection:** The conclusion takes on a philosophical tone, reflecting on the relationship between humanity and nature. The authors suggest that viticulture in Burgundy is an example of how humanity can work in harmony with nature to create something of lasting value.

These points demonstrate that the conclusion of the book not only summarizes the main themes but also offers a critical and reflective perspective on viticulture in Burgundy.

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