

# Book Report

*Wine Into Words: A History and Bibliography of Wine Books in the English Language*

James Gabler, Bacchus Press  
Baltimore, 2004

*Edited and reprinted with the kind permission of Bo Simons, who originally wrote this review for "The Wayward Tendrils Quarterly".*

This is it, fellow Tendrils. This is the work of great moment. This is our Mecca, our Jerusalem, our Great White Whale, our obscure object of desire. This is the Hokey Pokey. This is what it's all about for us who enjoy wine books. James M. Gabler has done it again. He has come out with a second edition of *Wine Into Words: A History of Wine Books in the English Language*. This book in its first edition set the standard for wine bibliography, and this second edition continues that standard. If anything, it raises the bar. The work has grown, more than doubling the number of entries or books cited, while adding only a quarter to the total number of pages with skillful typography and layout. The first edition in 1985 contained 3,200 entries; this new edition boasts 7,800. Its layout, the way the text rides the page, the ease with which the reader's eye can lift the information improves with this second edition.

I have had a hard time reviewing this book. I didn't want to put it down long enough to review it. Unlike the historian and California State Librarian Kevin Starr, who says in his introduction to this book that he read the book "item by item, page by page, in alphabetical order," I flitted about, like a bee in a field of flowers, like a sot in a great cellar.

But, let me try. Gabler deserves praise and recognition first and foremost for his comprehensiveness. Does he list every wine book? No, but he comes very close. Librarians like me are pretty good at testing the comprehensiveness of a bibliography, finding a reference to some obscure book that compiler has failed to include. I am astonished at the scope and breadth of Gabler's achievement. He has *Superplonk* by Malcolm Gluck, a book that in its earlier editions eluded Roy Brady. He includes both *Sonoma Wine Tour* and *The Long Memory* by Millie Howie. I was able to find only a few entries I think he ought to have, but few, damn few, and not worth mentioning.

His achievement in listing the older books in English on wine is stunning. Gabler also deserves praise for the excellence of his annotations. They tell what you need to know clearly and with elegance. Witness the annotation to *Knee deep in Claret*: "Covers the history of development of the wine trade in Britain, particularly in Scotland, from the earliest times to the present. The book's title is taken from a Robert Burns poem." At times Gabler lets his feelings toward the subject show. When I agree with him, I find these

annotations witty and sagacious, and when I disagree, I find them less so. However, the annotations remain informative and relevant.

There are numerous other points to praise about *Wine Into Words*. Gabler provides numerous excellent biographical sketches of selected authors. His short title index allows one to find a work by title. His subject index is a valiant attempt to provide access by subject to the books he lists. One small quibble: while his title index refers users to the entries by entry number, the subject index refer only to a page where a user has to search through more than 20 entries for each page.

With a book this wonderfully large, there are some quibbles but it seems mean-spirited to point them out. Nonetheless, I am compelled to mention one flaw. Gabler suffers charmingly from scope fuzziness: He does not include many cookbooks, or pamphlets and ephemera. He includes only some technical books and papers on grape growing and wine making, but not others. Non-book items, videos, CDs, CD-ROMs, etc., are excluded "except where they provide historical information not to be found elsewhere." I would have included "Babette's Feast".

The second edition stands as a worthy successor to the first. Pick it up and spend time with it. Read it, open it up to any page and get lost in a subject that never fails to delight. Use it as reference; build your library with it.

Enjoy