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Viticultural Verse: Advertising, Poetry, and the Niagara Wine Industry

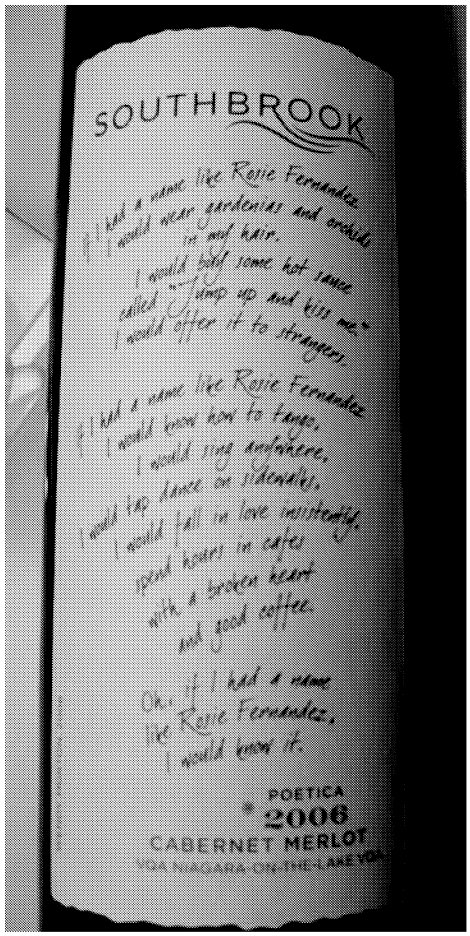
by Lorraine York

Advertising and poetry have shared a long, intertwined and turbulent history, and cultural critiques of the subject have tended to ramp up the turbulence. To begin with, cultural theorists have not been kind to advertising in general, let alone advertising that seeks to harness the cultural capital of verse. Raymond Williams set the tone, calling advertising "a true part of the culture of a confused society"; that mixed-up society was, of course, for Williams, modern capitalism, and he dubbed advertising its "official art" (194; 184). Much more recent theory of advertising sounds a similar note, seeing advertising, as Williams did, as an invasive parasite, eating away at the fabric of social relations; Andrew Wernick, although he is wary of forging a one-to-one link between advertising and "ideological hegemony" (25) in *Promotional Culture*, nevertheless refers to advertising as a "pervasive" (93) "rhetorical form diffused throughout our culture" (vii) that "has become, today, virtually co-extensive with our produced symbolic world" (182) The closing sentences of Sut Jhally's materialist study of advertising, *The Code of Advertising*, draw much more explicitly upon metaphors of invasion:

> The movement of value *invades* the symbolic/material processes of human needing and destroys any idea of the separation of superstructure and base. Advertising not only reflects, but is itself a part of the extraction of surplus-value (in addition to realizing it). Capital invades the process of meaning construction—it valorizes consciousness itself. (205; emphasis in original)

It is understandable why such metaphors of ubiquity and biothreat should flourish when cultural theorists analyze advertising; there seem fewer and fewer material surfaces in our lives untouched by it—sport jerseys, web pages and even public toilet stalls. Still, such sweeping and automatic critiques flatten the field and do not, ironically, take account of the broad diversity of promotional culture that Wernick, for one, persuasively describes. However, there are promotional initiatives that trouble both the

apocalyptic air of much cultural critique of advertising on one hand, and any easy celebratory "everything goes" corporatism on the other. One of these is Southbrook Vineyards's Poetica series of wines, whose labels feature excerpts from Canadian poems.[1]



First of all, is important to realize that Southbrook's venture is positioned within a field—poetry and advertising—that is even more suspicious of advertising's bad faith than most cultural estimations of advertising generally are. Overwhelmingly, the critical literature on this topic has assumed that poetry is always and necessarily exploited and diminished by contact with promotional culture: an assumption that I seek to trouble, while acknowledging those incontrovertible instances of blatantly reductivist, exploitative commercial uses of art. This automatic negativity had already taken root in the early twentieth century; Paul Valéry, not surprisingly, saw advertising as "one of the great diseases of our time"; it "insults our eyes, falsifies all epithets, spoils the landscapes and corrupts any quality and all critique" (qtd. in Nöth 53). There seems little to redeem here. And subsequent commentators on poetry and advertising have pretty much taken up the scorched-earth tone of Valéry's denunciation. The semiotician Winfried Nöth prefaces his study of the uses of visual art in advertising with the observation that "the literature of classical poets has become rare in modern advertising," mainly because bringing together the elite culture of poetry with consumer goods is widely received as being in bad taste. As an example of this incommensurate pairing of poetry and commodities, he

cites a 1921 Colgate advertisement that promises users of the product sparkling teeth comparable to those of a Robert Herrick maiden:

> Some ask'd how pearls did grow, and where?
> Then spoke I to my girl.
> To part her lips, and she shew'd them there
> The Quarrelets of pearl
> (55)

Often, critiques of poetic advertising hinge upon the criterion of complexity: poetry has it, whereas advertising is a kitschy poseur. For example, John Jeremiah Sullivan wrote a piece for *Harper*'s in 2000, in which he skewered a SuperBowl commercial for Monster.com, the online employment agency, which shows a young woman lost amidst a morning work rush, offered advice by several passers-by, each spouting a line or two of Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." Sullivan shows how, by selective quotation, Frost's poem loses its edgy qualifications, its somber and self-reflexive irony, and becomes merely an unproblematic song of the resolutely ambitious:

> Out went the second stanza, in which the qualifying note is introduced: "the passing there / Had worn them really about the same." Out went the wishful resignation…of "I doubted if I should ever come back." Out, most brazenly, went the first two lines of the last stanza, in which the speaker imagines himself as an old gasbag, turning the wavering and randomness of his life into a tale of courage and foresight. Scraped clean of irony, the abridged text that Monster.com's "cast of characters" recites is an uncomplicated paean to heroic individualism, just the sort of thing the speaker's old, sighing self might come up with in one of his less honest moments. (Paragraph 7)

In a case like this, where resistant content is actually excised from the poem, the critic indeed has a point. But other arguments assume that poetry inherently has a richness and multivalence that no ad can touch; the American poet and teacher Ross Talarico, for instance, put three poems written by his students up against three television advertisements featuring similar content, demonstrating how, in each case, the poem was complex and self-aware, whereas the ad carefully sanded down the rough edges of complexity. And it is not that Sullivan and Talarico are "wrong," as we like to think that the scholars whose writings we invoke in the opening moments of our articles generally are; in fact, they're right *about the specific examples they analyze*.

Where we run into theoretical problems is in generalizing about the inherent complexity or cultural worth of poetry and advertising from these carefully chosen examples. Decades ago, for example, the semanticist S. I. Hayakawa drew a sharp distinction between "venal poetry," or poetry for hire, of which advertising is the prime example, and "disinterested poetry"—"verbal magic (or skullduggery) for the purpose of giving an imaginative, or symbolic, or 'ideal' dimension to life and all that is in it" (206). This in spite of the fact that Hayakawa opened his influential essay "Poetry and Advertising" by briefly considering the ways in which poetry and advertising are complexly related: indeed, he suggestively referred to advertising as "the poeticizing of consumer goods" (205) before proceeding to disarticulate the poetic and the commercial. There is very little writing on poetry and advertising that rearticulates them in a relationship that is other than exploitative. That may indicate the way in which poetry specifically has been taken up as a vantage point from which to critique its mass-cultural cousin, advertising.

Looking beyond specific treatments of poetry, more recent, revisionist considerations of advertising come closest to my own project. Jennifer Wicke in *Advertising Fictions*, provocatively contends that advertising is, to quote her, "a language and a literature in its own right" (3), and while I am unsure about the need to justify advertising in these linguistic and literary terms, Wicke makes an excellent point about the need to distinguish advertising, however provisionally and temporarily, from ideology: "advertising," she claims, "does not serve as a simple messenger-boy of ideology, if only because ideology does not exist in some place apart before it is channeled through advertisement" (16). Nicholas Holm puts a related point succinctly when he argues that the automatic negativity of cultural studies treatments of advertising, in his words, "is due in large part to a premature, precritical collapse of the distinction between advertising and capital, which is in turn symptomatic of wider thinking about mass culture" (4). A parallel prying open of the space between "commodity" and "fetishism" marks the cultural theory of Jane Bennett, who challenges the notion of modernity as a space of disenchantment and asks, instead, what the enchantments even of advertising, such as they are, can contribute to political activism and ethics. Taking her cue from a 1998 Gap khakis ad, "Khakis Swing," Bennett explores the way in which advertising may do more than simply enslave its watchers to a capitalist system of commodification. Paying close attention to the way in which the ad shows dancing (khaki-clad) bodies swinging, being frozen in mid-air, and then reanimated, Bennett shows how the ad also expresses "the liveliness of matter":

> You can call those pants 'commodified' and you can call fascination with the advertisement a 'fetish,' but the swinging khakis also emerge from an underground cultural sense of nature as alive, as never having been disenchanted. Out of the commercialized dance erupts a kind of neopagan or Epicurean materialism—an enchanted materialism. (118)

Bennett justifies her act of looking for activism in all the wrong places by pointing out that it is the porosity and complexity of commodity culture that make it worth searching for fissure: why challenge a system that is airtight or hopeless (116)? "And so," she writes in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, "I emphasize the openings, ambiguities, and lines of flight within systems of power, doing so to work positive effects within and upon the system" (116).

Bennett says that the enchantment she writes about involves what she calls "a surprising encounter, a meeting with something that you did not expect" (5), and this description nicely sums up my initial response to Southbrook Winery's Poetica Series. My surprise—at finding a form of poetic promotion that did not feel like the exploitative use of art by commerce that the scholarship on advertising had taught me to expect—has led me to prise open the overwhelmingly negative take on advertising in general and advertising's relation to poetry more specifically.

There are, of course, other examples of Canadian poetry being used for promotional purposes, though they are not plentiful. One of the most interesting of these was the Hudson's Bay Company's commissioning of new works by Canadian poets and visual artists in the mind 1960s to mid 1970s for promotional ads in periodicals like *The Tamarack Review*, *Queen's Quarterly* and *Canadian Literature*. Over those years, participants in the ad campaign made for an impressive roster of writers: Margaret Atwood, Al Purdy, John Newlove, Alden Nowlan, Phyllis Gotlieb, A.J.M. Smith, Miriam Waddington, Joan Finnegan, James Reaney, Louis Dudek, Gwendolyn MacEwen, DG Jones, Raymond Souster, Ralph Gustafson, Gustave Lamarche. Poets were initially paid a fee of $50 per poem, which sounds like a meager amount by contemporary standards but which was at the time—if the enthusiasm of the participants is any indication—a welcome supplement to the poets' incomes. Atwood, whose poem "Some Objects of Wood and Stone" became part of the advertising campaign, wrote to HBC's Executive Assistant of Public Relations and inventor of the scheme, Ms. Barbara Kilvert, "it is encouraging to see a Canadian company doing something that ought to be done" (HBC Archives RG2/68/6). Miriam Waddington wrote: "Your idea and way of using Canadian poems is really brilliant," and Dorothy Livesay lavished praise on the venture:

"What Texaco did for opera—HBC does for poetry." John Newlove observed frankly, "I must say that Hudson's Bay is quicker about making a decision and in paying for it, and more generous in payment, than any literary outfit I've run across so far" (HBC Archives RG2/68/6). Although the HBC venture serves as a precedent for poetic promotion in Canada, the warmth of the praise lavished upon the idea by the poets involved suggests that it was both a welcome and an infrequent phenomenon.

More recently, slam poetry in Canada has been turned to various promotional purposes, both by the state and by private corporations. The West Coast poet Shane Koyczan won the U.S. National Slam Poetry individual competition in 2000, an accomplishment that brought him to the attention of the Canadian Tourism Commission, who hired him to write a poem for the 2007 Canada Day celebrations on Parliament Hill. But it was Koyczan's performance of this poem, "We Are More" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsq68qRexFc) at the opening ceremony of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver that brought him to national attention. Media outlets and Twitter were buzzing with the news of his success at the ceremonies; as the CBC online news report proclaimed, "Olympic Ceremony Poet Bursts onto World Stage." Since then, Koyczan has taken his performance piece to a corporate sponsor, performing a selection from "We are More" in a recent Maxwell House ad. Koyczan's spot is part of a larger campaign that focuses on optimism, "Brew Some Good." On their website for the campaign, Maxwell House posts YouTube-like videos of moments and stories that are designed to emphasize the positive, as a rejoinder to the overwhelmingly negative tenor of media news outlets.

Poetic promotion, then, is something that is part of our literary past, as well as our present moment, and promotional campaigns like these are certainly open to a broad range of cultural critiques. For example, those poets of the 60s and 70s who allowed the Hudson's Bay Company to use their poems in print ads arguably hired out their poetry in the service of a national myth of exploration and exploitation. In the period directly preceding this, the Hudson's Bay Company sought to depict its long-established trading relations with indigenous people as an instance of benevolent outreach to grateful subjects of empire. Peter Geller, author of several studies of HBC's promotional initiatives, argues that "In *The Beaver* magazine, as in the HBC's public relations project in general, stereotypical and simplified images of peoples and places served to present a particular vision of the company and its activities" (183). These activities, aimed at publicizing the company's positive role in nation-building, gained urgency in the late 1950s and 60s as the company came under fire

for its role in the relocation of Inuit communities. Their attempts at damage control took the form of a series of self-congratulatory print ads; with the poetic campaign of the 60s, the Company sought a more subtle way to celebrate its alignment with Canadian cultural nationalism.

Similarly, the licensing of Koyczan's upbeat paean to Canada, "We are More," to the Olympic commission and then to Maxwell House hitches his optimism to nationalist and private enterprise causes that may not be the cause of optimism in others. One might consider, for instance, the controversies in Vancouver over the way in which the Winter Olympics produced a sanitized version of both the city and Canada, or the fact that Maxwell House is owned by Kraft, identified by Oxfam Canada as one of the big Four coffee roasters who have done little to nothing to make the lives of coffee producers better. It neither buys fair trade beans nor those produced in accordance with international standards ("Coffee Companies Doing Little to Help Struggling Farmers"). Where, then, in the midst of such problematic partnerships of poetry and corporate culture, can one find more productive linkages of art and commerce, Bennett's "enchanted materialism," if there is theoretically every reason to believe that commerce need not soil everything it touches for promotional purposes?

Southbrook's Poetica series of wines is one such rare example. It was unveiled by this Niagara-on-the-Lake winery in 2008, and it features vintages dating back to 1998. Typically, Southbrook will choose one white and one red in a year (often a chardonnay and a cabernet merlot), but they do not promise to choose wines *every* year; since Poetica is a top-of-the-line series for Southbrook, they will only choose those wines that meet their highest standards. Bottles of each varietal of each vintage are graced by poems or excerpts of poems by Canadian poets, ranging from Charles G.D. Roberts to P.K. Page to b p Nichol, Christopher Dewdney, Gwendolyn McEwen, Sarah Slean, and Martin Tielli of the Rheostatics (See Appendix 1). The concept was the brainchild of designer Laura Wills of Messenger Design in Toronto, who read through hundreds and hundreds of Canadian poems in order to come up with the selections. The finalists were then submitted to the winery owners, Bill and Marilyn Redelmeier, who had the final say on which poems were to appear on the labels ("Interview with Bill Redelmeier"). Poets received a case of wine in return, which was surely attractive to wine aficionado Christopher Dewdney or the late P.K. Page, who enthused, "I think it's a brilliant idea. I'm a red woman!" (www.southbrook.com), but less relevant, perhaps, to non-drinking West Coast poet Wendy Morton, who nevertheless tried a teaspoon at the launch.

"It tasted delicious," she told me in an interview. "But what do I know?" ("Interview with Wendy Morton")

Some of the surprise produced by this linkage of poetry and wine is the revision it offers of the venerable tradition of wine labels featuring visual art. The classic example is the Chateau Mouton Rothschild, which has carried visual arts labels since the mid 1940s, incorporating painting or drawings by the likes of Marc Chagall, Pablo Picasso and Robert Motherwell. As Bill Redelmeier explained to me, "The problem is…when Rothschild did Mouton with an art label it was wonderful…[but] It's been copied so many times. We hated copying what others do. We don't want to copy; we want to do something original" ("Interview with Bill Redelmeier"). Besides, a new-world copy of the Rothschild art label already existed: Kenwood Vineyards's Artist Series. Bill Redelmeier indirectly cited this example when he spoke to me, mentioning the controversy that erupted when a California winery placed a nude on one of their labels: "what you think of as beautiful art is not always what others think is beautiful art," he reflected ("Interview with Bill Redelmeier"). The year was 1975, and Kenwood became embroiled in a messy conflict with what was then called the American Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, who found the art-deco image of a reclining nude by California artist David Lance Goines obscene. Eventually, Kenwood went on to place visual art by Picasso, Van Gogh, Joan Miró and Alexander Calder, among others, on its labels. Faced with such a high profile model—Rothschild—and an equally high profile imitator—Kenwood—Southbrook opted to explore the possibilities of other creative arts. You might say: they wanted to enchant, to provide a "surprising encounter" that departed from what had become the cliché of the art wine label. Part of that surprise depends, of course, on the very tradition from which the poetry label departs; invoking Rothschild even by means of difference reinstates that venerable house as a sign of distinction, quality, and standards, and implicitly positions Southbrook as a worthy Canadian successor.

Like the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, or the Hudson's Bay Company in the mid twentieth-century, Southbrook does draw to some extent upon cultural nationalism. It seeks to harness the power of such nationalism by aligning itself with the Niagara wine industry's continuing campaign to show itself capable of carrying on traditions of fine winemaking that are often associated with Europe. On their website, Southbrook proclaims that their project of selecting Canadian poetry for their prestigious line of fine wines is "part of our ongoing support for the arts in Canada" (www.southbrook.com). In this spirit, the chosen poets are carefully

chosen for their geographical span, from Victoria to Halifax. The graphic designer Laura Wills makes the connection between proudly Canadian wine and proudly Canadian verse explicit: "…what better way to support Southbrook's proud Canadian heritage than by showcasing only Canadian poets?" (Ogryzlo).

Still, this is a subsidiary theme of the promotional campaign, possibly because the winery does not wish to overshadow its commitment to the local terroir. The force of regionalism, so crucial to the production and marketing of wine, exists in a complicated relation to the nation in Southbrook's promotional campaign. Implicitly, consumers are asked to see their commitment to regional terroir and to Canadian national culture as overlapping attachments to a specificity of place.

A more substantial way that Southbrook's poetry/wine pairing operates is through a shared discourse of small production and cultural value. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, the Poetica series occupies a position in the field of cultural production that is closer to the pole of restricted production wherein, in his words, "the producers produce for other producers" (39). You might argue that wine does not lend itself to Bourdieu's theory, since wine is, happily, all about consumption: how could wine ever operate as a Keatsian "unheard melody"? Consumers with a certain level of disposable income do, of course, buy and enjoy the Poetica wines, which are currently priced between $50 and $154, but the restricted production of the line produces a similarly restricted, limited profit margin. (Several of the early releases were only available in magnums. The 2003-2006 Poetica wines had limited-edition numbering. Production of some of the earlier wines in the series amounted to two to three barrels—only 40 to 60 cases of 12 bottles each, in other words.) Furthermore, I would argue that the prestige lines such as Poetica are, to a considerable degree, produced for other producers, since they showcase to those other producers what a particular winery, method and terroir are capable of; they are, in that sense, flagship products whose intended audience are both wine enthusiasts and fellow winemakers alike. They are not primarily about making the winery a great deal of money. A telling sign of this use of the vintage as cultural showcase is Southbrook's decision to keep even the sold out vintages on their website, with full details included about the poetry on the label and even tasting notes…for a wine that can no longer be bought and tasted by the consumer.

This extreme pole of viticultural marketing, in which meaning becomes attached to a product that is either restricted in consumption or not consumable at all, appears to bear out Sut Jhally's denunciation of invasive advertising: "Capital invades the process of meaning construction—it val-

orizes consciousness itself" (205). What is being marketed is, in effect, the immaterial: prestige and cultural value. This aspect of the Poetica line produces the most serious challenge to my attempt to create some space between advertising and exploitation for alternative effects and affects. Poetry, instead, becomes tied to high-end viticulture as a twinned expression of exclusivity, available only to fellow producers and members of privileged classes. There is no doubt that this is true: wines that sell from between $50 and $154 are clearly produced with a particular class demographic in mind. As for the promotion of the immaterial that Jhally describes, all advertising "valorizes consciousness," seeking to link consumer products to particular affects. Whereas many critiques of advertising, however, rehearse these incontrovertible and, by now, unsurprising points, I am interested in an engagement with advertising that acknowledges these operations of power and yet searches for additional or alternate ways in which this relationship between art and commerce can be conceptualized. As Nicholas Holm maintains, "Yes, advertising is the art of capitalism, insofar as it is the art that always has to acknowledge its role within capitalism—it cannot hide or deny it. But this is why advertising is such an important aesthetic space, because it…can lead to new ways of presenting and thinking through the world, while never being able to turn away from lived economic reality" (8). It is in this space that what Jane Bennett calls "enchantment" can come to pass, but it is an enchantment that does not seek to deny or downplay exploitative materialism. If anything, it seeks to understand it more comprehensively.

If one were to take a more uniformly critical position on Southbrook's Poetica series, for example, one might expect to find a correlation between the restricted production of the wine and the level of cultural capital enjoyed by the poets and poetry chosen for the labels. Is the poetry as recherché as the preciously scarce wine inside the bottles? At first, my supposition that this might be the case was strengthened by the comment on the chosen poems by Ann Sperling, Southbrook's director of winemaking and viticulture: "They're not hallmark cards. They were selected to have a little more depth—like the wines" ("Bottled Poetry"). But a survey of the poets tells a different story; these are not all poets of restricted production. They range from self-published poet Stephen Elliott-Buckley, whose poetry appears in small-production venues such as chapbooks, zines and broadsheets, to Nova Scotia poet Lesley Choyce, who has published 70 works of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. They extend from Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, a canonized cornerstone of Canada's poetic history to Wendy Morton, founder of the nation-wide Random Acts of Poetry event,

which sees poets read their poems to startled people on the street, in libraries, beauty salons, and pretty much randomly everywhere.

However, even though the modes of dissemination used by the Southbrook poets differ greatly, they do share qualities that mark them, if not as poets of restricted production, as poets of targeted consumption. Many of these poets—Slean, Tielli, Elliott-Buckley, for instance—resonate with an urban chic demographic[2]: the kind of 30s-to-40s urban hipsters interested in independent film and music that the current CBC radio, for one, pursues with some of its newer programming choices. This is not a blanket explanation, however, for Southbrook's poetic choices, which include, after all, P.K. Page and Charles G.D. Roberts, but it is undoubtedly one factor in those choices. Particularly since Niagara wineries have, in recent years, sought out affluent urban consumers (principally from the Toronto region), it would make sense to target this demographic in the promotional activities they engage in—poetry included.

If there is no simple, one-to-one connection between small production and the Southbrook poets, the connection between wine and poetry as fields of restricted production operates at the level of the poetic genre itself. When I asked owner Bill Redelmeier, "Is there a connection in your mind between the special, limited edition aspect of Poetica and the qualities of poetry, which is also, in a sense, limited edition art?," he quickly replied, "Absolutely…We would not use poetry for anything but our best wine." He went on, though, to speak of the limited edition aspect of the poetry as something that occurs, for him, more at the level of consumption rather than that of production: "It's interesting," he remarked, "to see people [visiting the winery] read the different ones [poems] and different ones will resonate with different people" ("Interview with Bill Redelmeier").

This appeal to the consumer both at the level of general demographic and at the level of the private individual who has a specific relation to poems, operates naturally through poetry. Southbrook markets a commodity (albeit a small-production lot) that prides itself on the specificity of vintage, of season, of terroir, through the use of a cultural commodity that is also heavily geared towards notions of private, idiosyncratic taste. This allows discourses of originality and uniqueness to flow through the promotional use of poetry to market wine; as Bill Redelmeier points out about the poetry used in the campaign, "each of the pieces of poetry is unique; they are not all similar. They are all love poetry in some sense, but otherwise, they are very different" ("Interview with Bill Redelmeier"). Poet Wendy Morton reflected that "uniqueness" was the key attraction of the scheme, for her: the "special part was…my poem was going to be in an unexpected

and delicious place" ("Interview with Wendy Morton"). In their press releases for the launch of the series, Southbrook did not hesitate to sound exactly this note of dovetailing poetic and viticultural originality: "The debut of Poetica marks the first time a Canadian winery is displaying the 'art of words' on its bottle labels in a specially-designed artist series that showcases poetry" (www.southbrook.ca).

To return to my opening question about advertising, poetry, wine and commodification, in the light of this emphasis on uniqueness and small production, one reaction might well be: how could one consider that placing poetry on a wine bottle label is selling out, if the sales figures are so slight? Should one's poetic soul not carry a higher pricetag? The same question was posed to me by poet Wendy Morton, founder of the Random Acts of Poetry, when I asked her this delicate question about poetry selling out to commercial interests: "The real issue is: no one is going to get rich being a poet" ("Interview with Wendy Morton") However, this might not be the "real issue": the question of the *volume* of commodification does not adequately or seriously address the question of advertising's exploitation of creative cultural products. So I locate my earlier claim, that Southbrook's Poetica series of wines didn't "feel" like the sort of massive exploitation that traditional critiques of advertising led me to expect, somewhere else: in the relationship and reciprocity between the poem and the wine.

Most obviously, poetry and wine, placed in relationship by Southbrook's Poetica series, reflect and enrich each other's sensuality and orality. As Southbrook's online tasting note for the 2005 Poetica Chardonnay celebrates, "Wonderful mouth feel, rich and viscous"; the next year's vintage similarly praises its "Wonderful long mouth feel"—and really, what better way to describe a poem that plays sensually on our tongues? Lines like Stephen Elliott-Buckley's:

> I want to spoon feed you
> chocolate ganache
> on a summer Tuesday midnight
> at Havana on Commercial Drive
> I want your eyes to stay closed
> so your other senses are heightened,
> like taste of course,
> but nerve endings more importantly,
> since I've slid my foot out of my sandal
> and I'm sliding my big toe
> up and down

your brazenly naked calf's
smooth unshaven blond hair
(2007 Poetica Chardonnay)

Or more powerfully, perhaps, because less explicit, Christopher Dewdney's lines from *Radiant Inventory*, placed on the 2007 Cabernet Merlot: ""Now that I have been opened / I can never be closed again."

The aptness that I discern in the relationship between vehicle and product also has to do with the ecological bearings of many of the chosen poems—P.K. Page's "Planet Earth," which has been adopted as an environmental rallying-cry of sorts. In 2008, Southbrook was the first Canadian winery to earn both "Demeter certification" for its biodynamic winemaking processes and OC/PRO (Canada's foremost organic certifier) certification as an organic company. And at a time when there is a growing movement to rectify the often shameful working conditions that migrant workers face in the Niagara vineyards, it is noteworthy that Southbrook is certified as a Local Food Plus operation, which means, among other things, that it works to "ensure safe and fair conditions for farm workers" (www.southbrook.com). For one thing, its commitment to organic viticulture ensures that workers at Southbrook vineyards are not subjected to harmful pesticides.

When I put the question about whether using poetry on a wine label somehow cheapens or sells out the poetry to the co-owner of Southbrook, Bill Redelmeier, I knew I was treading on tricky ground. After all, here is someone who, with co-owner Marilyn Redelmeier, has devoted years of his life to the art and culture of winemaking; who was I to suggest that pairing his wine with these poems would be to the detriment of the *poetry*? Accordingly, he replied, "I could give you two responses. One is trite and short"! But he went on to explain how, in his view, there is a reciprocity of vehicle and product: " I would argue that…a very important part of terroir is intention. If you were to use the Mona Lisa on bandaids that would cheapen it. But there is the use of the Mona Lisa on a Chianti. And it's a very good Chianti. I don't think that cheapens the Mona Lisa" ("Interview with Bill Redelmeier").

Many critics of consumer culture would not be persuaded by Redelmeier's distinction, and would see the reproduction of an artistic image on any consumer product as equally exploitative. But this is exactly the sort of flattening out of critique that an automatic rejection of all advertising produces; it does not push us to consider distinctions among the various sorts of relationships between advertising vehicle and product that are possible. I am not convinced by Redelmeier's argument that intentionality

determines the relative good or bad faith of advertising campaigns, but I do perceive promise in Redelmeier's concern for terroir, which, in its broadest sense, means the relationship among environmental factors at work in the local space. It potentially offers a novel way of thinking about the reciprocal relationship at work in promotional activity. The question of relationship sets Southbrook's Poetica apart from other promotional activities that, like the Mona Lisa bandage, offer a weak rationale for the pairing of vehicle and consumer product. Southbrook poet Wendy Morton's support for all manner of corporate sponsorship, for example, lacks that sense of reciprocity, aptness, terroir if you will. Her founding of Random Acts of Poetry began when she picked up a phone, called a Chrysler VP of Marketing, told him she would be in the Maritimes doing poetry events, and said "I think I want a car." She promised that, if they were to give her this car for the tour, she would jump out of it at intervals, read a poem, and present onlookers with a book of poems. For 4-5 years, Chrysler provided her with the PT Cruiser she requested—because, as she explained to me, PT stands for "poetry travels." Morton also forged a corporate deal with WestJet, becoming their "poet of the skies." In return for free airfare, she would be introduced to her fellow travelers at the beginning of the flight, would read them a poem, and then offer to write poems for or to them during the course of the flight. (She was somewhat taken aback when, on her maiden flight, 40 passengers raised their hands.) More recently, she agreed to write poems about a BC herbal remedies company, Prairie Naturals, and as a result, every four months, a package of vitamins arrives at her front door. The approach here could be called random acts of corporatization, and it lacks the thoughtful matching of poetic vehicle and product that marks the Southbrook Poetica venture. As Wendy Morton declared to me in an interview, "I love the idea that the corporate world is willing to support me."

Though Southbrook Winery's Poetica series requires that we recalibrate and rethink our common assumption that any meeting of advertising and art has to be an exploitative one, my position is far removed from Morton's love of the corporate world's willingness to sponsor her, or Shane Koyczan's willingness to put his ode to Canada at the service of Kraft Foods. On the other hand, Bourdieu's easy assumption that "poetry, that exemplary incarnation of 'pure' art, is not saleable" (185) is not accurate either. We need to prise open that easy identification of advertising and exploitation, of commodity and fetishism, the better to allow us to understand the workings of promotional culture: the good, the bad and the ugly. Jane Bennett says that enchantment, for her, means, among other things, "a

more unheimlich (uncanny) feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition" (5), and I agree that the surprise of finding of my intellectual assumptions about advertising and poetry set awry by my research into Southbrook's Poetica series has been enchanting in her sense of the word. After all, though Paul Valéry did unquestionably remark that advertising is "one of the great diseases of our time," our analyses of promotional culture need to be capacious and nuanced enough to deal with the fact that he also apparently observed, "A businessman is a hybrid of a dancer and a calculator."

Appendix

List of Poems Appearing on Southbrook's Poetica Wine Labels

1998 Chardonnay: Charles G.D. Roberts, "A Song of Growth"
1998 Cabernet Merlot: P.K. Page, "Planet Earth"
2000 Chardonnay: Steve Venright, "Draw"
2002 Cabernet Merlot: Gwendolyn MacEwen, "The Discovery"
2003 Chardonnay: bp Nichol, "Blues"
2004 Chardonnay: Martin Tielli, "Just Because"
2005 Chardonnay: Sarah Slean, "Your Wish is My Wish"
2006 Chardonnay: Lesley Choyce, "I'm Alive, I Believe in Everything"
2006 Cabernet Merlot: Wendy Morton, "If I Had a Name Like Rosie Fernandez"
2007 Chardonnay: Stephen Elliott-Buckley, "Blinding Possibilities"
2007 Cabernet Merlot: Christopher Dewdney, from *Radiant Inventory*
2 more (2009 vintages) to be released in 2011

Notes

1 Although the use of poetry on a wine label may not appear to qualify as an "advertisement," I am considering an instance of "promotional culture," to use the term that Andrew Wernick has devised to describe "advertising" in its many social manifestations.

2 I am indebted to Russell Johnston, Brock University Department of Communication, Pop Culture and Film, for pointing this out.

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