will naturally continue to evolve. However, the strengths of this book are timeless and greatly outweigh these complaints. *Pacific Pinot Noir* is recommended to anyone who has discovered the joys of pinot noir wines.

—Matthew Reid, Calistoga, CA

**Bordeaux/Burgundy: A Vintage Rivalry**
Jean-Robert Pitte. Translated by M.B. DeBevoise
xiv + 246 pp. Illustrations. $24.95 (cloth)

Most of us have had a charming someone in our lives who had the ability to take a bit of mental fluff and spin it out into an amusing and seemingly endless thread. That the thread was absolutely unweavable into more serious cloth was of no consequence: the pleasure of his (and it’s always his, isn’t it?) company lay in the elegance of the spinning. If you didn’t have an Uncle Joe who brought out his fiddle to accompany after-dinner drinks, you had an old school friend who dined occasionally with the Kennedys, or at the very least you had the televised version of William F. Buckley. This sort of elegance-without-substance is especially appealing in the world of wine writing. Those of us at the fringes of the wine world—the writers, the waiters, the wannabes—revel in pretended intimacies with those at its center: the winemakers, the viticulturalists, the owners of grand estates. If the writing that pretends to take them down a peg also aggrandizes them, so much the better. All of us today love our slightly soiled saints.

So here we have a book that treats two of the idols of the wine world, Bordeaux and Burgundy, with an easy familiarity, pointing slyly to the weaknesses of their partisans while genuflecting dutifully to the wines themselves.

There are two layers to argument in this book. The first is intellectually respectable: there is more of history and culture in each bottle of wine than there is geography. This is, of course, a heresy in the French wine world. If our soil is not unique, then where lie our claims of greatness? Or the value of our real estate? However you react to this assertion (and the author himself backs off from it a bit), you have to admit that it’s worth discussion.

The second layer involves the pathetic fallacy, the odd notion that inanimate things or even generalizations about things have feelings. You see, it seems that the wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy don’t get along. They are at opposite poles of a world of French culture and, indeed, opposite ends of the French soul.

You can imagine the dichotomies: the Bordelaise are temperate, the Burgundians lushes. The wines of Bordeaux are cerebral, the Burgundies sensual. Bordeaux is masculine except when it’s feminine, and Burgundy is feminine except when it’s masculine. Bordeaux favors the aged palate, Burgundy the young. One promotes urination, the other copulation. Bordeaux is Protestant (the very Jewish Rothschilds aside) and Burgundy Catholic. And so on. The reader imagines the author straining for effect, being more sly than serious even when he hedges and qualifies. The effect is inherently droll, and you are to smile, but not to laugh.

In between all the stories about dinners and revels the author has enjoyed and the overreaching in the personification of the two wine regions he reminds us of some very sound anti-terroir arguments. He also reminds us that wine culture as we know it is relatively recent. For instance, in the eleven-thousand-year history of wine, serving the stuff undiluted became established only at the beginning of the twentieth century. There is a provocative bibliography for those who would pursue one of these details.

The average wine consumer may be dazzled by all this, but she would be right to be a bit puzzled as well. Is there not more to wine than these two? Is there not Alsace and Chianti? What about the Langhe and Rioja, not to mention Napa and Coonawara? Are we to forget that the best of these two French contenders produce wines that are so expensive that most of us will likely taste them only once or twice in our lifetime? We could just as reasonably listen in on the quarrel between the Lamborghinistas and the Ferraristas and then retire to our Camrys and drive off.

But to demand too much of this book is to miss out on the fun. There’s a raconteur here, a wine-lover with stories to tell. Best to let the tipsy uncle play his violin and best for us to raise a glass of, let’s say, Zinfandel and sing along.

—Lynn Hoffman, author, *The New Short Course in Wine*

**Bookends**

**Chicken: Low Art, High Calorie**
Siaron Hughes
New York: Mark Batty Publisher, 2009
128 pp. Illustrations. $24.95 (vinyl)

Just as the whiff of fast-food fried chicken might be its most powerful attribute, the first thing that strikes readers of *Chicken: Low Art, High Calorie* is the powerful aroma of its catsup-red cover. Perhaps heavy-gauge vinyl was chosen because a good