

The Douro and its wine in the English Imagination

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Wine from the Douro was not, as some accounts would have it, an English invention. Nonetheless, once the wine had captured their attention, the English inevitably influenced production and distribution. The relationship is made clear by the response of the "comissarios veteranos" to the accusations of the *Novas Instruções* of 1754. When their methods were questioned, the comissários replied that the wine was made following the English merchants' instructions and thus, presumably, in response to the demand of the English market. This paper will attempt to draw a broad picture of how that market viewed the Douro and its wine, relying on newspapers, advertisements, books, and pamphlets as well as some archival records. The arc of this view runs broadly towards what one perceptive journalist called the "disestablishment" of port wine in 1860 from what, by comparison, we might call its establishment with the Methuen Treaty in 1703.¹

Early days

To understand the Methuen Treaty and its significance, we need to look the the end of the previous century. England was a nation of wine drinkers well before Methuen. By the late seventeenth century, however, as France was close and some of its wine-growing regions had once been controlled by the English, English wine drinkers overwhelmingly drank French wines. Anglo-French tensions towards the end of the century, however, provided Portugal with the opportunity to replace French wines in English affections. It was not a frivolous challenge. The English were quite prepared to break the law to get the familiar wines produced by their political enemy. Indeed, it took three embargoes, a

¹ *Novas Instruções da Feitoria Ingleza a Respeito dos Vinhos do Douro* (Porto[?], 1754); TURNER,

Mathew Freke, Wine and Wine Merchant, *New Quarterly Magazine*(1874): 595-620.

change in tax policy, the Methuen treaty, the War of the Spanish succession, and a battle over free trade to dislodge the French wines for any length of time.

The first embargo, from 1667-1668, driven in part by the protective tariffs imposed by Colbert on English textiles, was brief and there is little reliable data about Portuguese wine imports during this period. One curious piece of evidence comes in an advertisement of the Oporto & Cadiz Wine Company, who in 1845 announced the receipt of the "179th consignment of the famed wines of the Alto Douro".² If the advertisement is reliable and the sequence uninterrupted, it indicates that Douro wine was beginning to come into London as early as 1666. Thus the embargo fortuitously offered a boost to its attempt to catch the English palate. Unfortunately, the embargo was short. When English markets reopened to them, the preferential tax status that French wines had enjoyed was reinstated, leaving Portuguese wines to pay £2 more per pipe than French wines. This was a steep disadvantage for a wine new to the London market to overcome, and it helps explain why a decade later, when records of any reliability first become available, no more than 80 pipes of wine are recorded coming to England from all of Portugal. (France, meanwhile, was supplying some 15,000 pipes.)³

In 1677, London's Portugal merchants petitioned the English government to encourage a greater trade in these Portuguese wines. Again, timing was propitious. Within a year, the English parliament had once again excluded French wines. This embargo lasted until 1685 and provided a significant boost to imports of wines from Portugal, which may have exceeded 11,500 pipes for the period. It is hard to be precise because during these embargoes, French wine often came into England under the pretence that it was Portuguese.⁴ The case of *Bird vs Hardwicke* in the Court of

2 *Times* (1845) Dec. 19. In a *London Gazette* of 1666, there is a report from Pembroke of "the *Robert of London*, laden with Oyles and Sugars from Porto Port, and another with Wines, both bound for London". *London Gazette* (1666) June 4. The wording is ambiguous but suggestive of wine shipments arriving from Porto that year.

3 The import and tax data come from FRANCIS, A.D. *The Wine Trade* (London: A&C Black, 1972). His figures are in Tuns. I have converted these to pipes. Export data comes from MARTINS, Conceição Andrade, *Memoria do Vinho do Porto* (Lisbon: ICS, 1990).

4 Francis's figures at this point come from reports to Parliament during the free-trade debate of 1713 (see below) and should be treated with a certain caution. The sources were uncertain and the purpose

Chancery provides a sideways glance at this. In 1682, Hardwicke, who had a consignment of port on a ship on the Thames, apparently wanted to prevent competition from Bird, who had a similar consignment. So Hardwicke denounced Bird's wine as French. The result was that Bird's wine was impounded and Harwicke had the market to himself. Though Bird's wine was not French, the denunciation and seizure suggest that such smuggling was not uncommon.⁵

When the second embargo ended, imports of wine from Portugal fell rapidly-- indicating that these had gained a place in the market primarily as a substitute for French wines, not in their own right. With yet another embargo (1689-1696) they rose again, quite decisively, increasing annual exports of port forty fold between 1687 and 1693. While annual imports in this period passed 13,000 pipes, port still had trouble making an impression on English drinkers. In "A Farewell to Wine," a facetious poem by Richard Ames, a waiter offers port to a customer who does not know what it is. The waiter is only able to say that it is a wine from Portugal and suggest that it is a suitable substitute for claret. Though outlawed and product sof the enemy, both claret and burgundy remained popular. The playwright John Dryden captured this affection for the enemy's wine nicely while playing on Louis XIV's title as "the most Christian king":

When, with full bowls of Burgundy you dine,
Though at the Mighty Monarch you repine
You grant him still most Christian, in his Wine.⁶

In the same year (1692), the philosopher John Locke also noted that people were ashamed to dine without French wine. This lingering affection may account for the smuggling that evidently went on and continued to muddy the figures for consumption of

tendentious.

5 GREAT BRITAIN, *High Court of Chancery* (Dublin, 1726-29). Michaelmas Term, 1682. Case 98, pp 109-110.. This seems to have been one of the earliest occasions that an issue concerning port wine came before the courts. As the report was published well after the case was heard, it is hard to know whether the term *port* was used at the time. If it was, then this may be one of the earliest public usages.

6 AMES, Richard, *The Bacchanalian Sessions* (London, 1693); DRYDEN, John, Prologue to *Don Sebastian, A Tragedy* in *The Works of John Dryden*, G. Saintsbury, ed. 18 vols. Edinburgh: Patterson & Constable, 1883, vol VII, quotation at 321

port. It is apt that the first citation of port in the *Oxford English Dictionary* involves a case of smuggling noted in Narcissus Luttrell's diary of 1691:

English ships that went to Bourdeaux and took in wine, and after
sailed to port O Porto, and then came home, pretending it to be
port.

Luttrell made similar observations later in the embargo.⁷

Despite their previous resilience, when this embargo was lifted in advance of the Treaty of Rijswick, French wines failed to recover as they had in the past. Some of this failure may reflect a growing affection for Portuguese and other wines, but a good part was no doubt due to the punitive duties assessed on French wines, which payed about £29 per pipe compared to £15 on Portuguese wines. Yet, even as imports of Portuguese wines in general remained steady, exports from Porto fell once the embargo was lifted until the next war, the next embargo, and the dawn of the Methuen Treaty.⁸

Methuen, war, and peace and advertising wars

The Methuen Treaty left its mark on Portuguese wine and port in particular for more than 150 years, yet as is often noted, its immediate effect was slight. The War of the Spanish Succession once again kept French wines out of England, so the preferential tax rates given Portuguese wines were of no great significance until trade with France opened again in 1711. During this period, port did establish a firmer hold on the English market. The wine was now familiar enough that announcements and advertisements appear in London newspapers and, beginning a long tradition, English wine merchants were prosecuted for fabricating port (not, this time, out of claret, but in a notable case, out of

7 LOCKE, John, *Some considerations of the consequences of the lowering of interest, and raising the value of money in a letter to a member of Parliament* (London, 1692); LUTTRELL, Narcissus, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714*, 6 vols. (Oxford: At the University Press, 1857), vol II, quotation at p. 314 see also vol II p. 334 and vol III p. 133.

8 Through the 1690s, Port was still struggling to be accepted. Salmon's *English Physician* described "Portoport" as "a very strong Bodied Wine, and a great Stomatick, but not very Palatable, and therefore not so much drunk as other wine". SALMON, William, *Seplasium the Compleat English Physician* (London, 1693), quotation at p. 926.

stale beer and vinegar).⁹ The popularity of port, unprotected by embargoes, was not tested until steps towards peace opened the English market to French and Spanish wines again. At which point, port came to play a symbolic role in a complex political battle. Consequently, it is hard from this point on to separate completely its political appeal from the mere preference for its taste.¹⁰

The peace with France was promoted by the English Tories and resisted by the Whigs. Thus claret and burgundy became associated with the French-leaning High Church Tories, while port was the toast of the Whigs. The *Spectator*, for example, a good Whig paper, was "much offended at the Act for importing French Wines" in 1711. "A Bottle or two of good solid Edifying Port," Mr Spectator went on,

[M]ade a Night cheerful. ... But this plaguy French Claret will not
only cost us more Mony, but do us less Good.¹¹

As wine merchants, particularly those of the Company of Vintners, who were more familiar with French wines, sought to regain a share of the market, something of an advertising war broke out among the English papers. Out of this, the firm of Brooks & Hellier, run by two enterprising merchants dealing in Portuguese wine, arose not only as promoters of port wine, which they imported in consignments of up to 140 pipes, but as a standard of honest trade, to be contrasted favourably with the corrupt practices of the Vintners. Daniel Defoe (though a Tory, was deeply opposed to the High Church element and to the monopolistic Vintners) championed Brooks & Hellier in a series of articles in his *Review*. He claimed that the firm had been victims of skullduggery from the Vintners and deserved custom for the good and pure wines they supplied.¹² The *Spectator* also supported Brooks & Hellier's fight against the corruptions of the trade, praising the firm

9 For typical announcements, see the *London Gazette* (1706) Feb 3; for advertisements, *Daily Courant* (1708), March 27. For fabrication see COURT OF KING'S BENCH, *Modern Cases* Second Edition (London, 1719), *Domina Regina vs Macarty et al.* 3 Anna (1705). This case is much cited in later law reports.

10 The events around the French commercial treaty are explained more fully in DUGUID, Paul, "The Making of Methuen", *História: revista de faculdade de letras* (2004) 3(4): 9-36.

11 *Spectator* (1711) April 17.

12 *Review* (1711) VIII, Sept 15, 18, 20, 22. In the course of these articles, Defoe revealed his own connections to the port trade in the 1680s.

for having "discovered and prevented the Abuses in the Portugal Wine Trade". Both periodicals argued that Brooks & Hellier had reformed the trade in a novel way, by integrating importation, distribution, and retailing more tightly. Forming alliances with London tavern owners. Brooks & Hellier advertised their wine widely, and in these advertisements they would indicate which taverns they supplied. Defoe argued that the strategy was so successful that, in those taverns (and perhaps in others), port came to be known by the firm's name: "You shall hear them cry - thus, A Quart of Brook and Hellier".¹³

Such praise did not go unchallenged. Edward Ward, a High Church Tory pamphleteer and an old antagonist of Defoe, who like Defoe had been pilloried for his writing, took his chance to pillory Brooks & Hellier (and to mock the directions the firm's advertisements gave as to where good wine might be found) in *The Quack Vintners: or a satyr against bad wine (with directions where to have good)*. Inscribed to B--ks & H---r. Ward, who was to become a tavern keeper himself, had previously written about corruptions in the wine trade and conventional tricks such as selling port as claret and providing short measures:

Bound with large Wickers, fill'd with heavy Port,
Sold for French Claret, wanting of a quart.

In *The Quack Vintners*, he accused Brooks & Hellier of the all failings that the *Review* and *Spectator* were blaming on the Vintners, including filling

... e'ery Hole with liquid Trash ;
Sqeez'd from the Berry which on Elder grows,
Lengthen'd with Cyder, and made rough with Sloes.

It is important to note that Ward is attacking Brooks & Hellier and not port itself. Ward makes this clear when he goes on a poetic tour of Brooks & Hellier's rivals:

Whilst *Thwaite's New Fountain* flows, let none despair
Of Port that's excellent, and Bourdeaux rare:
Both rang'd within his Vaults in order lie,
To furnish those who want a fresh Supply.¹⁴

¹³ This use of particular names for generic port was to reappear in the twentieth century in Ireland, where "Sandeman's" became a widely used term for any port. See also *Spectator* (1712), April 27.

¹⁴ WARD, Edward, "The Journey to H---" in *The Third Volume* (London (1706), part III, quotation at p. 6/17 Jan 3, 07

Indeed, from this time forth, advertisements reflect this distinction between the wine itself and the merchants who sell it. Suspicion evidently fell much more on what English importers and wine merchants did to the wine than on what might be done in the Douro or Porto. Consequently, advertisements increasingly claim that the wine they are selling has not been touched since arriving from Porto. For example, Thomas Thompkins, a wine broker and persistent advertiser, advertises his "neat Red Oporto Wine fit for Draught" in the *Tatler*, in 1710 and "(natural) Oporto ... neat" in 1711; others follow suite, describing their wines as "never touch'd since it came over, if one Man may believe another, but purely neat from the grape" or "all Neat as was imported". Historically, "neat" meant (as it still can today) undiluted and was primarily applied to brandy. But, as some of these advertisements suggest, it seems to have come to mean unadulterated and wine was claimed to be neat if it was for sale in the condition in which it had left its country of origin. Thus the claim of "neat" wine is in part a reflection on the assumed probity of exporters and implied perfidy of importers. (In the case of port, particularly when coupled with "natural", "neat" may also mean unfortified.)¹⁵

In keeping with this pattern, Ward sought to throw doubt on Brooks & Hellier. Circumstances also cast some doubt on that firm and the support provided for them by the *Spectator* and the *Review*. Neither periodical was completely impartial, as both carried advertisements for Brooks & Hellier. Moreover, both Brooks and Hellier were listed publicly as subscribers to the *Spectator*. Furthermore, though Defoe praised their way of doing business, within a year, Brooks & Hellier were gazetted as bankrupts.

83; WARD, Edward, *The Quack-Vintners: or, a Satyr against Bad Wine* (London, 1712), quotations at pp. 5 and 17.

15 *Tatler* (1710) June 10-13; *Spectator* (1711) Aug 20; *Daily Courant* (1713) July 3. For much earlier accounts of "neat" brandy, see, for example, *London Gazette* (1688), March 2. In *Polly*, his sequel to the *Beggar's Opera* John Gay draws on this conventional advertising claim "neat as imported" to make a bawdy joke about a prostitute:

If I take her home, I don't question the making more money of her.
She was never in anybody's house but your own since she was
landed. She is pure, as she was imported, without the least
adulteration.

The joke indicates the pervasiveness of the trope. GAY, John, *Polly: An Opera* (London, 1729), Act I

They were also blamed by some for the death of Richard Eastcourt, a popular actor-turned-tavern-owner whose business had been brought down by the Brooks & Hellier failure (a point that Richard Steele failed to mention in his obituary of Eastcourt for the *Spectator*).¹⁶

Wine and politics

The implications of the peace with France reached well beyond these advertising wars and personal tragedies, however. The circumstances of the peace and the political debate over the question of free trade with France solidified port's role, both symbolic and actual, in the English market. As part of the peace negotiations at Utrecht, the Tory government agreed to a free-trade alliance with France to bring the two countries closer together. Popular for making the peace, the Tories foresaw little difficulty in passing the proposed Treaty of Navigation and Commerce that would give France the status of most favoured nation. In this they were overconfident, for they had overlooked the Methuen treaty. Agreeing as it did that France's access to British markets would at least be as favourable as that of any other nation, the the Treaty of Navigation and Commerce was clearly incompatible with the Methuen treaty, for this guaranteed Portugal preferential taxation compared to France. One or the other would have to give way. The Tories were determined it would be the ten-year-old treaty with Portugal, which up to that point had had little bearing on the wine trade and was not widely known.

The government could be confident, because the Port wine interest was too weak to resist. Most in the trade understood that were Portuguese wines lose their preferential treatment, French wines would be available as a substitute, and they would no longer suffer from a tax disadvantage. The Methuen Treaty, however, did not only deal with wine. It tied wine imports to wool exports. If the Methuen Treaty was abrogated, then the Portuguese would be free to keep out English wool (and they threatened to do so). Unlike the Port wine interest, the wool interest was powerful.

¹⁶ For Brooks & Hellier's bankruptcy, see *London Gazette* (1712) Sept 23-27; for Eastcourt's death, JONES, D[avid], *A Compleat History of Europe* (London, 1712); for Steele's obituary, *Spectator* (1712), Aug 27.

Wool merchants realised that if the Portuguese wool trade was lost to the British manufactures, there was no likelihood that France would provide an alternative, as it would with wine. Thus in the summer of 1713, Westminster was the destination for petitions and petitioners against the French treaty from wool regions around the country. These converged on Parliament in numbers strong enough to remind MPs what was at stake. Although the government summoned the aid of Defoe (now willing to denounce Portuguese wines), Jonathan Swift, and the Tory press, the commercial treaty was defeated. Wearing wool hats and drinking port wine became a symbol of the anti-French, protestant, Whig victory. With preferential duties and symbolic status, port after 1713 became entrenched as the "Englishman's wine" and the Methuen Treaty enshrined in the unwritten constitution.

It didn't take long, however, for the wine to switch political parties. Indeed, it was destined become the wine of opposition throughout the century, though no less patriotic for being so. In his poem "On the Irish Club" (1729), Swift, who was partial to white port, associated champagne with the Hannoverian court and, though he had deeply opposed the Methuen treaty and supported the French free trade pact in 1713, prescribed port as a sign of opposition:

Bravely despise Champagne at Court
And chuse to dine at home with Port.

While Swift's was explicitly addressing the Irish, Nathaniel Smith had, within another decade, raised port drinking to be a diagnostic sign of firm Tory opinions, made claret drinking to be suspect, and condemned burgundy drinking to be near traitorous.

You ought to be prejudic'd against every man who prefers
Bourdeaux-wine to Port; 'tis certain he has not the interest of his
country at heart, because the first of those wines comes from a
country, where the ballance of commerce is against us ...

If the candidate for member of parliament, should
go so far, as to choose to drink Burgundy rather than Bourdeaux-
wine, he is a man that has entirely lost the true English taste; and
by that, gives the greatest reason to believe, he has also lost the
English way of thinking: the one is the consequence of the other.
If a true Tory had lived ten years in France, he would never have

been able to bring himself to like the flavour of Burgundy, or the relish of a Partridge.

Lastly, if the Candidate likes Champagne better than the White-wines which we import from Spain and Portugal, ... there is no need of farther examination, he is a disgus'd Whig ...

They one day, contrary to my opinion, chose a man that I mistrusted, because I had seen him drink three glasses of Champagne; and six months after he turned his coat, and went over to the court party.¹⁷

Fortification, adulteration, and reputation

If, as these accounts indicate, port had become a strong political symbol, similar contemporary sources help address the question of how strong the wine itself had become. It had generally been regarded as a strong wine. Yet, as we have seen, in its early career in England it was seen as a substitute for claret. It was distinguished from "sweets", a common term for fortified wine. And it was regularly described as "natural" and "neat from the grape". All of which suggests that port was not yet generally fortified. In his *Brief Case of the Distillers* of 1726, Defoe, who certainly knew about wine even if he exaggerated his participation in the trade, notes that:

The common *Draft* of Red Wine of *Oporto* and *Viana*, though all stronger than the *French Wines* formerly drank, is not now strong enough for the *Citizens*; but they must be *made up* so the Wine-Brewers call it with *Lisbons*, with *Alicants*, and *Bene-Carloses*; and the *Oporto* and *Lisbon* Whites, tho very strong, are turn'd out of Doors, for the yet stronger *Mountain Malaga*.

This passage suggests that port--at least before it reached the "brewers" in England--was not exceptionally strong. Indeed it intimates that Lisbon and Mountain wines were the stronger wines, used to fortify port. Defoe does reflect the mounting taste in England, under pressure from cheap gin, to make wines stronger. A couple of years earlier (1724),

17 SWIFT, Jonathan, *The Poems of Jonathan Swift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 2 vols; SMITH, Nathaniel, *The Touch-Stone: Or a Plain and Easy Method to Distinguish an Honest and True Englishman from a False One*, quoted in LE BLANC, Jean Bernard, *Letters on the English* 2 vols (London, 1747), vol I, quotation at pp 274-5.

a letter to the Duke of Newcastle had claimed that the Porto white wines were by that time regularly fortified, whereas the reds were not:

Your Grace is pleased to direct two Hogsheads of White Port & one of White Lisbon, I believe it would prove more agreeable, to have all three of the last sort, for though the Red Wines at Oporto are excellent, the White is all mixt & strengthened with Brandys.

This letter suggests that fortification was neither standard nor recognized practice in the 1720s and that white ports were fortified before red. We also know from the *Noval Instrucçōens* that by 1754 fortification was regarded as ordinary practice. The change appears to have come at some point between the two, as which point what was once regarded as adulteration became accepted practice.¹⁸

Quite what adulteration meant (even if we set fortification to one side) is complicated. Pierre-Jean Grosley, a Frenchman who wrote of his visit to London in 1772 noted that he "drank no pure unmixed wine, except in two houses" all the time he was there. One of the exceptions he noted was not in an English household, but "that of a French Banker", who, "having a correspondent in Lisbon, considered it as a high advantage, to be supplied with Port wine in its pure and natural state; this wine, which is of a deep colour, but lively, and of a very high spirit, resembled the best claret in right order, such as is drank at Bourdeaux". As Grosley indicated, this household was an exception. In general, wine was mixed, "brewed", "made up", "strengthened", "blended" and "mended" in numerous ways, only some of which were looked on as improper. *The Lady's Companion*, while offering advice on modest behaviour, provided without a blush "an excellent Receipt to make Neat Port, as it is practiced with great Success by several Brewers in the Cities of London and Westminster". This included

12 Gallons of Alicant Wine
6 Gallons of English Spirits
3 Gallons of French Brandy
42 Gallons of Southam Cyder

18 DEFOE, Daniel, *Brief Case of the Distillers* (London, 1726), quotation at p. 47. Burnett to Duke of Newcastle, August 6, 1724. National Archives (Kew, UK) SP 389/31 105.

The whole made a hogshead at the cost of £6.10s. *The British Housewife* of 1760 had a section on "made wine" and also excused the practice by housewives on the grounds that making wines was very much what the professionals did:

The Wine Cooper knows People like Port to be deep coloured and rough, and he knows how to give that Taste and Colour; for the true genuine Wine of Oporto is not of that Sort: Every one knows genuine Port Wine is quite a different Thing from what is commonly sold under that Name.

We should note once again the accusation was not against port wine itself, but against what was done in its name in England. Respect for the "true genuine Wine of Oporto" remains. It is rare to find the accusation made against the Porto end of the business, though Tobias Smollett's rural squire Bramble, who suspects everyone who lives in a city of trying to cheat him, stretches the finger of accusation as far as Porto:

As to the intoxicating potion, sold for wine, it is a vile, unpalatable, and pernicious sophistication, balderdashed with cyder, corn-spirit, and the juice of sloes. In an action at law, laid against a carman for having staved a cask of port, it appeared from the evidence of the cooper, that there were not above five gallons of real wine in the whole pipe, which held above a hundred, and even that had been brewed and adulterated by the merchant at Oporto.¹⁹

The story of the "action at law" is repeated in various forms well into the nineteenth century, though Smollett probably added the detail about Oporto for embellishment as it doesn't seem to occur in variants. If Smollett's story is the exception it appears to be, then it is reasonable to argue that the reputation of "the true and genuine Wine of Oporto" remained high throughout the century. With Smollett as the exception, this respect for the wine as it left Porto acknowledges the general trustworthiness of the wine and its producers survived from earlier in the century as did the general untrustworthiness for the wine merchants of England.²⁰

19 GROSLEY, Pierre Jean, *A Tour to London* (London, 1772), quotation at p. 89; *The Lady's Companion* 2 vols. (fourth edition, London, 1743[?]), vol II, quotation at p. 316; BRADLEY, Martha, *The British Housewife* (1760[?]), quotation at p. 462.

20 Tobias Smollett, *Humphry Clinker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, first published 1771),
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The sense that what came from Porto was reliable throws into question conventional accounts of a mid-century collapse in port's reputation. These accounts are of some significance, as they are used at the time to justify and later as to explain the establishment of the *Companhia Geral* and the whole process that led to the demarcation. The principal source for this story is the *Novas Instrucçoes* of 1754, which discusses "o conceito, que em Inglaterra se faz de que os vinhos do Porto saõ perniciosos á saude, e vai chegando a hum tal extremo, que muitos os reputaõ já porvenenozos". To judge whether this story, rather than the wine, might be the major fabrication, we can look at books from the period of the late 1740s and early 1750s, the period that the "Novas Instrucçoes" appear to describe. In these, port is widely recognized as being good for the health. As an ideal solution for medical compounds, it features among *Materia Medica* in the Royal College of Physicians' *British Dispensatory*, which appeared in numerous editions (and under various titles) between 1746 and 1754 and as a medicine in its own right in Lewis's *New Dispensatory* (1753). Richard Brookes's *General Practice of Physic* (1754) offers it as part of a "well regulated Diet". George Counsell's *Art of Midwifry* (1752), recommends "good Port Wine, red, or white" to "a Woman being naturally weak; or fatigued and weakened by a long or difficult Labour". Given that port later acquired a reputation for causing not curing gout, it may surprise some that it is regularly proposed as a cure for gout (eg, *The Family Magazine*, 1747; *A Practical Essay on the Use and Abuse of Warm Bathing in Gouty Cases*, 1751; *An Essay on the Gout*, 1755). One drinking song from around this period maintains that port is the only wine that cures not causes the disease:

Great Bacchus is mighty in giving us Wine
From Italy, Spain, from France and the Rhine
But of all the great Blessings he to us conveys,
His Wine of Oporto must carry the Bays,

quotation at p. 152. A page before, Smollett supports the notion that eighteenth century drinkers in general trusted exporters and not importers. Squire Bramble argues that what he eats or drinks generally comes from his own farm, except for claret, which is "imported for my own use, by a correspondent on whose integrity I can depend". For versions of the story about the port pipe that contained little no actual port, see William Ellis, *The Complete Planter and Cydrist* (London, 1756), Archer Polson, *Law and Lawyer* (Philadelphia, 1841). They may all be variations on *Regina vs Macarty* (see above).

Whose Beauty's transcendent and Vigour so stout,
That as other Wine gives, this still eases the Gout,

...

Then if any would know which of Wines the best Sort
Let him take for his Answer, a Bottle of Port.²¹

It is, of course, extremely hard to prove a negative. But as yet I have found no useful evidence that port itself did fall in reputation--despite the best efforts of the frauds and falsifications rampant in England. Though its exports fell in the 1750s, there is no outstanding evidence in England that its reputation did. The claim in the *Novas Instruções* should be treated with a certain scepticism (as, indeed, should the entire document). Many factors contributed to the establishment of the *Companhia Geral*. Falling exports may have been one of them. Falling reputation may not. Having survived whatever caused its stuttering exports , port lived out the rest of the century in high esteem. By 1800, with the French shut out again, it dominated the English wine market.

Fall from fashion

Unfortunately for the port trade, the turn of the century marked a high point for the wine. The Napoleonic blockade during the war made conditions difficult for exports, but in the long run, it was the peace that followed which caused most damage. Indeed, the French Revolution and succeeding wars were good for port, helping postpone the Anglo-French

21 ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, *British Dispensatory* (London, 1756); LEWIS, William, *The New Dispensatory* (London, 1753); BROOKES, R[ichard], *The General Practice of Physic* 2 vols. (London, 1754), vol I quotation at p. 257; COUNSELL, George, *The Art of Midwifry* (London, 1752), quotation at pp. 59-60; *The Family Magazine* (London, 1747); OLIVER, William, *A Practical Essay on the Use and Abuse of Warm Bathing in Gouty Cases* (London, 1751); ROBINSON, Nicholas, *An Essay on the Gout* (London, 1755). *The Vocal Medley Part the Second* (York, 1755[?]), quotations at pp. 153-4. If, as some believed, English men took greater care of their animals than their wives, it should be added that port is prescribed several times in Bartlet's *Gentleman's Farriery* (London, 1753). One of the earliest claims that Port was good for gout where other wines were not may come in a Spectator puff for Richard Eastcourt (see above). Roger de Coverly writes. "The Hogshead of neat port came safe ... Our sexton (poor man) having received strength from thy wine since his fit of the gout, is hugely taken with it : He says ... that it strengthens digestion, excludes surfeits, fevers, and physic, which green wines of any kind cannot do". *Spectator* (1711) Jan 2.

trade alliance that Pitt had entered into at the Treaty of Vergenne (1786). This was a conscious reflection of the proposed Treaty of Navigation and Commerce of 1713. A century after the peace at Utrecht, the Congress at Vienna finally made possible open trade between England and France. Throughout the eighteenth century, when such a rapprochement threatened, the Portuguese and the port wine interest were each time able to raise the threat of some sort of embargo on British wool exports to Portugal and its territories. By 1815, the wool interest was weak and the Brazil markets were open to British ships, so this well-used tactic had lost its force. After 1815, as the port region struggled through disarray, poor harvests, uprisings, and civil war, wine from other countries began to take increasingly large chunks of port's market. By the 1830s, Spanish wine had surpassed port in the English market; by the mid-century, French wine took the lead. The figures can be found in economic accounts, but the fall can also be traced elsewhere.

You don't have to look far to see tastes were drifting away from port. Advertisements show a flood of alternative wines, some introduced as alternatives to port, others as replacements. In 1808, *The Morning Post*, though in time of war, was advertising "French Port, the produce of the Portugal grape" and predicting it "will supersede the drinking of Portugal wine". Later advertisements by H.B. Fearon, a major supplier of port, would make the same argument for Masdeu, with the backing of Cyrus Redding.²² Redding was an indefatigable journalist with a taste for French wine, who set a combative anti-port tone in his influential *History and Description of Modern Wines*:

The history of no country in the world furnishes an example of greater political absurdity than our own, in the conclusion with Portugal of what is commonly called the Methuen Treaty, better characterized as the Methuen or qin merchant's job. By this treaty Englishmen were compelled to drink the fiery adulterations of an interested wine company, and from the coarseness of their wines, exposed to imitations without end.²³

22 *Morning Post* (1808) Nov. 29; *Morning Chronicle* (1836) July 6.

23 REDDING, Cyrus, *A History and Description of Modern Wines* (1833) quoted in UNWIN, Timothy,

Wine and the Vine (London: Routledge, 1991), quotation at p., 278.

The shift in both taste and politics is evident elsewhere. Benjamin Disraeli's dashing young hero Vivian Gray, was "brought up with a due detestation of the Methuen Treaty", who when offered a chance to taste some of Mr. Groves's port wine, turns it down saying "I'm not at all a good judge of port, it is too heavy for me; I'd sooner taste your ale". Groves, a traditional English farmer, replies,

Ah! it's the fashion of you young squires to cry down port wine;
but depend upon't, it's the *real* stuff. We never should have beat
the French, if it hadn't been for their poor sour wines.

This is a scene that is repeated down the century in novels by, for example, Thackeray and Trollope, as the young rebel against the old symbolically by refusing their port; or conversely, the young show their want of principle by drinking port to ingratiate themselves with the old.²⁴

Grove's argument was evidently not pure fiction. In 1867, *Le Moniteur Vinicole* took great pleasure in reprinting a paragraph from an unnamed English newspaper which had argued,

It was the Port Wine for the officers, and the strong beer for the soldiers, that helped to make British arms invincible in many a battle, and I can easily understand Louis Napoléon eager to jump at any treaty that enabled him to wash the brave sons of Britain out their muscle and manhood by this sour and attenuated tipple.²⁵

Of course, it wasn't only the port drinkers who made fools of themselves in this way. At about the same time, *Harper's Weekly* noted "A fanciful theorizer [who] said that all good English comedies were written before the time of the Methuen treaty ... arguing then that only pure wine can inspire pure wit".²⁶ But with the defence left

24 [DISRAELI, Benjamin], *Vivian Gray*. 5 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1827), vol. I, quotation at p. 125.

25 "L'Esprit Public Anglais", *Moniteur Vinicole* (1865) 10 (79): 313.

26 "Fog Medicine", *Harper's Weekly*, (1869) June 19: 389. This is a curious echo of lines from the Prologue to Peter Motteux's *Farewel Folly* (London, 1707)

Yet tho we promise but our humblest Sport,
We hope some Claret's mixt among the Port.
Most Comedies owe something still to Farce;
Port, Dash'd with French, may pass, now good Wine's scarce.

primarily to the squires and their newspapers, port's place in the English market, if not in its imagination, became increasingly insecure. Lacking fashionable sentiment and economic and political backing, the port trade could only look on as it was disestablished by the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty of 1860 and Gladstone's subsequent budget, which resulted in port, as a fortified wine, paying higher duties than its great rivals, champagne, burgundy, and claret. Cobden was almost as aggressive as Redding in his distaste for both the Methuen Treaty and port wine. The former he referred to as the "absurd treaty that was made with Portugal ... the consequence of which has been that the taste of this country has been perverted". And of the wine, he wrote "the thing which is adulterated our people have preferred ... narcotic and inflammatory mixtures called port and sherry ... when people drank French wines it made them merry ... but when they drank sherry and port it made them stupid".²⁷

Despite such attacks from Francophiles like Redding and Cobden, and the defection of younger generations in the novels of Disraeli, Thackeray, and Trollope, port did not lose its affectionate place in the English imagination entirely. The *entente cordiale* has its limits and young men grow old and adopt the taste of their fathers. Port passed, across the course of the nineteenth century, from a wine drunk by all classes in all conditions--by the glass in a tavern, by the bottle over dinner, and from the decanter in a college or club--to being more of a niche wine, favoured by certain classes and reserved for certain occasions. Perhaps the most intriguing outcome of this long trajectory in which the position of port in the English market was so much shaped by Anglo-French relations has been that more port is sold today in France than in England. Heightening that paradox, port is still regarded even by the French as the "Englishman's wine", testament to its enduring place in the English imagination.

27 COBDEN, Richard, "Speech on the French Treaty, Rochdale, June 26, 1861" in SALIS-SCHWABE,

Julie, *Reminiscences of Richard Cobden* (London: Unwin, 1895), quotation at p. 323.