Vinaceous Correspondents:
Martin Ray's Friendships with Eminent Oenophiles
The Third Article in a Series / Fifth Section
by *Barbara Marinacci*

[This installment is part of an article in a continuing series about Martin Ray that began in WTQ's April 2003issue (Vol. 13, No. 2). MR was the first vintner to produce and promote pure varietal wines in the period following Repeal, when he owned Paul Masson, and he continued to do so later at his own much smaller winery. The lengthy article portrays the close relationship between this perfectionistic winemaker and wine quality-advocating Maynard A. Amerine, enology professor at UC Davis. This segment is based mainly on their communications between 1952 and 1954, which also include letters from Eleanor Ray, MR's second wife, who had become his alternative "voice" and alter ego. During the latter year, Amerine was in Europe. The author thanks John L. Skarstad and Axel Borg of UC Davis's Shields Library for their research assistance in this project. Above all, she is grateful to editor Gail Unzelman for her dedicated work and patient indulgence in publishing this long-running series. Barbara Marinacci, who is Martin Ray's stepdaughter, depicts him primarily through documents but she also expresses facts and insights based on her and other people's direct observations and experiences over the years.]

PART III. MARTIN RAY AND MAYNARD AMERINE (1937-1976)

Martin Ray's abysmal emotional state during his wife Elsie's terminal illness and after her death in the summer of 1951 had been miraculously soothed, if not entirely cured, when his renewed friendship with Eleanor Williams Kamb led quickly to their wedding in the middle of September. MR's second marriage, undertaken so soon after Elsie's demise, shocked her relatives, and the residents of the town of Saratoga also acted disapprovingly when they learned of it. His good friend Maynard Amerine, though, must have felt greatly relieved that Martin—as he always called him, not using the nickname Rusty—had suddenly and obviously taken out a new lease on life. Amerine and Eleanor got along well from the start.

MR wrote to his soldier-nephew Willis Ray to tell him of the marriage and his sudden turnaround in mood.

> It was not as easy as that, of course. But you know your Uncle Mart! Time always seemed to me something to be made the most of. There was no reason to let it drag along when there was life to be lived.

But he also indicated that the rapid change in wives, without undergoing a lengthy mourning period, had caused inevitable confusions:

> I had a lot of mental disturbance—nightmares of making love to a composite woman, and stuff like that. It took a little time to overcome that. But Eleanor loved Elsie like I did and she understood and we never deceived each other. Now we live beautifully together just as though we had always been married. There have been no adjustments, no compromises, to make. It seems to me we have been together always. [10/18/51]

MR's occasional disorientation was alleviated by the newlyweds' recognition that for the rest of their life together Elsie would always be an unseen presence. Given Rusty's commanding and demanding nature, Eleanor, of course, made most of the adjustments and compromises, despite MR's denial of any need for this in his letter to Will. In the past, as a spirited and independent-minded longtime divorcée, she had often worn slacks—which became movie-star fashionable by the 1940s. ER now deep-sixed them, for her new husband had said that only he, both literally and symbolically, would wear the pants in their coupling. So the new "Madame Pinot," the queen of Rusty's wine mountain, wore skirts except when joining him in tasks such as winter vine pruning and the bottling or labeling of wines down in the cellar.

MR's mental condition at first seemed so fragile that ER avoided upsetting him by challenging outrageous statements he made, as about politics or people, or by telling him he'd already drunk enough wine (as Elsie would have done). He had explained how nerve damage from the "nervous breakdown" (far more likely a stroke) that he had suffered 20 years earlier made verbal discord intolerable. She saw how any argumentation, let alone defiance, from her or any of her children might incite an emotional meltdown or rage. She grew adept at either ignoring his extreme opinionating or else assuming his point of view herself. MR insisted that they present a "united front" in all matters, including his strenuous efforts to reshape aspects of her three nearly grown, semi-fatherless children—two sons and a daughter.

Never having had offspring of his own, like many childless persons MR knew exactly how to conduct childrearing and repair past inadequacies. He took seriously this new if belated role of paterfamilias—

correcting manners, giving career advice, and manipulating these fledglings' personal lives. Above all, he was keen on introducing his charges, along with their mother, to the joys of the winegrowing life. He was thrilled when ER's twin sons, Peter and Barclay, who had asked to be legally adopted by him, took Ray as their new surname after they turned 21 in December of 1952. Moreover, to his great satisfaction, on their revised birth certificates he was even named as their biological father—supplanting his long-estranged friend and business partner, Walter Kamb. Having these previously unexpected heirs now inspired MR to think about establishing both a wine domain and a winegrowing dynasty.

Full-time Winegrower Once Again

By early 1952 MR had bought back the mountain property in Saratoga that he had sold to the Kews during Elsie's terminal illness; he also took over their shares in the Martin Ray, Inc. wine business. The newlyweds moved from the rented house in Saratoga to the rustic redwood cabin that MR had built while developing his new mountaintop vineyard. They now lived 2,000 feet above the wide and fertile Santa Clara Valley. Stretching out dramatically far below them, it was still mostly filled with farmlands—highly productive orchards and fields, with a few towns scattered about and some tall buildings far to the east marking the location of the city of San Jose.

In the first months of their marriage, the re-energized MR busied himself with vineyard care and tending his wines, kept in a small cellar built below the little redwood house and in a garage converted into a small winery building during the three years when Kenneth Kew's parents had been in a partnership arrangement with Martin Ray. They had expected their son to learn all about vineyard and winemaking from MR, who now did all the hands-on work of a true winegrower—as he'd finally done in his last two years at Masson, after the winery fire. He had tried to teach and inspire his phlegmatic protégé by his example. But it was all in vain, he had finally realized, and then Elsie's illness and death had driven him into despair. Thus Eleanor's entry into his life, bringing two hardy and enthusiastic sons, seemed miraculous, and his earlier discouragement and cynicism departed.

MR had once hoped that his nephew Willis, who had sometimes done work at Masson and later helped with planting the new vineyard and building the cabin on the mountain, would join him. But Will had gone off and rejoined the Army. MR had sometimes sent him reports, such as this vignette of springtime work in the vineyard.

> Just finished the first plowing, three times each way. Also just finished sulphuring the first time. The vines look beautiful now. The 7:00 o'clock train still puffs along in the valley below about the time you are getting fully corked from pumping up and down the rows while pumping away with the sulphuring machine. We started out just after 4 o'clock in the morning. [5/11/50]

To reestablish an active presence in wine sales several years after selling Masson, MR had begun selling wines whose labels, with a red-and-black circular logo with a fancy "MR" at the center, now proclaimed his own name—and his location: Saratoga, California. As he had written to Will in 1950, when still in business with the Kews:

> There is enclosed a new price list, which will tell the story pretty well. The Pinot Noir Champagne 1942, the Pinot Noir (still wine) 1941, are wines we kept when we sold the old property [Masson] and we have only very limited quantities. But they serve as window dressing, so to speak, and it is intended that each year we will now make 100 cases of Pinot Noir Champagne. And the 1945, 1947, 1948, 1949, etc. vintages of Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir will ultimately sell at $72.00 per case when they are as old as the 1941's and 1942's are now. In the mean time, we are starting out the sale of the 1945's at $35.00 per case with the idea of raising this figure as years pass and the wine is older.

In 1952, when MR regained his property and business as sole owner, many of the wines he had made in limited quantities in earlier years were still cellared and either in cask or bottled and waiting to be sold. They mostly had come from grapes grown elsewhere, in small vineyards down in the valley, while MR's own mountain-grown vines were maturing, with Pinot Noir put in first, then Cabernet Sauvignon. He had also selected various Cabernets—previously made locally by Mario Gemello—for his non-vintage Martin Ray La Montaña Woodside Cabernet. Earlier, he undoubtedly had asked Amerine to taste the wines he was selling or preparing to sell, or else considering buying from another winemaker.

Now, additionally, MR had in cask the Pinot Noir cuvée 1951 that Maynard, with 20-year-old son Peter, had vintaged from the first major crop picked from his young vines—while the Rays honeymooned. When they returned and said they might go off to South America for a few months, Maynard even offered to drive down from Davis during their absence to tend the wines.

Soon, though, MR launched a new project that would keep them close to home: designing and building a new house at the very top of his mountain, about a hundred feet up the slope from the north-facing cabin, whose one big room couldn't comfortably contain his new family of five when all assembled during holidays and vacations. He intended the job to be finished before the holiday season of 1952, not long

after the duo's first wedding anniversary. In the summertime hiatus from their colleges, Eleanor's two sons joined in the construction work.

The new house and its surroundings would offer a 360° view of the valley and Diablo Range to the east, the south end of San Francisco Bay, and the tall and cool green curve of the Santa Cruz Mountains as they stretched from the hills above Los Gatos area in the south to run in a northwesterly way up the San Francisco peninsula to Montebello and then Woodside, where Emmett Rixford had produced his marvelous clarets in pre-Prohibition times. (Not only had MR been obtaining Cabernet Sauvignon grapes from the old vineyard there, but also budwood for starting his own ultimately extensive planting.)

This was the special, historic winegrowing region that Eleanor one day, consulting her French dictionary, would dub the *Chaîne d'Or*. She attributed this now-enduring term's origin to that legendary Frenchman, Paul Masson, who had declared, as did his successor, Martin Ray, that in these very foothills and mountains—this now nicely named "chain of gold"—the greatest California wines would eventually be grown and vintaged. The basis for this prediction had come from past triumphs: not just MR's at Paul Masson, of course, but also those of more distant predecessors.

But what could MR call his own particular mountain? Eleanor, always with an eye to publicity, felt that it *had* to have a imposing title. Table Mountain, its official name—shared with the Masson side across a shallow and narrow canyon—simply wouldn't do. She decided that it should be Mount Eden, since the name hadn't been appropriated yet by any other mountain ascending from the westernmost valley-based thoroughfare known as Mt. Eden Road (called so from the long-defunct Mt. Eden Orchard and Vineyard Co., which had adjoined the road).

MR's new life partnership with Eleanor had decidedly reactivated his "holy fire," his zealous crusading on behalf of wine quality, which lately had been hibernating. He now felt an even greater impetus than before to transform the tastes and buying habits of wine consumers, to persuade wine retailers to upgrade both wine offerings and selling tactics, and to browbeat or shame the more enlightened vineyard owners and wineries into altering their winegrowing and wine marketing standards. But before he could do that, other pursuits claimed most of his time and attention. He also had to produce more wine.

Eleanor's Introduction to Wines and Wine History

From the very start of their reconnection, MR was eager for Eleanor to understand and then join in his grand mission: making world-class wines that would prove California's great potential in winegrowing. He talked eloquently about the long history of wines made from grapes, dating back to ancient times, and later to be perfected in France and Germany. He told of the ravages of phylloxera in the vineyards of Europe, then California, in the late 19th century, which meant that *vinifera* vines now should be grafted onto resistant rootstock. He described the incalculable damage done by Prohibition to both the wine industry and wine drinkers' palates, then fervidly decried the abominations committed by post-Repeal and current wineries in California—the state that grew by far the most grapes and produced the most wine in the nation. Their blending and mislabeling tactics were to him near-criminal actions, as they inevitably destroyed the high reputation that the state's best wines held before the 13-year Great Wine Drought.

When Maynard Amerine came up the mountain on one of his frequent visits, or when the Rays visited him in Davis, Eleanor joined the two men in sampling both European and domestic wines. Among the latter the two men judged few acceptable, let alone pleasurable to drink, and they would try to determine which grape varieties had been merged to make these claimed but phony varietals. (MR had an aversion to lush, intensely colored and flavored grapes useful in blending—notably Zinfandel, which often dominated blends; he never would find merit in it and considered it an unpedigreed upstart, far indeed from a "fine" varietal wine.)

Maynard talked about prominent trends and personalities in the industry and shared with the Rays various insights and gossip-tinged revelations about wineries—their owners, winemakers, and wines. And ER listened intently as MA discussed his strategies for improving winegrowing—mainly by trying (as he had for years) to persuade the better wineries, as well as growers who supplied them with winegrapes, to plant more fine varieties so that eventually they could stop blending out wines that should rightly be made into pure varietals. As it was, the premium-rated commercial wines often slid in just above the 51 percent of the named varietal content as required by law—which even then wasn't assured, since no inspection system was in place to impose penalties on violators.

Eleanor appreciated the warm friendship between her winemaker husband and this enology professor, centered as it was upon their deep devotion to improving the quality and reputation of California's premium wines. In their joint campaign, each man would be fighting in his own arena and manner, and she entered this alliance, recognizing how she might best use her intelligence and skills: through writing.

ER had literary leanings (she'd been an English

major at University of Washington, where she and Rusty had originally met), and years of experience in fashion-oriented publicity, sales promotion, and advertising. Moreover, she was now a published author and hoped to continue writing—and publishing. About a year before marrying MR, a venerable New York publishing firm had released *We Kept Mother Single*, her humorous account (making herself a third-person character in it), set during the Depression and WWII years, that celebrated the challenges and joys of single-parenting. But no longer single and with her children leaving the nest, she was primed for a new project. It clearly had to be involved in some way with the subject of wine—and winegrowing.

Her new life orientation, coming when she was 47, meant learning as much as she could, and quickly. Besides listening to Rusty and Maynard, she began reading a number of the wine books lying around the house. A few, such as Mary Frost Mabon's *ABC of American* Wines (1942), had bookmarks in places where her vintner husband was mentioned. (ER heard from Rusty about how Frank Schoonmaker had removed an entire chapter about his extraordinary tenure at the winery in his and Tom Marvel's book, *American Wines,* before it was published in 1941 because MR had refused to finalize their partnership in owning and running Paul Masson when FS failed to come up with the agreed-upon cash.) A half-dozen years later came Robert Lawrence Balzer's *California's Best Wines*, which had come out in 1948. His book was ahead of the flock of publications in the postwar period that began introducing the state's wines and better wineries, and sometimes their vintners too, encouraging people to buy, drink, and even visit the wine sources themselves.

Balzer, as a young, aspiring wine writer (later to become a wine columnist for the Los Angeles Times), had first met MR while he was still proprietor of Paul Masson, probably in 1940. There he saw and heard ample evidence of MR's utter and unquestioning faith in the winegrape-growing potential of his section of the Santa Cruz Mountains region, as well as of his commitment to classic winemaking methods that would produce pure, and "fine"-rated, varietal wines.

"There's the winery. It looks like a chapel," had been Balzer's first comment upon arrival.

> Martin Ray was standing outside waiting for us. I had known from correspondence that he was an idealistic zealot where wines were concerned. He was more than convinced that this was the only spot in California where truly fine wines could exist. It was a legend he had learned as a child and now fully believed. In the next few hours he did not explain how this might be accomplished, but that it existed as a fact. As we walked through the still, dark, fragrant cellars past great oval puncheons and carved oak barrels, he spoke ardently of his accomplishments since the day in 1936 when he acquired the winery from Paul Masson.
>
> "No matter whether it's winemaking, wine-buying, or wine-selling, it's wine we're concerned with. It must be what it is represented to be if we're going to earn the trust and faith of those who look to us for that confidence. There are a number of wineries directing their efforts toward fine winemaking and they deserve the greatest credit, but none of them, so far as I know, goes the whole way to make really great wines."
>
> By the "whole way" he meant, beyond vineyard location and grape varieties, selecting perfect grapes right down to individual berries for pressing, as is done in Germany, following through with guarded fermentation, constant tasting while the wine is aging as it's racked, clarified, bottled, and binned. He had offered his first vintages to the late Julian Street for appraisal. That genial expert pronounced their color "superb," the bouquet "beautiful," and over all, the wine "big, full, ... remarkably fine." After tasting I found myself nodding enthusiastic agreement. Ray's personality was compelling, his sincerity genuine. He wished to prove that he could produce, in addition to champagne, still wines as fine as any from France of Germany. The Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir we tasted gave promise that he might well achieve his goal in a few years. But he was never to know this satisfaction. A disastrous fire broke out in July of 1941. The wines he had made to capture the acclaim of the world trickled down in a red flood over the molten glass and charred oak. His loss was estimated to be more than $100,000.

And then, quite erroneously, Balzer had reported in his book that MR had sold "the charred remains of the stone winery" to the Seagram distillery corporation. In fact, MR had rebuilt the winery as well as the Masson business, and didn't sell for almost two years, in 1943. The next statements, though, were well on target.

> [He] betook himself to an even higher hill. He would start again, this time from the beginning, just as Paul Masson had done. I have been told he intends to carry on his zealous effort for magnificent wines. If so he will succeed. His wines will be expensive beyond any in the country but he won't mind, nor will the most ardent wine lovers. [pp 134-35]

Balzer had been in the vanguard of wine writers and wine devotees who became acquainted with Martin Ray, impressed with his energetic evangelism over varietal purity and honest labeling, which became his battle cry during the late 1930s and early '40s, to remain with him forevermore. His aim to achieve wine perfection in his own wines, as MR amply expressed in many long letters to Julian Street, would show the promise of California in winemaking and by their very existence push the state's better wineries to compete with his Masson wines. From the start, this crusade meant that he concerned himself not only with his own winemaking but also with trying to impose quality principles upon other vintners and wine merchants, while impressing consumers with his own adherence to them. And now his new winery would bear his name.

Taking up the Quality Theme

Early in 1952 Eleanor told Rusty and then Maynard that she was going to write a novel that would personalize and dramatize the current situation in California's wine industry. Immersing herself in serious reading, she began taking notes on articles and books about wine, some of them supplied to her by Amerine. For instance, knowing that it would interest both Rays, Amerine mailed ER an announcement, sent out several years earlier, of "an important meeting of the members of the Dessert Wine Subcommittee" of the Wine Institute's Wine Quality Standards Committee, scheduled to take place on July 20, 1950. With it he sent a carbon copy of the letter that he had written to Harry Bacigalupi, president of California Grape Products Co., with the expectation that he would read it at the meeting. A major matter on the agenda involved debating whether Muscatel should now be classified as a non-varietal wine. If agreed upon, no longer would the producers of that hitherto varietal wine need to use at least 51% of Muscat grapes in their vintages.

MA's letter expressed his extreme irritation over this plan, concocted for the convenience of the wine industry. He recognized that if this outrage were permitted, it could later be applied to other varietal wines made from specific grape varieties, consequently downgrading them. Since ER wanted to have her own copy of his letter, and since photocopiers wouldn't be available for two more decades, she retyped all of it, to keep in her growing files on wine-connected subjects. (It's noteworthy that Amerine, in an interview in 1969 with Ruth Teiser for the Bancroft Library oral histories about the California wine industry, cited this very letter of his as a forceful early statement protective of grape varieties and the varietal wines made from them.)

> As you know I have been away the past two months so it was somewhat of a shock to have your letter regarding a rehearing of the absurd proposal that "muscatel is not a varietal wine." I regret that prior commitments made it impossible to attend the committee meeting tomorrow, your announcement having only arrived yesterday.
>
> Shortly before his death the English novelist, George Orwell, wrote a short satire on the modern world entitled "Nineteen Eighty-four." In this novel Orwell imagines a world ruled by a communistic dictatorship under the slogans "War is peace," "Freedom is slavery," and "Ignorance is strength." It is a world in which truth is what the state says it is; history is rewritten to fit and 2 + 2 = 5. Remembering this dreadful prediction I wonder if someone has not speeded up the process a bit.
>
> To be brief: there is no historical or factual basis for the statement that muscatel is not a varietal wine.

Amerine then quoted from six different respected sources: a word dictionary, a wine guide, a French viticultural and enological dictionary, a winemaking handbook by UC Berkeley's eminent enologist William Cruess, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Lastly, he quoted from a 1941 article written by himself and Maynard Joslyn:

> "Muscatel is a fortified wine possessing a distinct muscat flavor.... Only muscat grapes should be used to insure that all California muscatels will have the desirable characteristic varietal flavor. The present minimum requirement of 51 per cent muscat grapes is not high enough to yield muscatel with the desired flavor. (Calif. Agr. Experiment Station Bulletin #651)"

Amerine, as Associate Professor of Enology at UC Davis, showed that he wasn't reluctant to take verbal jabs at a collection of winery owners and grape growers who were trying to rewrite wine and viticulture textbooks.

> In my opinion ... the more serious part of this discussion is not on the proposal that "muscatel is not a varietal wine." That is a patent absurdity and as fallacious as it is dangerous. The serious thing is that anyone in the industry could entertain such a ludicrous thought. In Mr. Orwell's book the Ministry of Light rewrites history to suit the convenience of the communistic state. The same type of reasoning is indicated by people who propose legislating varietal names into generic names to satisfy local economic needs. If there are not enough muscats in California to make the required amounts of muscatel wine then plant some, but do not attempt to call "black" "white" and thus make a mockery of right.
>
> I fully agree with Professor Cruess and Joslyn and my own statements. The problem is not how to make muscatel with less muscat grapes but with more. [6/19/50]

Maynard's note to ER closed with this self-satisfied comment: "I was told that after my letter was read the discussion ended."

Eleanor was also attentive to the conviction shared by Rusty and Maynard that in recent times the quality of people's manners generally—the social niceties—had badly declined, along with true connoisseurship. Here was MR's complaint to Amerine after he had shipped two cases of his wine off to New York by air freight for their appearance at a gourmet dinner given by the Lucullus Circle—which, after studying the event's menu, he judged to be an organization catering to wealthy but uncouth gluttons.

> How any one can drink some 17 wines is more than I can understand. Nor can I accept the serving of a Pinot Noir and a Cabernet, one old the other new, with the same course.... I regret selling them the wines. I'd prefer having the Pinot Noir 1941 to the money.... And, we received no comment from anyone about the wines. After the dinners you gave in the past at which our wines were served we always had immediate letters from people like Farnham Griffiths, Harold Price and people who really enjoyed the wines and cared a little that the grower might like to know how his wines were received.... Of course, there is always the possibility none enjoyed the wines, any of the wines, that is, or the food either. I wonder just how that bunch did look before, during and after that dinner? Not happy, not gay, I dare say. [4/10/53]

Maynard then supplied MR with his own variant experience of current social obtuseness.

> My personal opinion is that the art of saying "thank you" is becoming a lost art—and rapidly so. Several months ago I entertained elaborately for "friends" from San Francisco. To date, I have not heard from them and when I met them accidentally at the Segovia concert a month ago they chit-chatted a moment and said nothing. From mutual friends I know that they greatly enjoyed being here and expressed great approval of the wines and foods to their friends in S.F. But to the host—not a word! Is it that they are embarrassed to say "thank you" as if it were somehow a social faux pas to express appreciation? I wish I knew. [April 1953, undated]

ER inevitably picked up from them this belief that quality in most things in American life—in aesthetics, commerce, and behavior, not just wine—was simply going to hell nowadays. Though her interest wasn't as hotly consuming as Rusty's (quality-connected issues hadn't bothered her a bit until she married him), it enabled her to enter actively into discussions the two men had on the subject and its ramifications into other areas of current American culture and its degradation in sleazy consumerism. An undated letter of hers to MA would have been written in 1952 or 1953, when she was first focusing on the wine quality issue so as to cast it into some compelling fictional form. It shows the sort of talks she was often having with Rusty. Grateful for whatever help Maynard might provide, she said:

> Thank you for your Quarterly [Wine & Food Society], which I'm returning to your office. In case you think I'm using wines as a frivolous "decorative" note in my book, let me relieve your mind—I'm not. But I'm using a wine growing family as my central group of characters, and using wine as the most pointed example I know of to illustrate the trend today of "blending out" all quality to a uniform sameness, with nothing left of the original appeal, individuality. Your paragraph in the article about the contribution of southern Europeans [*i.e.*, the Italians in the bulk-wine business, notably in the Central Valley] toward this leveling off process is a keynote for one facet of the picture, for which I'm gleaning particular, sharp incidents.
>
> The whole philosophy of the great distillers that have moved into the industry heightens the theme. [André] Simon's article in the same issue hit a note that's close to center in what I'm trying to present fictionally: "What would be a tragedy, indeed, would be to allow economic efficiency to be the excuse for debasing wine to the level of beer, gin or whisky, pooling the produce of many vines into a brew, or blend, or 'make' of uniform drabness and cost, chemically bright and stable; above all manufactured upon a sufficiently large scale to be advertised in a big way—the only way that 'pays.' That, indeed, would be the greatest tragedy of all." Wine will illustrate freshly and sharply this trend in all the arts, education, business—and in people's lives, it seems to me.
>
> Maybe you'll ponder this idea and we can discuss it when we meet, which I hope will be soon. I know you're a veritable gold mine of incidents that show how this process of "blending out" quality goes out and out in widening circles of destruction.

Amerine generously offered ER access to his home library, which held many books, files of topical subjects, years of Wine and Food Society newsletters, and a large menu collection. Furthermore, the Rays could stay at his house while she went through it all, for as long as they liked.

Eleanor tentatively titled her ambitious novel-in-the-making *This, Be Arrogant*. Its central character would be a sensitive yet forceful winemaker who's associated with an old vintner closely resembling Paul Masson, of course. He fights both natural elements and the wine industry while aiming to make great wine, all the while dealing with the eternal attractions, challenges, complexities, and conflicts in human relationships. She created a hero whose character and wine quality-reforming efforts mirrored, not surprisingly, those of Martin Ray. (And, after all, who else might serve as model? There never was, and no longer ever needs to be, a winegrower quite like him; most of the causes he fought for so long and strenuously in the premium wine industry have been realized.)

ER's novel, as it went through various versions and retitling over some years, would never see publication, though pieces of it did end up in Eleanor's dramatized biography/memoir of MR, *Vineyards in the Sky*. Still, her effort to become well educated about wines and wine matters would serve Martin Ray well over the years. Mostly, the pair was to speak, and to write—whether in correspondence or wine-connected tracts—expressing the same strong opinions, though their styles of delivery differed.

An Unfortunate Disruption—and Recovery

One night in early December of 1952 the Rays were subjected to a horrifying event. Their new home on top of the mountain burned down—only a week after they had moved into it with most of their prized possessions. Gale-force winds had blown several unsecured posts supporting the veranda roof into plate glass windows in the huge living room, smashing them. The great rush of incoming air pulled hot coals from the fireplace, setting fires on the carpet, which rapidly spread. Rusty and Eleanor had fought the flames at first but finally gave up and fled for their lives. The experience is recounted by ER in one of the most dramatic chapters in *Vineyards in the Sky*.

After the fire, Amerine had sent off a brief note to them several days later, written on Bohemian Club notepaper:

> Sunday PM
> Dear Eleanor and Martin:
> I have just been told of the fire not having read Friday or Saturday's paper. You know you have my sincere regrets and any help I can give I shall—just let me know.
> —Maynard

He would have realized how for MR it was a ghastly recurrence of the ordeal by fire that he'd undergone in 1941 when the Masson winery, except for its outer shell, burned to the ground before his eyes, destroying all his prized wines in cask and most of his bottled ones.

Now the Rays had, at least, two main consolations. The little redwood cabin had been spared, so they weren't homeless, though shorn of many irreplaceable treasures—such as MR's collection of Julian Street's letters to him. MR had naturally feared that his cache of precious wines in the new cellar had also been destroyed. But protected by thick concrete walls and ceiling, they had stayed safe. After some days of scrubbing down the cellar thoroughly—walls, floor, barrels—and then drying it out, he apprehensively opened a cask and drew off some of its contents with a wine thief. Smelling and tasting smoke contamination in the wine, he was disconsolate, believing now that all his wines in cask were ruined.

Several weeks after the fire, MR, now more rested and objective, again went into the cellar to taste his wines in wood. He was greatly relieved to find them quite sound—and therefore salable when bottled. He'd then recalled how Amerine had once told him that if one anticipated detecting some undesirable taste or odor in a wine, he'd be apt to discern it, even though it might not be there at all. In a while, MR asked MA to come up and taste through the casks, too. For if he—the most adroit wine judge MR would ever know—couldn't detect any smokiness in the wines, they were indeed unimpaired. To his relief, they passed Maynard's deft sensory tests. In this Rusty was more fortunate than his wife, whose manuscript for the wine-centered novel she'd been working on for months had gone up in smoke.

It was not in MR's nature, nor Eleanor's either, to give up and fall apart when some nature- or human-induced calamity occurred. (MR has been called "indomitable" for good reason.) In the very early springtime, ER found a symbolic message in the huge blackened oak tree close to where their new house had stood. For several months it had looked totally dead. Then just as spring arrived she wrote to Peter, now at work on his PhD at Harvard, about the "great miracle this morning!"

> The big oak tree has a sprout of green leaves high at the tiptop about center—so it looks as if it's going to live!! At least we have new hope. Somehow the oak tree was a symbol we all felt—that if it could possibly pull through then we, too, surely could carry on and rebuild. [3/23/53]

The Rays would show Maynard the reviving tree on his next visit. And yes, Rusty told him, they were going to build their home again, and soon. But differently this time, with the house made of solid concrete, the veranda's roof posts securely bolted down, and heavy shutters, devised by himself, to be pulled across the picture windows whenever tempestuous winds began blowing.

Occasionally in those months MR would send off a note to Amerine, as when he asked him to send, from UC Davis, a "pure yeast culture for our champagne bottling." Then he'd add a brief vineyard report:

> Finished our pruning a few days ago, clothed heavily in woolens, double sox and high rubber boots, standing in heavy snow. Some buds had opened but continuous movement of air currents saved us from a killing freeze. Spring has now returned. [4/12/53]

Throughout 1953 Eleanor rewrote her novel while helping Rusty with the ever-abiding vineyard and cellar work. And MR spent time supervising the construction of their new concrete-walled house that would sit above the slab foundation that served as the house's flooring as well as the cellar roof. Meanwhile, he dealt with the usual buildup to the vintage period, including bottling wines to free up casks, then the grape picking and crushing and pressing—sometimes

while the concrete mixing and pouring into forms for the house walls went on. As ER described her battered, multi-tasking husband to Maynard at this time:

> I wish to describe to you Martin Ray, poor chappie, in present condition as of this moment: eyes red, breathing difficult since he's stuffed up from an awful cold due to low resistance due to much overwork, throat sore, back killing him from too much lifting, but he can't sit down on account of his fanny is badly blistered due to sitting on a box in winery from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. twisting constantly back and forth running both corking machine and egraffer for champagne (from Pinot Noir blanc de noir, 110 bottles including 2 magnums), one leg is still very painful from having his shin smashed by a sledge hammer, his feet are sore, poison oak driving him mad on both ankles, one arm aflame from a tetanus shot, which was necessitated by two bad cuts on one hand, and both hands are so stiff from crushing so many grapes for yeast operations that they won't open or shut, and torn grievously by cement he tried to pull off wood forms by hand due to fact that the first pouring crew of Mexicans quit, and right in midst of work, so any cement spilled on upper forms hardened and had to be taken off so as not to ruin the pour, the next day. So you see Popka [ER's frequent nickname for MR] really needs a rest, what? He also has some trouble sleeping, but that does seem incidental....
>
> Don't be too alarmed if we seem to disappear behind the iron curtain of vintage—we might be considered to be there right now, although the big part is still to come. We'll be thinking of you, and hope to see you shortly after all is over—maybe on our "grand tour" we promise ourselves. [10/2/53]

Letters Between Friends

For 15 years, with time out for military service in WWII, Amerine had provided MR with information about technical matters in winemaking and news of what was going on elsewhere in the wine business. Above all, perhaps, he furnished motivation —steady encouragement for him to proceed with the growing of fine variety grapes and the vintaging of pure varietal wines. After all, MR's wine triumphs were proving the points that the frustrated MA failed to impress upon the proprietors of the other, and larger, premium wineries. In the early 1950s this companionable association bolstered MR's determination to get back into the combative mode that had characterized his years at Paul Masson, when his quality-demanding stance—expressed so fully in those long and frequent letters to Julian Street—put him at odds with most people in the high end of the wine industry, which was still struggling to resurrect itself after the repeal of Prohibition in December of 1933. The bulk and jug wine producers dominated the American wine scene, and in the postwar period connoisseurs again could obtain elegant table wines from France and Germany.

Now and then after MA returned to UC Davis from the Army in 1946, letters would have passed between him and Maynard Amerine, but all evidence of their personal correspondence between then and 1952 has probably been destroyed, whether inadvertently by fire (MA's letters) or deliberately by human hand (MR's letters). Also, because they got together fairly often, there was rarely any need for anything more than notes. When ER organized new letter files in 1953, the Rays began saving all correspondence, with their own outgoing letters carbon-copied for possible future reference. As the Amerine files in the Ray Papers—archived in UC Davis Library's Special Collections—reveal, MA addressed his letters and postcards to both Rays, unless he was focusing only on winemaking technicalities. ER often wrote to Maynard herself, usually in a much lighter vein than her husband did.

In his intensive epistolary relationship with Julian Street that began in late 1939 (fortuitously preserved in the Princeton University Library), MR showed that he enjoyed writing letters, when time permitted and he had the need to communicate ideas, feelings, experiences, and future plans to particular individuals. Some were people he liked and trusted—that rare person, like Street or Amerine, who would either understand and appreciate whatever he had wished to relate, then give him honest but helpful reactions. Others were persons he wanted to cultivate and impress, such as wealthy or influential customers or wine writers. He either dictated letters (to a secretary at Masson, and later to Eleanor) or else handwrote or typed letters on his own to special friends or acquaintances—when he was apt to ramble or rant or ridicule as the spirit moved him while covering recent events or preoccupations. But busy as he was, he was apt to delay some intended communication for weeks on end. Thus Eleanor often wrote in his place, giving their news and expressing their current opinions (sometimes vehement).

When Amerine took a year's sabbatical leave in Europe in 1954, a period of time opened up wherein MR could express himself somewhat as he'd done with Street. Now the Rays' letter file for Maynard grew perceptibly larger. A considerable portion of the written communications between the Rays and MA consists of postcards from the latter along with letter exchanges in 1954, when Maynard was in Europe. These letters reveal a lot about MR not just at that time but overall—and, for that matter, more obliquely, about Amerine, too. They seem fairly complete, though it appears that the Rays sent some of Amerine's letters to other people who would be

interested in something he had said in them, and then they were not returned for safekeeping.

Amerine Goes Abroad

In the fall of 1953, two years after the Rays' marriage, MA began detailed preparations for his upcoming year in Europe, to be largely funded by a Guggenheim Fellowship award. Naturally, almost everywhere he'd go and everything he'd do would be connected in some way with wine and winemaking. His Saratoga friends, when hearing about his plans, couldn't help but feel envious. As ER wrote him:

> We can see how your feet are itching to start on your way—ours would be too. In fact, we are dying for want of a vacation—and hope we can get off in a couple of weeks, after the Cabernet vintage, and the second section of the house is roofed and windowed. [10/2/53]

In early December Maynard sent out to friends and associates a detailed itinerary and schedule in advance of his departure. He would fly to New York on the 20th, board the *Andrea Doria* on the 24th, and land in Lisbon on the 30th. Then, after spending 10 days in Portugal, he'd be off to Spain, where he would stay for a half-year, based in Madrid at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, but collecting samples far afield in other places. (A main interest there involved investigating Spanish techniques in making sherry or *jerez*, in which he'd already conducted research at Davis.) Then, interested in seeing how different areas in Europe grew and processed wine grapes to produce various wines, he'd then travel to southern France, northern Italy, northern Yugoslavia, Austria, and Switzerland. From August to December he would be mostly in Germany, working in the Botanisches Institut at the intensive viticulture and enology research center at Geisenheim-am-Rhine. From there he'd take occasional trips elsewhere in Germany, and to France during its vintage period. On New Year's Eve he would finally head back home. (He would stick fairly close to this original plan, but ended his European jaunt in Britain.)

Several days after he arrived in Portugal, Maynard visited an old college friend of Eleanor's who was now married to a cork grower, and through him met a vineyardist who wanted desperately to secure a few Ruby Cabernet vines. This high-yield, robustly flavored hybrid, successfully developed at UC Davis by Harold Olmo for hot climates, was seemingly impossible to obtain in Europe. So MA said he'd do what he could to help out. He wrote MR, explaining why he was asking him to take care of this request, and how it might be done.

> I dare not write Winkler and ask him to airmail these as he would find all kinds of reasons for not doing it. The first would be that Portugal has an embargo on US cuttings (for reason of virus). However, you can ask him to send you the two rooted cuttings (for a friend of yours) and ask him to be reasonably sure they are virus-free. Then you can air express them to Soares Franes. You can sign that John Doe sent them. [1/4/54]

Three weeks passed, and MA had heard nothing yet from Martin or Eleanor. So he wrote:

> Dear Rays—
> No word from you so assume
> a. Martin has arm trouble
> b. You are shipping lots of wine
> c. You are trying to prevent Tony [Korbel] from selling to Paul Masson (I predicted last July he would sell) [Note: Korbel did indeed sell that year, but not to Masson.]
> d. You have gone on vacation
> e. Or my card and letter never reached you. [1/31/54]

Both the Rays wrote and airmailed letters off to Maynard soon after this message arrived. "There is a little truth in all your suggested explanations for our silence," MR said. He also had let MA know that the delay had been caused by UC Davis's tardiness in getting the vine material to him, not his own malingering.

> As for the Ruby Cabernet cuttings, I acted promptly and, as you will see from the enclosure [a notice from UC Davis], the delay is not mine. I will see it through at the earliest possible date and will be most happy to help in this small way. Anything else I can do, just let me know. [2/6/54]

Toward the end of March MR would write Amerine and assure him that the Ruby Cabernet cuttings had been dispatched, via air parcel post, to the fellow in Portugal who'd so desperately wanted them.

> I sent your friend the vines—four of them.... I had to declare what was in the package. So, upon gazing at it I decided it could be nothing else but a large silver serving spoon. So that is what it was declared as. I even insured it for $25, just to make a good job of it.... Please let me know if they reached their destination. I gave my name as the sender. [3/20/54]

(In a marginal note referring to these clippings sent, written years later, ER said, "Now—big acreage there!" Perhaps many vines on the Iberian peninsula are actual descendants of MR's '54 contraband shipment, following Amerine's instructions.)

Postcards, Letters, and Gifts from Europe

Amerine's year abroad created a bonanza of written communications between him and the Rays. These often took the form of dialogue—one with a lengthy time lapse between statement and comment, or question and answer. The Ray Papers has a file folder that holds a number of picture postcards that Maynard sent to Martin and Eleanor from a variety of places, often signed simply MAA (with a center line through the initials). Most were

written during his yearlong European sojourn, but a number came from other locations, including California ones. In the blank left-side space for a message he managed, often using tiny script to squeeze in news of whatever he was currently seeing, doing, and drinking—and with whom he was spending time. Almost always he inserted little touches of humor or commentary that he was sure would amuse or interest the Rays.

Here are two snippets reporting on his adventures and observations while in Spain:

> Have been going out a lot. Three or four wonderful dance halls here. Of course all prostitutes but not bad looking if you look and choose carefully. Of course, when you've had 10 sherrys that isn't so easy. I never carry much money nor my passport so all I can lose is an already very tarnished virginity (self-contradiction) and perhaps some sleep! [2/12/54]
>
> All goes well with the Spanish front. Senators Bridges & Symington have come & gone—and no Spaniard cares. The US has grandiose ideas about its plan in Europe or in Spain. The French "hate" us passionately. I work a little, play a lot & feel fine. [3/4/54]

And several months and some cards later, this message arrived from Austria:

> My dear Rays—A brief note to say you must drive through Austria some summer. The Salzburg festival is all that anyone could ask. Vienna is trying to be lively. There are lots of wines—all nicely labeled with year, variety, producer, vineyard. None great—a few hi in SO_2. Oh yes, many Jugoslavia wines give alcohol & sugar %s. Will be in Geisenheim after Aug 5 or 6. Cold season here is great for tourists. Hell for fruit. MAA [7/27/54]

Amerine's letters were apt to get longer and chattier once he got to Germany (though he still sent postcards, too).

> Now I write to you at a little more length, since, as you can see I have finally bought a typewriter—in Switzerland. I have sent you cards from here and there, and hope that at least a part of them have gotten through. I did not enjoy the south of France as much as I should have because I refuse to believe that the French are honest in charging such prices.... However, the two experiment stations that I visited were most cordial and helpful....
>
> Two experiment stations in Jugoslavia were also most kind. But the country is in a moral and economic stupor.... Austria is western European again but the Soviet occupation of a good portion of the country doesn't permit too much expression of what they are really thinking. And, parenthetically, I have discovered that you never really hear what the people are saying unless you understand their language well enough to talk to them in it. That is more true in Spain than France.... [*Note*: Amerine wanted to increase international exchange of information about enology and viticulture, and a main goal in this European stay was to become conversant in both Spanish and German. In Spain he even wrote his lab notes in Spanish, asking an assistant to correct any errors. A number of MA's technical papers were translated into other languages.]
>
> Vienna was horribly bombed but is repairing the damage. The gay life which it once had is hardly to be seen—though they, and the Germans, do drink huge quantities of dry white wines....
>
> If you won't ever quote me I might say that German wines for steady drinking, and I have them twice a day, are a little too much of the same thing. That does not mean that I don't like them but I don't need them quite so often. Their cigars are poor. And their women, with exceptions, can stay here....

He also had written a more personal paragraph:

> Congrats on your 50th [MR's birthday]—lets make it a 100!! Someone writing in Time recently said that we live about as long as we think we will. Thank God I have always said that I would outlive my grandfather, in age, and he lived to be 94. Nice figure to shoot at anyway.

MR's response to this opinion of Maynard's about German wines was this:

> Interesting, what you report on German wines. I have been drinking up ours, as we lost our 1945 Schloss Johannisberger with oxidization. And I decided if I couldn't count on that wine for more than 9 years I had better drink them all up. The Berncasteler (Thannisch) is still in good shape. But in drinking them more frequently than usual I have lost my taste for them. They are too sweet for me. And when they are not too sweet they are too thin. The taste has turned away from my liking. In the end, nothing pleases me but a French claret, a French Burgundy white or red, a Champagne or one of our own wines. The exception merely illustrates the rule. I have drunk a very great deal of wine these last three years, well over a bottle a day myself, I imagine. These last wines satisfy me. The German wines I have drunk never any longer satisfy me. That is a simple statement of fact. And I don't care what anyone may have to say in contradiction. [8/20/54]

From time to time MR offered his verdict on California wines he had tried out recently, such as a bottle of Italian Swiss Colony champagne: "It was the poorest wine I ever tasted that was not sour or otherwise polluted. It tasted just like a cream soda.... We dumped it in the vineyard." [4/17/54]. He was far kinder to a different California-made wine:

> Among the wines drunk, a bottle of Beaulieu Cabernet-Sauvignon 1940 was very good. It was the best Cabernet of theirs I have ever tasted and it had aged well or, rather, held up very well and [will be] good for some years to come. [6/27/54]

But then he took a jab at another BV wine that was labeled as a varietal: "This reminds me of their so called Pinot Noir which we recently tasted in the

vintages 1944, 1945 and 1946." Since he had already vented plenty about these "fraudulent" Pinot Noirs when writing to his friend Angelo Pellegrini, he was sending Maynard the carbon copy of that letter; unfortunately, it doesn't seem to have been returned for filing away.

During his time abroad Maynard purchased and sent off several gifts to the Rays, including an engraving of an old winery that they soon got framed and hung in their big living room. To Martin he had sent two soft "scarfs" which he'd purchased in Spain, intended to keep his winegrower friend's sensitive back warm while he was outdoors in cold weather, vine pruning, or possibly in the dank cellar. MR wrote:

> First, I must tell you that the two woolen Spanish back protectors have arrived and, this time, in perfect condition. A thing you may have overlooked is that Eleanor might take one of them under protective custody! I was surprised to have her ask me which one I would prefer! They are just the thing for me when the cellar temperatures are pretty well fixed but the outside fluxuates [sic] so widely in seasons. Thank you so much for this last thoughtfulness and generosity. [11/7/54]

Maynard had sent Eleanor a special gift from Spain as well. Unfortunately, it had been smashed in transit. "Hello Maynard!" she wrote at the end of Rusty's letter to him.

> A dire shame about that beautiful tile. I put it all together again like a picture puzzle, and the bowl-of-fruit design was very very lovely, the colors exquisite—so I enjoyed it greatly, anyway, if but temporarily—for the pieces were too tiny to glue together.

Then ER added her own brief commentary about the recent rejection of her novel by Alfred A. Knopf himself, whom Rusty had known from his Masson years. Eleanor's explanation for the rejection, which likened her novel to the manifold tile shards she'd received from Spain, was sensible and moderate.

> Too bad about my book, too, maybe same trouble, a lot of too tiny pieces to hang together. It's probably too much non-fiction for fiction, and too much fiction for a non-fiction book—as with everything intended for the public, it has to be slanted accurately for a particular group, and I've got to think about it and fix it, no doubt. [8/10/54]

MR's reaction, though, was quite otherwise when he previously conveyed news to MA of this disappointing turndown. His letter had several long paragraphs in which he attributed it partly to "Eleanor's reference to the European Jews who have moved into our California wine industry, evidently." Knopf wouldn't have liked that, of course. And in one of his occasional anti-Semitic and paranoid diatribes, MR declared that Jews now controlled the publishing industry. He was also convinced that publishers and editors were under the potent influence of a pretentious breed of snobbish wine sophisticates, epitomized by Alexis Lichine, who wrote columns and books that were considered admirable and authoritative. Thus the novel would be distasteful to them because—

> ... it was about a family of the soil who worked and who believed all these phony self declared "gourmets" are barnacles who need to be shook loose from their attachment to the wine industry and who think of themselves as getting the wines somehow direct from the vines because they can't bear to think of the grower as having had nearly so much to do with the wines as themselves in "discovering" them. [6/27/54]

Maynard sent a sympathetic message to Eleanor and offered suggestions as to some academic publishers she might approach with her rejected manuscript. MR then responded:

> Thanks so much for what you have said about Eleanor's book. It is fiction and it is not a wine book. But she has in it all the problems of a wine growers life and incidentally more authentic stuff on wine than any book yet published as fiction. [11/28/54]

Eventually ER would set fiction writing aside, realizing that Martin Ray's own life and character were more fascinating and potent than anything she might devise in fictional form—and she worked to depicting them in words. It made quite a challenge, for neither on paper nor even in reality could his identity and deportment ever seem quite believable. She also had plenty of other writing to do: promoting her husband's wines, which she herself would "publish" in informative and often spirited home-printed communications that she mailed out to a growing list of people.

Report on a Madcap Dinner Party

In her own first letter to Maynard since his departure, ER had apologized: "So sorry we've been slow in writing—for we firmly intended to have missiles [*sic*] spread all over Portugal and Spain awaiting your arrival!" But they hadn't had a "let down" ever since the beginning of the Christmas holidays and moving into their replacement home. "Your life sounds mighty fine, Maynard," she continued. "How about bringing home some attractive Spanish gal? Seems a mighty sane thought to me, after dining with some squirrelly bachelor friends of yours recently." (ER often chided him about his perennial bachelorhood and tried to set him up with single women.)

Eleanor delighted now in telling Maynard of the eccentric doings at a recent dinner party which took place at the Esquins' home. (John Esquin, whom MA knew, was a respected San Francisco wine merchant in those years, and the Rays frequently socialized with him and his wife, Lilly.) Present that night were Maynard's friend Dr. Salvatore Lucia, a professor at

the University of California School of Medicine and recent author of *Wine as Food and Medicine* (which Amerine had critiqued—also contributing to the first chapter on "The Chemistry of Wine"); Dr. Robert T. Knudsen, a young physician recently arrived in San Francisco, already acquainted with Maynard, and becoming known as an avid wine connoisseur; and Bob's elderly parents, visiting from the Boston area.

Knowing how Maynard relished gossipy tidbits, ER portrayed various wine-enhanced symptoms of dottiness among three of the male guests. (Both the Rays' letters abound in this type of reportage, whether playful or malicious.) Eleanor found Dr. Lucia "attractive in his odd way. But with many a loose screw, what? He's absolutely balmy about his dog Chico." As for the two other weird fellows:

> Even old Dr. Knudsen went into an eerie dissertation—which made me think it was a mighty good thing his wife has had him in tow for many years, or surely he wouldn't have made it safely to his present apparently normal situation. He said a friend of his, also in physics, shot himself because he couldn't keep up with such a big field. But as for himself, he met the problem by narrowing his field. Until by now he has only one interest, acoustics in opera houses. When he goes abroad he consequently is limited to places where there are opera houses. He goes there every day, just sits and listens.... There is no perfection in opera acoustics. It's just a question of getting 6.5 instead of 7.6, or something like this. Sir Christopher Wren made the foul mistake of all time in the great opera house he built in London. It's a whole point or two off, unthinkable. The doctor has spent much time sitting there, listening and shuddering at such a mistake by such an expert. It all went on like this. He is a dear, and I was so relieved to think of what an apparently normal, happy life he leads, despite his chief interest in life.

Having concluded that a sane and loving wife could prove to be an attribute, even a remedy, for brilliant but peculiarly fixated men of any age (listen up, Maynard!), Eleanor then moved on to the younger Knudsen:

> Would that some normal gal would interest Bob, who seems to have taken after his dad in emotional fascinations. Did you know Bob almost became a priest at one stage? He became so fascinated by the Pope, when his father brought him along to be presented, that he almost fainted—and for several years concentrated on studying all about all the popes, became a great authority on the subject, and determined to devote his life to studies in the Order. But what intervened? One day a man's hat blew off on the street ahead of him, he ran and caught it, gave it to the man who was mighty pleased, and upon learning that he was a Boston member of the Wine and Food Society, immediately Bob's interest switched from popes to wine. He went to see the man, he worshipped his every word.
>
> Great God, that evening was fascinating, what with old Dr. Knudsen telling one story after another like this one about Bob, and Dr. Lucia leaping about taking surprise pictures from odd angles, with fiendish grins, then going into a sudden serious, mystic look, and coming forth with a cryptic remark, challenging you to get it—then dropping his chin in hand, and telling you how a piece of music never sounded as wonderful as when Chico had his muzzle in his lap as he listened. John Esquin wasn't telling what he knew. Which underscored it all. Ah—

"Confidentially, they're completely nuts," had been ER's lead-in to her report on that evening and the antics of the three loopy and wine-fixated dinner guests. A rather sinister remark had then followed:

> Wine seems to be the one thing they have for a mutual focal point. But, like the insane, as soon as a pal turns his back they each whisper about how he actually doesn't know a thing about wine. Rusty has been dreadfully upset about what seems to be a concerted effort to belittle you. Were we less tired perhaps we could just laugh hilariously, for it's so ludicrous, it really is. He certainly told them a thing or two the other night. [2/6/54]

Eleanor didn't amplify on that part of the evening's doings because she knew that Rusty, still "dreadfully upset," intended to type up his own report to Maynard about what had become clear to him recently: A conspiracy had obviously been launched to undermine Amerine's reputation, along with those of other members of UC Davis's Viticulture and Enology Department. These rumormongers were spreading tales calculated to break what some wineries and winemakers considered a lock that the Davis faculty had established on the judging of California wines and vintages at state and county fairs and other wine-featuring events—thereby creating rankings that damaged certain wineries' commercial interests.

The Rays' two letters went out on the same day, within the same plump envelope. Amerine could have read Eleanor's and laughed. But he probably didn't find Martin's news quite so entertaining.

[*To be continued in the January 2006 issue*]