Vinaceous Correspondents:
Martin Ray's Friendships with Eminent Oenophiles

The Third Article in a Series / Fifteenth Section

by Barbara Marinacci

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

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This installment continues the portrayal of the long, wine-focused friendship between California winegrower Martin Ray and enology professor Maynard A. Amerine of University of California, Davis. When considering the dwindling communication between them in the mid-1950s, it presents the rarely told story of what MR called his Wine Quality Control Fight. Aimed at the higher end of the state's wine industry, it occupied much of his and his wife Eleanor's time, attention, and efforts throughout much of 1955, and into the next year. The Rays had discounted Amerine's downright disapproval of their campaign tactics: attacking the practices and integrity of other wineries while enlisting support from the numerous wine retailers, writers, and wine connoisseurs who had tasted and appreciated the dramatic difference between Martin Ray's pure varietal wines and the far more widely distributed blended ones being labeled and sold as varietals.

Martin Ray was author Barbara Marinacci's stepfather. First meeting "Rusty" Ray when she was 17 years old shortly before her mother's marriage to him, she regarded him with commingled fascination and rebellion, and soon distanced herself geographically not only from his vehement opinions and "dark" side, but also from the autocratic ways manifested in his new and unaccustomed patriarchal role. Later in life, after his death, she began to ponder the sources of his charismatic but flawed complexity and to appreciate his admirable qualities—especially when working on her mother's memoir/biography, Vineyards in the Sky *(published in 1993 and still available), and then while spending a year going through the extensive Martin & Eleanor Ray Papers before turning them over in 1999 to Special Collections in UC Davis's General Library, which has copied many letters for her and granted permission to quote from them.*

As always, Marinacci is extremely grateful to Gail Unzelman for enabling her to publish successive segments of this long series, begun in 2004. She doubts that the California wine industry has produced other winemakers as pugnaciously impassioned in pushing for quality as Martin Ray ... or so uniquely and eloquently prolific in their correspondence over many years. Certainly among a number of latter-day vintners he was, and still is, an influential and even inspirational figure.

Martin Ray hoped that the rather fawning letter he'd written to André Simon in October of 1955 would persuade him to compose a disapproving commentary in the next quarterly issue of Wine & Food, sent out to Wine and Food Society members, on the other premium California wineries' evident evasion of accepting quality-control measures that he'd been advocating for two decades now. Although Maynard Amerine often contributed pieces to W&F, if MR had asked him earlier to write about the QC war he'd begun waging, his friend would certainly have declined to do it. From the start, Maynard had made it clear that he objected to the strong-arm tactics and threats involved, along with MR's trying to undermine wineries' reputations through adverse publicity—and kept on telling him so (shown in segments 9–14 in WTQ October 2006–January 2008).

MR himself in fact had little respect for the Society's various urban branches, though he welcomed any support he might get from them for his noble cause: upgrading the reputation of California's better wines through wineries' adoption of self-imposed quality controls, belated as it would be. The Society's memberships, he often declared (starting when he owned Paul Masson, from 1936 to 1943), consisted mainly of wine dilettantes and downright phonies. But naturally he was happy whenever members praised his wines, publicly in print, or privately—even while they used their connections with vintners like him to freeload on wineries' wares. For as he'd write bluntly to author John Melville in the following year:

> You might be interested to know that I have virtually never sold any wine to any of the members of the Wine & Food Society. They are mostly beer and whiskey drinkers, who love wine only for the ceremony they are permitted to perform over it at their "state" dinners. Their membership is filled with men who have no home life, who are queer and out of balance socially. By mastering the phraseology of wines, and the lingo they talk, they are able to establish themselves as superior creatures, which they are not. [3/17/56]

Probably MR had never gone to any Society gatherings. His judgments came from socializing with a few member-officers, such as San Franciscan Harold Price, whom he'd known for years, and from

hearing other people's candid opinions—one of whom probably was Amerine. So if this was MR's cynical opinion of the Society's overall membership, what on earth did he think and say about its founding father?

MR's Perspective on André Simon

Unlike many other wine lovers on the planet, MR didn't revere the international Wine & Food Society's progenitor. He sometimes took verbal jabs at André Simon's high standing as both connoisseur and much-published author. In April of 1955, just before his Wine Quality Control Fight began heating up, he'd expressed a dubious assessment of Simon's current ability as an expert winetaster in a letter to oenophile Dr. Marcus Crahan, a psychiatrist and gourmand in Los Angeles who with his librarian wife avidly collected precious gastronomic and wine literature. [EDITOR NOTE: Marcus E. Crahan (1901-1978) will be the subject of an upcoming WTQ article.] Crahan had been corresponding with André Simon in an attempt to impress him with the caliber of some better California wines, and had told MR that he was shipping some off to England for Simon to evaluate. "I am really worried about those wines you are sending to Andre Simon," MR began.

> You know, I do not know what any of them are, nor about Andre Simon himself. He is eighty years old and cannot any longer even sit through a dinner, let alone taste young and unknown wines. And you know he made his money by being the Pommery Greno agent for the British Empire. He devoted his life to being a French wine merchant in Great Britain. I do not see how it is possible for you to get at his hands treatment that you deserve. His name carries great prestige, but his age and prejudices make him a dangerous judge. California winegrowers sent wines over there before, you know, and nothing came of it.

And here MR inserted a remark that presaged a crucial future development in California winemaking, partly because he and his wines provided a working model for the "boutique" winery that would grow or buy fine winegrape varieties, and from them produce wines on a small scale, in an almost handcrafted manner—then sell them at high prices.

> The only recognition we need concern ourselves with is that of our own country. If we can attract half a dozen young men of high ideals, determination and proper financial backing we can have, in fact, premium growers who won't need any artificial supports to hold them up.

Incidentally, in this letter MR had then gone on to praise UC Davis's work, and Maynard Amerine's in particular, in promoting wine quality—always done at the risk of making enemies in an industry that, after all, was partly financing the Viticulture & Enology Department's work in vine and wine research, educational training, and outreach to both growers and vintners.

> The University of California at Davis has done more to make the growers and the consuming public conscious of varieties and quality standards than all the money spent by the Wine Institute and the Wine Advisory Board. On the surface the two institutions profess to have a common interest, but it is my personal belief that they are opposing interests. And if you find any grower against Dr. Amerine, as you mentioned, it is a dead give-away that that grower cannot meet the quality standards advocated by Dr. Amerine and so wants to eliminate him, or anyone sponsoring high standards. [4/5/55]

MR liked so much what he'd written to Crahan that several weeks later he directly quoted two paragraphs from this letter when writing to John Melville: the first extract above and another one that had preceded and then precipitated the comments about Simon and Amerine. (The other paragraph he'd quoted to Melville will appear in a later subhead section. For, ironically, just as MR was composing this letter to Crahan, the entire sequence of events coming afterwards would challenge the close relationship he'd long enjoyed with Amerine.)

Although MR's dismissive remarks about Simon were expectable, he was never so obtuse that he'd neglect to steer a trusted envoy toward the British wine authority, because he'd calculate that benefit might accrue through the contact. And this would happen two years later, when his adopted son Peter Martin Ray was in England doing post-doc botanical research. Using a few letters of introduction MR had written earlier, Peter had visited some of Europe's prominent winegrowers. While at Harvard, too, he had become known to noted wine dealers and connoisseurs in the Boston area, and was even giving talks about winegrowing in Europe. Viewing PMR's wine-focused tangential avocation as a means of promoting his own wines, MR wanted it understood that he'd also be setting the stage for his and his twin brother's eventual inheritance of the wine estate. Though they could stay with their science careers, they'd always need to promote all the Martin Ray wines, past, present, and future.

> It is my idea that the interest you should take in our wines should be similar to the interest you might have taken in the Dawn Redwood, had you rediscovered it in interior China and brought back to civilization the first seeds. You would be sending seeds or plants out to all the botanical world and you would be interested in furthering knowledge of it and you would naturally feel something like the sponsor of its establishment in every climate suited to its growing. So with our wines, not that you have discovered them, but you have such an interest in them. You are not "selling" them. You

are not even directly concerned with the financial problems surrounding their growth and marketing. But the wines you are interested in, because you know they are the best grown in the country and because they are grown by your family and you are quite naturally devoted to them even more so than you are to the great growths of the older wine countries. So, keep your interest in proper perspective but keep it vigorous and straightforward. The time must come when you and Barclay must, through your friends and your friends' friends, support a substantial portion of the sales of our vineyards, just as it was true with old Dr. Rixford. It may seem far away to you now but it is very near. [5/23/56]

So now MR expected him to initiate the same kind of contacts and subtle promoting in London through getting to know well-placed wine people, including renowned dealerships.

You will be having the dinner or luncheon at the Berry Bros. before long, I suppose, and we will have great interest in a report of the event. They will no doubt bring out some very rare vintages for you. It is a great source of satisfaction to see how very properly and well you have developed all these wine connections. You now know the great growers of Burgundy, Bordeaux and Germany, and you have developed genuine friendship with them all.

There was strategic value, then, in having Peter become acquainted with celebrated wine authorities. Such persons could boost and spread the reputation of Martin Ray's wines, to prove California's great winemaking potential. They'd also feel assured that this unique winery's future operations would be carried forward successfully into the distant future by this capable, enthusiastic, sophisticated young member of next Ray generation. So in his instructional letter to PMR, MR declared:

There remains after Berry Bros one more man I believe you two [here MR thoughtfully included Peter's wife, Terry] should know before he is dead. He is an old man already but no one has ever had quite the stature he has developed. He is Andre Simon, International head of the wine and Food Society.

When hearing from others that this brilliant young plant physiologist who had made friendships with notable European vintners was also a budding winemaker himself, Simon would indubitably recognize Peter's upcoming importance in the wine world—and therefore desire to meet him. So to explain his plan, MR first described Simon.

He has written dozens of books and booklets on all the various wines and spirits of the world. And while I have often disliked certain of his writings and have always regarded him as the very essence of all the over sofistication [*sic*] that has been built up around wines, he is never-the-less a great personage. So, I think I will ask him to have you in for a little visit in his London home. He has written some very nice things about us and we have met many people over the years who are personal friends of his.

MR then counseled his son about desirable deportment, which would make an unsullied contrast to that of the usual wine fakers he always enjoyed caricaturing.

Being straight forward and genuine with these people of the wine world who occupy the very top positions at once places you not only in their favor but in this day and age it is great encouragement to these older people to know that there is in the world at least you two.... So accept it and understand it and then just go right on being your own natural selves. Guard always against becoming the phony sophisticate like Bob Knudsen, Harold Price, et al [frequent guests of the Rays, or else their hosts, and ostensibly MR's good friends]. Simon may very well be like that. But if he is, he is at least the greatest of them all! And in the years to come it will be well to be able to remember him and recall that you knew him. [8/25/57]

Peter and Terry Ray were indeed treated to an elegant midday meal in London at the Berry Bros. & Rudd, close to one of the royal palaces. As PMR now recalls it—

Other than the posh Edwardian appearance of the wood-paneled second-storey room where the dinner was held, and the impression that everything about the occasion was very friendly and pleasant (no commercial or other pressures), the main thing I remember about the dinner is that they opened and served a magnum of 1895 Chateau Lafite-Rothschild. This is of course a Premier Crus claret, so appropriately great expectations were associated with it. It also was one of the oldest wines I've ever had, and I remember it as having been magnificent, despite its age. They presumably had brought it up from their cellar containing a vast collection of remarkable wines, which had somehow survived the bombings of London in WWII. I did not, however, meet André Simon on that or any other occasion. But I certainly remember that MR deprecated him and claimed him to be a phony expert, his basis for which I do not know. [Email to BKM, 1/24/08]

MR, Wine Literature, and Current Winegrowing Practitioners

Martin Ray wouldn't have eagerly sought, and bought, Simon's books. His library holdings were scarcely those of an avid wine book collector—whether of historical, scholarly, technical, or popular wine publications; most of his books about wine to be invested in would have been given to him and needed a personal connection. Amerine over the years had often sent or lent him wine literature,

which he'd peruse. Yet MR liked books, as the Rays' sizable library shows. Busy though he always was, he'd try to get acquainted with worthwhile literature, whether classics or current. Often reading aloud to each other in the evening, he and his two sequential wives consumed much good fiction and nonfiction—in the latter category, especially biographies and history. He had good recall of what had been read, though he might reshape information to make it fit with already set opinions or distorted perspectives—particularly if the subject was wine or politics (past or present in either topic).

MR didn't regularly subscribe to the few trade journals of the times, such as Wines & Vines to keep abreast of personnel changes, the latest research, technological innovations, and marketing trends in the wine industry. (According to MR, an editor at W&V, sometime in the late 1930s, had told him that the magazine, under instructions from the Wine Institute, which helped underwrite its publication costs, could no longer accept either articles or even Paul Masson advertisements from him.)

Instead, MR's interest focused on gathering the state agriculture department's annual harvest and wine-production statistics on all major grape varieties—wine, table, and raisin types—so as to prove that even the better wineries used the latter two (particularly the superabundant Thompson Seedless grapes, in fresh, juice concentrate, or desiccated forms) for vintaging the overall huge gallonage produced. And because the state tracked specific winegrape acreages, he could also demonstrate that many wines labeled as fine varietals would actually have been grossly blended with inferior high-producing winegrapes, such as Chenin Blanc and Zinfandel. (So where did all the wine being marketed as Chardonnay come from, he argued, if the acreage was too low even to be statistically identified? And since MR considered the latter grape close to an abomination, he was invariably outraged whenever he detected dominant presence of "Zin" in wines claimed to be Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon.)

Rusty Ray preferred to stay aloof and get any industry news and gossip second- or third-hand (as he had received it for almost 20 years from Amerine). Also, as the absolute monarch of his own mountain, from the start of his winemaking career MR declined to attend meetings or go to banquets, where he might have socialized and exchanged information with winegrowing peers and other wine professionals. Distancing himself from others also made it easier to render harsh judgments about wines, along with the people who'd made them. And by holding court at dinners given on his secluded mountaintop, he could choose the dishes and wines to be served, along with dominating the conversation among the Rays' captive yet invariably captivated guests.

The sophisticated André Simon for years had starred in a very different, broadly intercontinental, literary milieu. MR's disdainful attitude toward him and other wine sophisticates (whether they were genuine or pretentious) may have provided smokescreens to conceal his own deep insecurities—even from himself. After all, his upbringing had been that of a California farm boy. And in spite of his admiration of the noble French and German wine estates and their products, he hadn't yet traveled to Europe (and never would, doubtless partly because he'd feel insecure far from his control center). But he could send letters introducing his adopted sons and favored friends whom he judged well qualified to meet with some of Europe's wine-royalty families. André Simon and the English (who didn't produce wine on their island, anyway) were just two of numerous persons and populations that MR tended to denigrate in both correspondence and conversation. He could proclaim, with fixated conviction, negative opinions about almost anything and anybody, including entire civilizations, nations, and racial or ethnic groups, as well as wineries' histories and wine people. Thus in early 1955, having heard that John Melville, like Dr. Crahan, was seeking to get wine-loving Brits' approval of certain California vintages, MR launched one of his mini-diatribes in a warning letter to him:

> My feeling is that nothing out of America could ever please them. And on top of this if the wines were good, which I doubt, they would not admit it.... The California growers just don't seem to realize no one in his right mind is going to drink their blends and frauds when they have a taste and the money to buy better.... It's as if they are frantically trying to sell themselves that their wines are superior. And England has the pick of the French wines.

Then MR couldn't resist adding one more jab at America's Mother Country—over its apparent ingratitude for the U.S. generosity during WWII with Lend Lease and then joining up with Britain in the crucial fight against the Axis nations.

> As for her press, you know it is 100% anti American. Why wouldn't it be, after we have saved their lives and given them so much! That is human nature. Lend a friend money and lose the friendship and the money.

The last comment was in line with MR's reluctance or refusal, based partly on adverse past experience, ever to lend money to anyone. (Later on, had he adhered to this dictum, he could have avoided the disastrous financial and personal entanglements and property losses that ensued from his co-founding the Mount Eden Vineyards Corporation.)

When ending his letter to Melville, MR returned to his great fixation on quality control, which had been mightily reactivated earlier in the month after he'd received Louis Gomberg's letter, memorandum, and telephone call. His final sentences show how encouraged he was by the enthusiastic approval of recipients of his recent mailings about instigating quality control.

> See you soon, John. Keep up the good work and dont let me discourage you. But try to direct attention to our great chances for making fine wines here and keeping the market we have right here. To hell with what the English think. Better we consider here what our own people think. Got another batch of letters today, all applauding. We are going to force the issue! [5/22/55]

MR's basically unflattering opinion of Simon's winemaking knowledge is reflected in a letter Eleanor wrote, 16 years after the Rays' 1955 QC battle, to a Mrs. Russell Clarke, whose son, currently at the Air Force Academy, had expressed a "deep interest in wines" and was considering becoming a winemaker.

> Perhaps some day you can come and bring him here, when he is on vacation with you. We would like very much to meet him. It will be difficult for him in his research to be able to sift actual fact from "old wives' tales" and the usual amateur explanation of winemaking techniques, as such have been passed along from one writer to another, none of whom know what they're talking about! Some who have even acquired quite a name as "authorities" such as Andre Simon actually are not even educated people, lack all knowledge of chemistry, biology, physics, even history—have no experience or even comprehension of basic facts about wine or its making, confuse grape varieties, etc. (He was a wine salesman all his life, until he made his success with his Wine & Food Society.)

And from here ER leapt into a generalization that both she and her husband often made.

> So often the truth about winemaking is the very opposite to "authorities." Tell him not to accept the printed word as fact. Students naturally are inclined to give respect to authors. We sometimes wonder if all history is as absurdly incorrect as is history involving just this one subject that we happen to know first-hand—winegrowing. We suspect it is—and once current history goes back beyond those alive today, it becomes almost impossible to right all the errors. [4/24/71]

This provocative observation perhaps deserves pondering. Wine scholars and historians, when researching wines made before their time as experienced imbibers, and perhaps never having even tasted them (whether in the wines' prime or past it), may rely unduly on printed texts and records of wine-contest outcomes that often were based on adroit, strategic promotions. Also, because MR, out of principle, for many years never submitted his table or sparkling wines for either private or public (such as county) competitive judgings, they are not listed among the gold-medal awards selected to identify those wines of outstanding quality that were produced in the state, and in the entire U.S. itself, from the late 1930s until the mid-1970s (the time of MR's death). Furthermore, wineries customarily set aside superior lots of varietals known to be far superior to ones made in highly blended bulk batches, which were then bottled, labeled as varietals, and shipped off to distributors and to retailers for public consumption. Such specially vintaged wines—to which the commercial releases could seem identical counterparts—would be reserved for use at important wine-judging venues or to impress influential visiting experts.

Wine scholars might also consider various reasons why mentions of Martin Ray and his pure-varietal wines were usually absent from mainstream coverage in books and periodicals about notable California wineries and wines. (The intriguing tale of Frank Schoonmaker's nastily deliberate excision in 1941 of an entire chapter he'd already written for *American Wines* about Martin Ray as proprietor of Paul Masson was told in the April 2004 WTQ.)

MR's hostility in his perennial quality-demanding stance alienated him not only from the potent influence-peddling Wine Institute and Wine Advisory Board, but also from most winery owners and the winemakers in their employ, who would go along with any blackballing of Ray—if they heard or thought about him at all. He was deliberately ostracized from recognition. (For whatever reasons, though, wine insider Louis Gomberg, starting in the late 1930s, appeared to genuinely esteem MR and his wines.) Additionally, Martin Ray wines didn't get wide attention anyway, since they were produced in comparatively minuscule amounts, were hard to find, and cost far too much compared with seemingly similar California varietals or champagnes. Therefore, by primarily researching the "official" sources of that period and depending on lists of contest winners, most wine writers and historians covering the score (and more) of years ranging between Prohibition's Repeal in 1933 and the first detectable signs of the oncoming, much-celebrated Wine Revolution, have failed to give Martin Ray, his wines, and his single-minded push for quality control their just due.

While MR Bullies, Amerine Carries On ...

If Maynard was unduly upset by Martin Ray's behavior, as he had indicated in that July phone conversation with his vintner friend, he wouldn't have permitted his feelings to interfere much with either his personal life or his professional work. For a while he had been composing a special essay for publication in the programme booklet commemorating the 1955 Vintage Tour of wineries to be taken by members of the combined San Francisco and Los Angeles Wine & Food societies on September 24th and 25th. Titled "The Well-Tempered Winebibber," it's both an eloquent statement about wine appreciation and a specific guide to tasting wines, for their individuality, quality, and comparison with others. It indicates the kind of philosophical yet impassioned discussions about wine that he must have had with MR in earlier, quieter times together, when the latter was unlikely to become obnoxiously inebriated.

Amerine began by saying that because works of art in general—music, painting, literature—have certain characteristics that distinguish great and lasting ones from those that are lesser and transitory, "The greater our understanding of these characteristics, the greater becomes our capacity for enjoyment and the wider our range of appreciation." The basic principles of aesthetics essentially involve "an appeal to our intellect that distinguishes the ordinary from the extraordinary, the short-lived from the timeless masters." And so, too, was the pleasure that people took in drinking wine, Amerine averred.

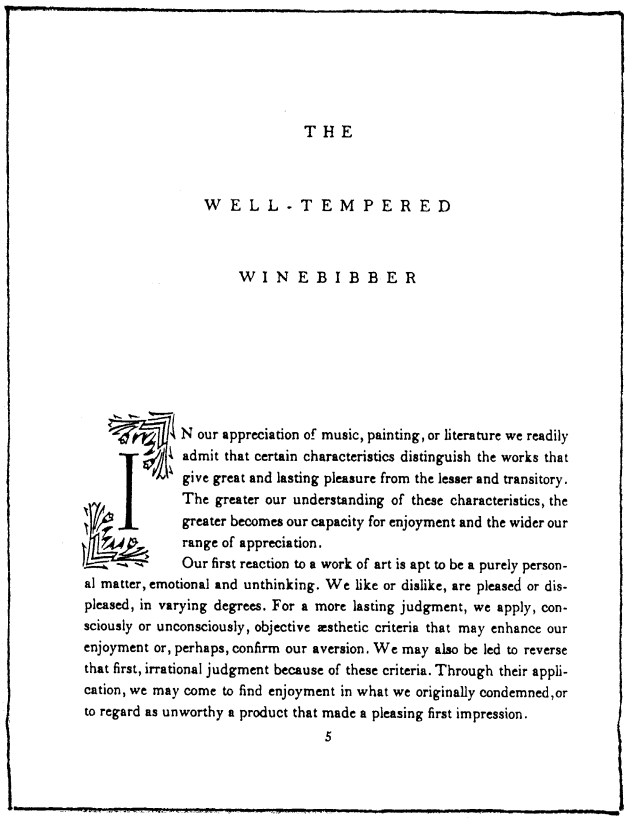
> It is the thesis of this essay that our enjoyment of wines is also essentially intellectual and subject to aesthetic principles similar to those applying to any other work of art. Furthermore, that wines of the most diverse types may be judged by the same basic aesthetic standard providing we give to them the requisite experience. [p. 6]

The author, however, had to admit that although numerous "learned treatises" expounded the principles of appreciating the arts—and here he even added cuisine, citing the M.F.K. Fisher's books about food—little was available on wine aesthetics. There were books presenting tradition and price, and in those making judgments on particular wines lacked explanations of the "foundations" behind them. So helpfully he now began to explicitly set down "a rational basis for distinguishing the good and the bad." As shown in earlier phases of his enological career, this Davis professor aimed to establish a scientific basis for judging both wine quality and the definite distinctions to be found among different types of wines, including varietals.

Why would he do so? In this passage Amerine seemed to agree with both Martin Ray's stand against the PWP's hucksterish plan to promote California wines and the PWP's dislike of consumers' annoying penchant for buying French imports. And he also cautioned readers against believing that every wine made by a certain "brand" winery was bound to be superlative (and defect-free), compared with its winemaking competitors' products. (Was he recalling too how MR always claimed that of his wines?)

> Furthermore, the modern huckster has brought to such an intensity the art of propagandizing as superlative the cheap and the poor that even the wry and experienced consumer may be fooled. (Oh yes, there are wine hucksters, too!) The intelligent wine drinker therefore owes it to himself to acquire some organoleptic skill and aesthetic appreciation in order to free himself from the merciless attentions of the salesmen who would have us believe that the expensive is good, that the imported is, *per se*, better, or that a certain brand of vintage is always, *ipso facto*, superior. [p. 6]

Through its 15 pages, Amerine's intellectually elegant essay carried literate wine imbibers through



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IN our appreciation of music, painting, or literature we readily admit that certain characteristics distinguish the works that give great and lasting pleasure from the lesser and transitory. The greater our understanding of these characteristics, the greater becomes our capacity for enjoyment and the wider our range of appreciation.

Our first reaction to a work of art is apt to be a purely personal matter, emotional and unthinking. We like or dislike, are pleased or displeased, in varying degrees. For a more lasting judgment, we apply, consciously or unconsciously, objective æsthetic criteria that may enhance our enjoyment or, perhaps, confirm our aversion. We may also be led to reverse that first, irrational judgment because of these criteria. Through their application, we may come to find enjoyment in what we originally condemned, or to regard as unworthy a product that made a pleasing first impression.

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— Maynard Amerine's essay appeared in the 1955 Vintage Tour program printed for members of the San Francisco and the Los Angeles Wine & Food societies. Following the "Winebibber" is the schedule of wineries, fare, and wines to be enjoyed during the tour, of which Amerine was the Chairman. The 24-page 12" x 9" booklet, an exquisite example of the fine press work of Grabhorn Press, San Francisco, was issued in an edition of only 100 copies. —

1955

VINTAGE TOUR

OF THE

SAN FRANCISCO AND LOS ANGELES

WINE AND FOOD

SOCIETIES

SEPTEMBER 24-25

such separate issues, in terms desirability or defects, as color, clarity or texture, odor (aroma, bouquet, foreign scents or off-odors), taste (acid or "dry," sweet, salty, astringent or bitter); the proper sequence of serving wines; the best type and size of wine glass for tasting, and defects; reasons for variations in personal taste. He also noted the important factor of experience in acquiring tasting ability.

> Those who have learned to drink wine as a child usually have a wide range of appreciation, for they have begun this education of the palate early. The acquiring of prejudices and fixed tastes comes with age. A major evil of Prohibition is that it robbed so many of this natural habituation period. Beginning as adults, they must now go through a slower and more difficult training sequence in order to cultivate a taste for the more austere and complex types of wine. [p. 17]

Amerine, nearing his conclusion, described what makes a "fine wine" so fine, akin to the great works of art in other fields of human creativity—though the appreciation is necessarily ephemeral except in one's memory, to be experienced again only when an identical bottle is opened and its contents imbibed.

> The fine wine has so many facets of goodness that we are continually finding new aspects of its quality. This is particularly true of red wines, and supremely so of well-aged red wines. Just as we return to a great painting or symphony again and again, each time making a new discovery, so, too, can we enrich our enjoyment of a fine wine—some new facet of its superior quality is revealed with repeated tasting. Moreover, the whole cannot be attained by merely adding up the individual parts.
>
> Such an abundance of discovery leads to endless discussion. Try, on the other hand, to describe an ordinary wine. The difficulty is likely to be in finding anything specific to say. It is generally dismissed as not being very good, and we let it go at that. It is upon this level that we need not let aesthetic principles bother us in the least. We like them or not. We need not waste time praising or condemning them, for their potentialities—except for quenching our thirst (which is not unimportant)—are small. But about great wines there is always a great deal to say and, hence, to appreciate. Great wines are also distinguished from mediocre ones by having no perceptible defect. Inability to recognize defects, incidentally, is one of the faults of the inexperienced taster.
>
> Finally, all truly fine wines are memorable. True, we also remember the characteristics of bad wines. But the point is that wines falling between these extremes drop out of mind. The wine that does not excite us enough to be remembered can never be great. [pp. 18-19]

Amerine then appropriately ended his discourse with that health-boosting toast, "*Prosit!*"

Ten years later, when Maynard Amerine published, with Vernon Singleton, the popular book *Wine: An Introduction for Americans* (University of California Press, 1965), for the penultimate chapter, "Wine Appreciation, Evaluation, and Service," he drew upon points made in this earlier essay. For several decades, Amerine's didactic services would be much in demand for conducting special classes to winegrowers in the technical aspects of critically evaluating wines. He also offered courses in Wine Appreciation to the lay public—part of the fast-growing and near-ubiquitous interest in wine tasting on the part of middle-class Americans.

Reprising MR's Wine Quality Fight

When Martin Ray wrote his letter (above) to Dr. Marcus Crahan in April of 1955, he also shared his initial reactions to the formation of the Premium Wine Producers of California. He had begun his typewritten, single-spaced letter of four pages by mentioning the invitation that he had recently received earlier by mail from Louis Gomberg, asking him to join this new promotion-bent group. Gomberg had enclosed his memorandum about the alarming expansion of competition from European wines and his plan for countering it. MR had only gotten around to really reading it carefully that morning—which then precipitated the following reaction (and more), which he shared with Crahan.

> There is not a single authentic unblended Pinot Noir or Chardonnay grown in California which is worthy of mention except our own. Can you not see, then, why it is so important to make it known what fine wines are and that they <u>can</u> be grown in California? We must have new men in the industry, new growers. These so-called "premium winegrowers" we now have are bound together through organization, effort and lack of fine wine appreciation, and their objectives are not based on growing finer wines but rather on forcing the American public to accept products of uniform low quality.

Then came a coincidental interruption in MR's epistolary discourse: a phone call from Louis Gomberg. Not having received response yet from Ray, he wanted to talk with him directly.

> You would be interested to know that even as I have been writing this letter, Mr. Gomberg telephoned me from San Francisco making a personal request that I join his group of growers in the effort which I have discussed. I told him just what I have told you. He then asked that he be permitted to use my name in soliciting other growers, representing that I favor their action; but I was obliged to decline his request. I told him that any time he wanted to bring anyone here important to the industry we would be happy to hold a luncheon for them, show them through tasting our

> wines against the best European wines what can be done in California by confining efforts to actually growing fine wines as opposed to falsely claiming such. [4/5/55]

(It should be pointed out that almost two decades earlier, at Masson, MR had made a similarly self-confident, hospitable invitation to winegrowers to visit his own premises and there drink comparatively both his wines and excellent foreign ones as the best way to show them what California could do. But few ever took him up on it.)

And now in early November of 1955, six months after these letters to Crahan and Melville, MR was still in occasional contact with Louis Gomberg. Communication went on despite his suspicion that the PWP and the Wine Institute had managed to sabotage his and Eleanor's adroitly planned QC publicity blitz in the summertime. Clearly, though, he still held onto a faint hope that Dr. Winkler would soon be summoned to present ideas for initiating QC plan. Thus he could tell Amerine in one of his now-routine monthly communications—

> Gomberg wrote an encouraging letter last week on the attitude of the growers. But I want to talk to Dr. Winkler before I accept any assurances about Quality Control. Gomberg says Dr. Winkler is preparing a report to the growers on my suggested plan and Gomberg no longer speaks of it in a questioning manner but rather as a thing that takes time. Perhaps he is thinking in terms of another 20 years. He did not say what he meant by time! I have begun to suspect Gomberg is giving me the run-around and is stalling. That is why I want to talk to Dr. Winkler. [11/12/55]

But in fact by then—although he didn't want to admit it yet to Maynard—MR was fairly sure that, despite Gomberg's seemingly positive attitude, the Premium Wine Producers wouldn't decide in favor of quality control, soon or ever. Earlier, Winkler had told him that nobody as yet had summoned him to the Wine Institute's headquarters in San Francisco, to present to the Premium Wine Producers group his ideas on how to go about establishing quality control measures within their ranks. So as early as the third week in October (as shown in his letter to Angelo Pellegrini; see #14 in January 2008 WTQ), MR was convinced that his efforts to win quality control had been deliberately "double-crossed" by the PWP group —probably under advisement from officers of its sheltering organization, the Wine Institute.

Doubtlessly brewing in Martin Ray's mind already was a plan to eloquently summarize this deplorable, wholly unacceptable rejection of QC—if that was how things were going to turn out.

Maintaining an Epistolary Connection

During the late summer and early fall of 1955 Martin Ray was plenty occupied with preparations for and then taking charge of the several vintages on Mt. Eden, as well as other projects—such as the increasing entertainment of visitors. It bothered him, though, that Amerine had stopped calling, as he often used to do. Maynard also mostly failed to respond to his letters, and on the rare occasions when he did write, his messages were superficial, unsatisfactory. After all, for years MR had considered MA his dearest friend and confidant, especially after Julian Street died in 1947. (And for six years, anyway, though convenient for subsequent archival purposes, that had been strictly an epistolary relationship until the Connecticut-based Streets visited Martin and Elsie in 1946, after WWII ended.) Martin would never forget that right after Elsie's death in the summer of 1951 Maynard had rushed to his side to console him in that all-night-long, wine-swilling, two-man wake.

Amerine had clearly put their friendship "on ice," as he'd told MR in July he needed to do, since important wine people weren't talking to him anymore—obviously thinking he was in cahoots with MR in pushing hard for the quality control measures that would adversely affect their business operations. This social ostracism came about despite the fact that Amerine from the start had disagreed with MR's methods, involving widely circulating written condemnations of other wineries' winemaking methods and deceptions in marketing "fraudulently" labeled varietals.

Of course MR thought—hoped—that Amerine only meant this social hiatus to be temporary, until his long-ongoing QC battle with the higher end of wine industry reached a conclusion pleasing to both of them, as for a time it appeared to be doing. He hadn't expected a real and sustained rupture. But since he was experiencing mostly silence on the other end of what used to be frequent communications, MR no longer wrote Maynard anywhere as often as before or said as much. He also refrained from making further personal attacks after his blast of July 26. And he didn't phone him, wishing to avoid either causing annoyance or being rebuffed outright.

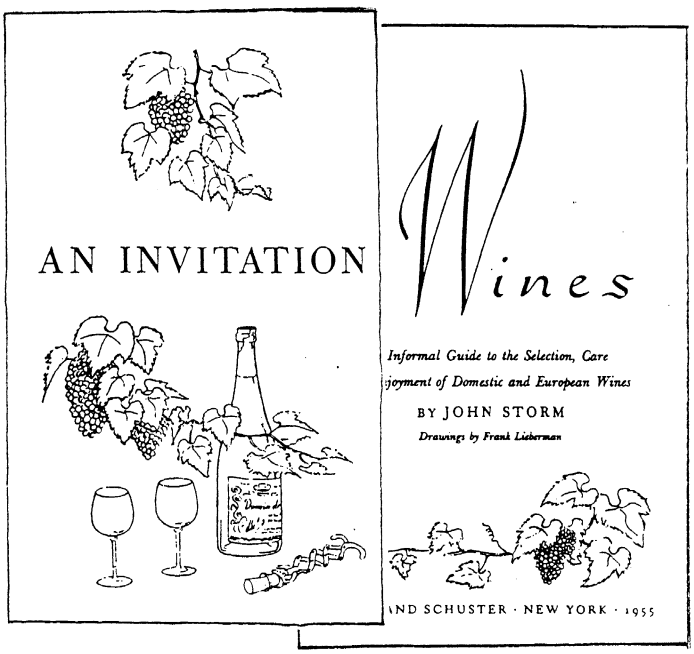
Carefully pacing his overtures, he now wrote Maynard only monthly. In October he had reported at length about the official winery inspectors' unexpected intrusion in his cellar. In mid-November he typed up a two-page letter to MR mostly giving miscellaneous news and observations. First, he told him about a small group of dedicated wine lovers in

Reno who intended to visit UC Davis next summer and were eager to meet Amerine. Then he moved on to the subject of wine writers and wine books. "Eleanor and I want to tell you that we liked your reviews in Andre Simon's WINE AND FOOD. [One was of Melville's *Guide to California Wines*, given as a sidebar in January 2007 WTQ.] Suppose you have seen John Storm's INVITATION TO WINES. He deliberately misquoted me." It's difficult to believe that MR would take offense at this comment which the author had made in a footnote:

> Mr. Ray, whose impeccable taste has done a lot to raise the standards of winemaking in California, believes passionately that only by honest varietal labeling can California wines compete successfully with the fine wines of Europe.

What probably bothered MR came afterwards, because it implied that he took credit for a discovery that Amerine for some years had insistently told him, and which MR's adopted son Peter had confirmed when in France the previous year.

> His [MR's] tireless research has lately revealed that the vine grown in California as the Pinot Chardonnay is not, in fact, the true Pinot. For this reason he now labels his wine simply Chardonnay. [*An Invitation to Wines*, 1955, p.121.]



Anyway, the statement gave MR the chance to do yet another critical riff on defects in wine literature. But it was followed at once by acknowledging that recent books like Melville's and Storm's were definitely raising consumers' interest in wines—and in Martin Ray wines in particular. No doubt, too, the special promotional efforts being mounted by both upscale California wineries and Gomberg's PWP group were also having positive effects.

> It makes one understand the action of Corporations, Agencies of the Government and even individuals, who employ publicity or press men to write hand-outs so that it can be insured that what is desired can be put across. But however bad our wine books, interest in wines grows with leaps and bounds....
>
> Doubleday told me that Melville's book sales will reach 10,000 copies by year end. That is a big sale for a wine book. I am sure the second printing or the revised edition, when and if it comes, will show improvements. I have had a long talk with Melville and he has agreed to certain changes and I believe your criticism will have its influence on him, although I have not seen him since the Autumn number [of the Wine and Food Society's quarterly] came out.

(Of course MR would tell John Melville about Amerine's disgruntlement over the poor sales of his own book compared with JM's popular one.)

As before, MR's letters to Amerine document how the rapidly rising demand for Martin Ray wines in the mid-1950s had begun pressuring him to expand his vineyard domain in order to grow his business—the expected American way.

> We have constant inquiries from all over the country now. Yesterday there were two wanting to buy. Our sales this year will be greater than what [wines] we have made—a situation both good and bad. We must some how cut our sales deliberately or extend our vineyard. We will likely plant further in January. I have never liked one thing that effects [*sic*] all of us sooner or later: We must go on forever doing more and more and more or suffer the turn backward. Business always grows or starts to die. Even life is that way. It is the element of time in its determined effort.

Apart from that problematic attempt to force the wine industry to institute quality control, MR at least felt that he and his own varietal wines, both still and sparkling, had gained gratifying and financially rewarding attention during the past year. This had come about through several ways: his strenuous sales efforts among retailers; informative mailings that he and Eleanor had written and sent out to retailers and customers—especially about the need for QC regulations among California's finer wines; and favorable publicity given by others, both verbally and in print, notably Melville's guidebook to wineries and their wines that had sold well within the state and accelerated wine tourism.

Then MR's November letter veered in a social direction, hoping to bring Amerine back into his and ER's winegrowing life and ambience at their Thanksgiving table.

> Now that recognition and success has come to our 10 year effort here on the Mountain, Eleanor and I want to share it with you. And I think the time has come for

an old time dinner and get together. And there is no better time than during the festive season we are about to enter. [11/12/55]

But would Maynard Amerine take this proffered bait?

Attempts to Resurrect and Repair a Sundered Relationship

After marrying MR four years earlier, Eleanor had often written to Maynard, especially when he was in Europe during all of 1954, for she too was very fond of him. Now, knowing well how much her husband was upset by the friendship's apparent breakup, she composed a note to send him on the same day Rusty would mail his (above). She tried to keep the tone flippantly stylish, as she had usually done before. So she devised nine mostly absurd questions for him to answer.

Dear Maynard:

1. Tell me this, what would cause this? An old cognac addict finds that suddenly any cognac burns holes in his/her stomach.
2. What is the proper thing to say when an arrogant socialite at a dinner party gives you a lecture on why Petri sherry tastes better than any imported sherry?
3. How can you account for this? Waking up and looking out the window I saw Frosty lazily chewing something, suddenly he jumped to his feet with surprise as a bird flew out of his mouth and away!
4. If while dancing with a seemingly sensible bachelor he cracked your finger causing permanent injury, what should you do? [Earlier in the year, Maynard had sprained or even broken ER's little finger as he twirled her around while they were dancing at his home.]
5. How soon can you normally distinguish sex in a kitten?
6. What do you think Woodward was doing (nude) out in the hallway?
7. Would you be flattered or insulted if you received a letter addressed to Dr. Maynard Morningstar, and why? [Herman Wouk's novel, *Marjorie Morningstar*, was a current bestseller. Some Ray acquaintance may have referred to Amerine using that ludicrously erroneous surname.]
8. Would you accept an invitation to come up for Thanksgiving dinner if I promised to play you a priceless recording of "Over the River and Through the Woods to Grandmother's House We Go"?
9. Do you consider it a natural phenomenon that as you grow older, people formerly cherished seem increasingly unbearable?

ER saved the really crucial question for number 10.

10. How should a wife go about trying to mend relations between her husband and his best friend who have tiffed but not over her?

Ten days later Maynard responded succinctly, in his own hand and on Bohemian Club notepaper, to both of the Rays' letters.

Dear Rays: I am sorry I cannot come to dinner. Tis better this way lest there be any tiffs. I shall be glad to see the Reno people anytime and show them what I can of our work. Just so I know a few days in advance. I plan to be here until mid-August....

Alas, I cannot find adequate answers to Eleanor's 10 questions, except #10 which the 2nd sentence above covers.

Yours, Maynard a.a. [11/22/55]

Still hoping to bypass the hurtful relationship break, in early December Eleanor ignored MA's withdrawal from their lives and reported on recent doings to Amerine. ("Papa" was a fond nickname for Rusty Ray that she, and Elsie before her, sometimes used.)

Papa's working every day from about 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. in the cellar getting out what seems a mounting avalanche of holidays orders!!! So don't think he's forgetting you just because he hasn't gotten around to answering your nice note. We're about dead around here from crucial overwork, but happy happy, and would be still happier to see your smiling face up here—and it's no casual statement to say that you're exactly the <u>only</u> one who is the perfect answer to a winegrower's dream, to have for dinner—or just to drink wines with, as a matter of fact. I could tell you some tall stories on that!

Paying no attention at all to what you said but please don't say it again, could you come up for dinner some Sunday soon and bring Ellen [MA's sister] and her husband? We've wanted to have them up here.

ER went on to report how as an unmatchable team they'd been working strenuously to package up the sparkling and table wines for holiday-season shipments to dealers and direct-purchase customers.

Last Sunday Rusty and I all by ourselves bottled 940 bottles of champagne, and do you know, we made far better time than any other two workers in history on this job? We both go like race horses when we get started, born demons for work—and what's more, complete perfection, you might say, blowing my own horn loudly.

Today Rusty's decanting wines for orders to go out tomorrow, and labeled ten cases, besides getting out a few of our special gift boxes, have you seen these? John Esquin says it's the most beautiful wine package he's ever seen either here or in Europe, a shallow wooden box with the two champagnes and three still wines individually partitioned off as in a showcase, each bottle wrapped in cellophane appropriately colored to the wine—ah, they shimmer like rare jewels! A terrific job to get all this special box and liners made, not to speak of finding cellophane in exactly the colors we wanted—and then assemble everything perfectly—

most people would say it's far more work than it's worth—but there's a deep satisfaction in sheer beauty.

(In a letter written a few days earlier to Burgess Meredith, ER had told how the two of them had bottled a cask of champagne, then celebrated afterwards. "Rusty's so fussy that it's a rare person who can handle any one of the three separate operations involved to suit him," she said, "so it gets down to basic family members." [11/28/55])

Finally Eleanor came to the crucial issue with Maynard:

> I've so many questions stored up to ask you that if you don't come soon I'll be forced to be a nuisance via the postal system! And not only questions, I've stories to tell you—like about our Thanksgiving. Nobody else will do, I insist it must be you, Maynard. Nobody could love you so much as your two lil friends up here on the mountain, so please say to hell with tiffs, leave them to chaps who really despise each other, and join forces with us up here for a rousing get-together in good old pre-holiday fashion! [12/4/55]

(Amerine was fortunate to have evaded the Rays' Thanksgiving feast. ER complained to Burgess Meredith that the various assembled guests, unnamed by her, caused a "frost" in that celebratory occasion. A half-year later, MR would detail in a letter to Maynard the several dramas that had transpired that day —to be presented in the next installment.)

ER signed her letter to Amerine, "With many flourishes of love from us both—" And sometime afterward, perhaps years later, ER handwrote this at the top of the carbon copy she'd retained, "Their friendship of long standing was almost killed by Martin's Quality Fight, trying for a Quality Control." *Almost* killed? It was near-dead by the end of 1955, though the Rays were unable yet to accept this sad reality and for some while would persist in their epistolary effort to reclaim Maynard as their intimate friend.

There was one route, though, through which Martin Ray would be able to sustain contact with Amerine, slight and occasional as it would be over the years. And that would be to ask for his opinion or advice from time to time in matters connected with the making of wine. Thus before terminating his November 1955 letter to Maynard (partially quoted earlier), MR posed a technical question that he hoped Dr. Amerine the enologist could answer.

> Will you please write me a short explanation as to why our Pinot Noir red wine always finishes its fermentation so fast while the free-run (white) and press (pink) always ferment for from a month to six weeks. And why is the tourney [*sic*] always in the free-run and never in either the press or the wine fermented on the skins? If it were not for its absence in the wine fermented on the skins I would conclude that the free run merely washes and carries it away. I would like your appraisal of the situation because I have not been able to get it out by early filtration into a sulphured puncheon. The experience goes back to 1937. I have never failed to find it and have always gotten it out as described. Once when I delayed the filtering the taste remained for several months perhaps a year or longer but gradually it then disappeared until finally I could no longer find it! [11/12/55]

Maynard's very brief response came in the note he had sent to the Rays on November 22nd. "Best explanation I can think of re press vs. free-run is that tannins act as partial antiseptic. Also free-run probably gets more organisms (from surfaces)." And over a half-century later, Peter Martin Ray, a retired Stanford plant physiology professor and former winemaker, now living in Fairbanks, Alaska, contributed the following commentary:

> I remember that MR had a mistaken notion of the spelling of the wine disease called *tourné* in France (with an accent on the *e*, hence pronounced tour-NAY). This is the past participle of the verb *tourner*, which means both to turn, and (at least for milk) to turn sour. As I recall it, this disease is caused by a bacterium that grows as long chains of cells, creating in the infected wine an impression, macroscopically, of silkiness or silky threads when the wine is poured (making the chains of cells align with one another). Since it has a disagreeable flavor and aroma, my recollection is that MR was fearful of getting tourné infections in his wines. He must have had this happen some time in the past, since he described to me the silky appearance—which I haven't actually seen, since I never got a tourné infection. [Via email, 1/28/08]

Between the two formerly close friends there would be bouts of correspondence ahead of them. The folders containing letters and notes between MR and Maynard Amerine from 1956 on, until MR's death in early 1976—slim indeed compared with those of previous years—indicate that MA never failed to reply to MR's requests for technical information, nor did he decline to arrange for, and then report in some detail on, any Martin Ray wines sent to him for testing. But that wonderful camaraderie of old was never to be resumed.

[To be continued in the next issue]