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In the spring of 1928, after nearly six years of residence in Paris, Ernest Hemingway returned to the United States to live.[1] Understandably, then, when he met a French-immigrant family later that year in Sheridan, Wyoming, he sympathetically noted their difficulties in adjusting to and accepting the American way of life. A "foreigner" himself in the New World, he no doubt shared to some extent the family's disappointments and cultural shocks. Hemingway would wait nearly two years to make fictional use of this encounter; thus "Wine of Wyoming" was written and published in the first year of the Great Depression, a time of national stock-taking and general questioning of the promise of America.

Carlos Baker calls "Wine of Wyoming" "a character sketch full of cleanliness and order, a quiet account of simple people who made and drank the wine of Wyoming and wondered if a Catholique named 'Al Schmidt' could be elected President on a platform which demanded an end to Prohibition."[2] Sheridan Baker, on the other hand, dismisses the story as having "little to recommend it beyond the curiosity of

[1]Hemingway and his second wife, Pauline, settled in Key West, Florida, at the "extreme, fugitive tip" of America (Sheridan Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: An Introduction and Interpretation* [New York, 1967], p. 57). However, not until the spring of 1931 did they purchase a home there, an old stone dwelling, which was "their first permanent house in the United States" (Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* [New York, 1969], p. 221).

[2]*Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story,* p. 196. Carlos Baker identifies the French family in Sheridan as Charles and Alice Moncini and their two sons, August and Lucien. "Charles was a trucker at the mines. Alice cooked and served meals. Ernest and Pauline sat on the vine-shaded back porch drinking cold home-brewed beer, with a view across the yellow grainfields, towards the distant brown mountains. They all spoke French together" *(Ibid.).*

They also shared a common faith, for Hemingway had married Pauline within the Catholic Church and "now regarded himself as at least a nominal Catholic" *(Ibid.,* p. 185).

American prohibition in rural form, and the fact that it seems to be almost straight Hemingway autobiography."[3] Actually "Wine of Wyoming" is a perceptive story about the American "melting pot" and the discrepancy between the dream and the reality of American life; it dramatizes the ongoing process of Americanization and reflects the bewilderment, frustration, and disappointment of a French couple who have settled in the American West.

The story opens on a note of disappointment. Two men, wishing to purchase some beer, stop by the home of the Fontans, a French-immigrant family who live on the dusty outskirts of a Wyoming town and who make and sell wine and beer in violation of the "dry laws." But the men, who are drunk, are refused and sent away empty-handed. After they leave, Madame Fontan talks about two of her disappointments in America. She was served " 'pork that was raw,' " she recalls, the only time she ate in an American restaurant.[4] Thoughts of ill-prepared food quickly lead to complaints about her daughter-in-law, who " 'don't cook' " and serves " ' les *beans* en *can*' " (159). Her son's marriage may be seen as a comic parody of the immigrant mother's dream of having her boy grow up to wed a sturdy, native-American girl. Madame Fontan's son is married to an American Indian, who tipped the scales at 185 at the time of the wedding and has since ballooned to 225 pounds. " 'Tout le temps elle stay in the bed and read books,' " complains Madame Fontan. " 'All the time she says sonofabitsh goddam. She don't work' " (159, 169). When the daughter-in-law is not reading, she is attending the movies. Too lazy to cook, too fat to have another baby, too desirous of escaping reality to make a good helpmate, the Indian girl is clearly not the wife that Madame Fontan had envisioned for her hard-working son.

The Indian, of course, is also a "foreigner" in America who, if he strays from the reservation, is engulfed by the purging flames of social assimilation. The fires of Americanization burn *white* hot, and for the culturally weak, like the Indian girl, the process is often one of vulgarization, even corruption. This theme is not a new one for Hemingway; in an earlier story entitled "Ten Indians," Nick Adams passes nine

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[3]*Ernest Hemingway: An Introduction and Interpretation*, p. 84.

[4]Ernest Hemingway, *Winner Take Nothing* (New York, 1933), p. 159. All further references to "Wine of Wyoming" are to page numbers in this edition, cited parenthetically in the text.

drunken Indians along the road as he returns from a Fourth of July celebration.

For the culturally strong, like the Fontans, adapting to the new life is perhaps even more difficult. The father repeatedly expresses concern over the wildness of his younger son and his companions. " 'They're savages,' " he explains after refusing his son's request to hunt alone. " 'They would shoot one another' " (167). André, whose voice is changing, is desperate to prove his manhood on the hunt. Even his challenge to parental authority centers on a gun; he refuses to hand over the rifle when his father demands it. " 'Il est crazy pour le shooting,' " says his mother (167). The lingering tradition of the frontier, symbolized by the gun, is no doubt an accelerating factor in the boy's rebelliousness and urgent need to demonstrate his self-reliance and his maturity by hunting " 'all by myself' " (168). Meanwhile, his parents attempt to cling to their cultural past. They continue to speak their native tongue, but the purity of the language is gone; "it was only French occasionally, and there were many English words and some English constructions" (158). At their Labor Day picnic the Fontans and the other French families reveal their Old World distrust and exclusiveness when some Italians drop by to help celebrate the American holiday. " 'We sung a song about the Italians and they don't understand it. They didn't know we didn't want them, but we didn't have nothing to do with them, and after a while they went away' " (164). But the melting pot is at least simmering, for the Italians do stay for a short time, as does the farmer who hears the singing and comes to investigate. " 'We give him something to drink, and he stayed with us awhile' " (164). Unfortunately, Madame Fontan has brought to the New World her dislike of the Poles; she believes there are too many Polacks in America and, besides, they are dirty. Her prejudice, however, is countered by the tolerance of her husband.

> "Les Polacks sont catholiques," Fontan said.
>
> "That's true," Madame Fontan said. "They go to church, then they fight with knives all the way home and kill each other all day Sunday. But they're not real catholiques. They're Polack catholiques."
>
> "All catholiques are the same," Fontan said. "One catholique is like another" (169-170).

But there are limits to Fontan's tolerance. He agrees with his wife that there are too many churches in America.

St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, the Frenchman whose observations on life in British America were published as *Letters from an American Farmer* in 1782, was struck by the religious tolerance in the colonies. "Religious indifference," he declared, is "one of the strongest characteristics of the Americans." Crèvecoeur spoke directly to the American myth. He saw the American as "a new man" who had left "behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners."[5] But though his sanguine observations may have been true for the eighteenth-century, they were discredited by the religious attacks upon the Democratic candidate during the presidential campaign of 1928. Hemingway's several allusions to the candidacy of Al Smith in "Wine of Wyoming" serve to remind us of the discrepancy between American myth and reality in the twentieth century and to link Smith's political fate with the private fate of the Fontans. As the daughter of Fontan's cousin tells Madame Fontan: " 'En Amérique il ne faut pas être catholique. It's not good to be catholique. The Americans don't like you to be catholique. It's like the dry law' " (168-169).

The attacks upon Al Smith and his supporters during and prior to the 1928 campaign clearly revealed that ancient prejudices had flourished in the New World. Adna W. Leonard, Methodist Bishop and president of the New York Anti-Saloon League, warned Governor Smith in 1926 that "no Governor can kiss the papal ring and get within gunshot of the White House." The United States, declared the good Bishop, is a "Protestant nation and, as long as the English language is interwoven with the word of God, America will remain Protestant."[6] Even William Allen White, the respected Kansas editor and spokesman for Midwest America, betrayed his Protestant bias during the heat of the campaign: "The whole Puritan civilization which has built a sturdy, orderly nation," he warned, "is threatened by Smith."[7] The "Ohio Edition" of *The American Issue* summed up the attacks on Smith's candidacy:

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[5]Michel Guillaume St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer,* Everyman's Library ed. (London and New York, 1926), pp. 51, 44, 43.

[6]*New York Times,* 9 Aug. 1926, p. 2, col. 1; p. 1, col. 5.

[7]*New York Times,* 13 July 1928, p. 4, col. 4.

> "If you believe in Anglo-Saxon Protestant domination; if you believe in the maintenance of that civilization founded by our puritan ancestors, and preserved by our fathers; if you believe in those principles which have made this country what it is; if you believe in prohibition, its observance and enforcement, and if you believe in a further restricted immigration rather than letting down the bars still lower, then whether you are a Republican or a Democrat, you will vote for Hoover rather than Smith."[8]

In "Wine of Wyoming" the Fontans' interest in Smith is limited to his Catholicism and his opposition to Prohibition. But Hemingway, one suspects, is using Smith and his impending defeat at the polls to extend his theme of disappointment to cover the thwarted prospects of the "foreigner" in America. Although Smith was a third-generation Irish-American, for many "new" Americans his political prominence and early success symbolized the immigrant's dream come true. The French economist and historian André Siegfried, writing in 1927, stressed the importance of Smith's origins to his national prestige:

> This child of the pavement was born in the slum quarters of East Side New York, of common Irish parents, through whom he is directly descended from the Old Irish peasantry. The enormous mass of immigrants rightly look upon him as their mouthpiece, for he is Catholic . . . and above all, he proclaims a new Americanism in which the old Nordic Protestant tradition counts for nothing. In spite of his crudeness, this Irish-American stands for the best in the non-Anglo-Saxon community, and the foreign population feels for the first time that he gives them access to power and honours.[9]

But Smith went down to defeat the very next year, and political analysts agree that his origins and Catholicism were major factors in his electoral rout.[10] Oscar Handlin, author of *Al Smith and His America,* saw Smith's defeat as evidence of the corruption of the dream of America as a "society of open opportunity, where every man, whatever his background or origin, could move to the place to which ability entitled

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[8]Quoted in Edmund A. Moore, *A Catholic Runs for President: The Campaign of 1928* (New York, 1956), p. 187n.

[9]André Siegfried, *America Comes of Age,* trans. H. H. Hemming and Doris Hemming (New York, 1927), p. 266.

[10]In the election Hoover defeated Smith by an electoral vote of 444 to 87.

him." Smith, according to Handlin, was a "victim" of the "artificial barriers to opportunity" that were raised in the twentieth century in contravention of the old ideals.[11]

The Fontans, too, have run up against barriers in the New World. Natives of a country where the consumption of wine and beer is an accepted and deeply ingrained social custom, they become "victims" of the Prohibition laws in America. For the Fontans drinking is one of life's simple pleasures when properly indulged (they are appalled by the American men who mix whiskey with beer and wine and by American women who drink themselves sick at the table). The money which they earn from their illicit product seems to be secondary to their own love of the grape and the hops. Fontan, we are told several times, " 'est crazy pour le vin' " (158); Madame Fontan, on the other hand, loves beer, which she learned to enjoy as a little girl and which she believes is very good for the health. In her section of France, she says, " 'Everybody drinks beer' " (173). She is frankly puzzled by the system of justice in the land of the free which prohibits the enjoyment of "la biere" and "le vin" and brands her good husband a criminal.

> "Already we paid seven hundred fifty-five dollars in fines when they arrested Fontan. Twice the police arrested us and once the governments. All the money we made all the time Fontan worked in the mines and I did washing. We paid it all. They put Fontan in jail. Il n'a jamais fait de mal à personne."
>
> "He's a good man," I said. "It's a crime."
>
> "We don't charge too much money. The wine one dollar a litre. The beer ten cents a bottle. We never sell the beer before it's good. Lots of places they sell the beer right away when they make it, and then it gives everybody a headache. What's the matter with that?" (172)

We are not told what youthful dream beckoned Fontan to America. But, as President John F. Kennedy observed, "immigration is by definition a gesture of faith in social mobility. It is the expression in action of a positive belief in the possibility of a better life."[12] But the better life has eluded this immigrant from France, now "an old man with small mine-tired body" (161). Although he went West and even

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[11]Oscar Handlin, *Al Smith and His America* (Boston, 1958), pp. ix, x.

[12]John F. Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants*, rev. and enlarged ed. (London, 1964), pp. 67-68.

settled in a frontier state, following the classic American formula, he has failed to find the key to the door of success. Symbolic of his failure and frustration is his inability to open the door of the house where his latest batch of wine is stored. He borrows a key from a neighbor woman, but the key doesn't fit. Both doors, front and back, are locked tight. When he returns home without the wine, "all the happiness went from Madame Fontan's face" and he "sat down in a corner with his head in his hands" (183). Fontan feels "disgraced" because he is unable to share a bottle of his new wine with the narrator, who has come to say good-bye. It is one more frustration in a long life of disappointment.

The snow-capped mountains form the backdrop for "Wine of Wyoming" and finally emerge as symbols of illusion. The mountains are "a long way away" (157), and the snow on their tops contrasts sharply with the heat, the dust, and the sun-baked houses in the valley. On the second afternoon the narrator sits on the porch looking at the distant mountains.

> There were furrowed brown mountains, and above them three peaks and a glacier with snow that you could see through the trees. The snow looked very white and pure and unreal. Madame Fontan came out and put down the bottles on the table.
>
> "What you see out there?"
>
> "The snow."
>
> "C'est joli, la neige."
>
> "Have a glass, too."
>
> "All right."
>
> She sat down on a chair beside me. "Schmidt," she said. "If he's the President, you think we get the wine and beer all right?"
>
> "Sure," I said. "Trust Schmidt" (171-172).

But things are not altogether what they appear to be. Smith, despite his campaign promises to change the dry laws, is running for the Presidency on a platform which "pledges the party and its nominees to an honest effort to enforce the eighteenth Amendment."[13] Similarly, the beauty of the distant snow is deceptive. It looks white and pure, but in reality, as we are told later in the story, "the new snow had not yet come to stay on the high mountains; there was only the old sun-melted snow and the ice, and from a long way away it shone very brightly" (178).

[13] *National Party Platforms,* comps. Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, 3rd ed. (Urbana and London, 1966), p. 277.

Thrice more Hemingway alludes to the mountains, relating them to the theme of disappointment or reinforcing the illusion motif. On the eve of departure the narrator lay on his bed, "the windows open and the air coming in cool from the mountains," thinking "it was a shame not to have gone to Fontan's" (179-180). If he had gone that night to take his leave, Fontan, who was waiting with three bottles of his new wine, would have been spared the disgrace and disappointment of the following day. But as fate would have it, a wineless and sad farewell is taken the next afternoon. After waving good-bye to the Fontans, who "stood together sadly on the porch" (184-185), the narrator and his wife drive off.

> We were through the town and out on the smooth road beyond, with the stubble of grain-fields on each side and the mountains off to the right. It looked like Spain, but it was Wyoming.
>
> "I hope they have a lot of good luck."
>
> "They won't," I said, "and Schmidt won't be President either."
>
> . . . As the road rose we could see across the hills and away across the plain of the valley to the mountains. They were farther away now and they looked more like Spain than ever (185).

Perhaps Hemingway's insistence on the similarity between the Spanish and the Wyoming landscapes is intended to suggest that, as far as opportunities for success, happiness, and "good luck" are concerned, there is little to choose between Europe and America. Clearly, by story's end, the discrepancy between the appearance and the reality of the snow-capped mountains has come to stand for the discrepancy between the expectations of the Fontans and the reality of their lives. From the distant shores of Europe, America no doubt promised much and "shone very brightly." But for the Fontans the promise has proven to be illusory, and the possibility of fulfillment is as remote as the distant mountains which rise in the background.

The American Dream, wrote President Kennedy, "was in large part the product of millions of plain people beginning a new life in the conviction that life could indeed be better, and each new wave of immigration rekindled the dream."[14] In 1930, however, Hemingway believed

[14] *A Nation of Immigrants,* p. 68.

that the dream was flickering, and in "Wine of Wyoming" he focused, not on the beginning and the hope of a plain immigrant couple, but rather on the closing years of their new life with all of its accumulated disappointments. For all of its pessimism, it is a quiet story, at times even gently comic. But before the decade is out, Hemingway would write more bitterly of failure in America and grimly comment on the disillusioned who used "the native tradition of the Colt or Smith and Wesson . . . those admirable American instruments so easily carried, so sure of effect, so well designed to end the American dream when it becomes a nightmare."[15]

[15]Ernest Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not* (New York, 1937), p. 238.