WINE OF WYOMING

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In late July 1928, a month after the birth of his first child with Pauline Pfeiffer, Ernest Hemingway headed to Wyoming to finish *A Farewell to Arms* and to fish in the Bighorn Mountains with his friend Bill Horne. By August 18, he wrote to Guy Hickok, a journalist and a friend from his time in Paris, that he was getting "good wine" from "a nice French family (bootlegger) where we sit on the vine shaded porch" (*Letters vol. 3,* 428). The family was Charles and Alice Moncini and their two sons August and Lucien who lived in Sheridan. Like the Fontans, the Moncinis made and sold wine from their home (*Letters vol.* 3, 428n) He introduced them to Pfeiffer when she joined him there, and the experience served as the inspiration for "Wine of Wyoming." Hemingway would later write to editor Maxwell Perkins that the story was "nothing but straight reporting of what [I] heard and saw when was finishing A Farewell To Arms out in Sheridan and Big Horn" (*Letters vol. 5,* 541).

On October 11, 1928, Hemingway wrote to Perkins that he had "a story about 3/4 done" *(Letters vol. 3,* 467*),* but the story was not published until August 1930 in *Scribner's Magazine.* Hemingway submitted the story to Perkins for the magazine in May, confidently defending his decision not to translate the French in the story: "Don't let anyone tell you . . . [it] has too much French in it. Everyone that reads Scribners [Magazine] knows some French or knows somebody that knows some French" (*Letters vol. 4,* 298).

The story was the first finished of *Winner Take Nothing* and received some of its kindest critical attention. Critics felt that the story stood out for its simplicity, sensitivity, and subtlety in a collection that many found grisly, brutal, and deliberately shocking. However, it later fell out of favor, as some have speculated, due to an increasing shortage of French readers among the American public (Martin 364).

It has subsequently received less scholarly discussion than other stories from the collection (most notably the Nick Adams stories); but, among what discussion there is, clear themes have emerged of intolerance, immigration, communion, marriage, and the differences between the Old World and the New. Joseph Flora's *Hemingway's Nick Adams* examines the marital themes of the story while arguing that the story ought to be included as one of the Nick Adams works, citing its placement near "A Day's Wait" and "Fathers and Sons" as Hemingway's "inviting his readers to consider the oldest story of the collection . . . as part of a late Nick trilogy" (234). Sheldon Norman Grebstein also focuses on the narrator, but, rather than debating his identity, he explores the implications of the fluidity of the narrator's role as both detached storyteller and significant actor. Grebstein, like others, observes the story's repeated contrast between the refinement of the Old World and "boorish Americans and the corruptions of American life" (65). Martin, too, writes about the story's illustration of "the contrast of European generosity and native American crudity" (363). Kenneth G. Johnston examines the story's political undertones and its inclusion of Al Smith's failed 1928 presidential campaign as illustrating "the thwarted prospects of the 'foreigner' in America" (163).

More recently, H. R. Stoneback writes about the story's depiction of Catholicism and its themes of "communion and dryness (in its several senses)" (210). Ann Putnam looks at how the story fits within Hemingway's personal and fictional understanding of

the West, especially in the story's "ambivalence about place in general, and the West in particular," which, Putnam finds, closely mirrors Hemingway's own feelings (18). George Monteiro describes "Wine of Wyoming" as a story of "sheer transparency," where "[t]here appears to be nothing left unsaid" (129), while Catherine Keyser discusses the story's culinary representation of race, immigration, and culture.

"Wine of Wyoming" has four major sections distinguished by the section breaks that occur after lines 344:6, 348:2, and 350:29. A nameless narrator (returning to America from an expatriate life in France) shares wine and food with a French immigrant family living in northern Wyoming, but, on the last night of his stay, fails to come to the goodbye party they throw for him. Although critics like Monteiro have remarked on the story's straightforwardness, "Wine of Wyoming" is not as simple as it appears. Hemingway plays with and comments on narration and storytelling through the writer-narrator's choices to reveal and conceal throughout the story. The story also takes a complicated view of the American dream, highlighting the hypocrisy, intolerance, consumption, and destruction that plague the frontier and its inhabitants. Despite its bygone Prohibition plotline, the story's themes of immigration and intolerance and environmental decay and destruction feel sadly relevant to a modern reader. "Wine of Wyoming" offers a small tragedy with grander implications, as a cast of characters relate the disappointments of bigotry, solitude, scarcity, and debauchery yet seem unable to recognize or prevent contributing to their continuation.

Before Hemingway settled on "Wine of Wyoming, other titles considered were "Il Est Crazy Pour Le Vin" [He Is Crazy about The Wine], "A Lover of Wine," "Pichot Est Crazy Pour Le Vin" (in earlier drafts Pichot was the family name, not Fontan), "September," and "The New Country" (Smith 218). Many of these titles focus on Fontan

and foreshadow his eventual shame, but they fail to capture the context. "Wine of Wyoming" alludes to the story's crisis but emphasizes the importance of its setting. Like the wine the title references, the story is the product of the specific location and time. The story is set in Sheridan, Wyoming, in what seems to be mid to late September, judging from one of the rejected titles and Mme. Fontan's story of the Labor Day picnic. Although August would have been more biographically true to Hemingway's experience, setting the story in September establishes an early autumnal mood, where the uncomfortable heat of summer lingers, but the growth and plenty have already ended.

The time period is also creates one of the central conflicts of the story: Prohibition and the illegal nature of the beer and wine the Fontans make and share with the narrator. The first readers of the story when it appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1930 would still have been living under Prohibition, whereas many readers of *Winner Take Nothing,* published in October 1933, might have been legally drinking after the Twenty-First Amendment passed in early December of that year.

In the story, Fontan's cousin makes a perceptive connection between the intolerance for Catholics in America and the dry laws that seem designed to target Catholic immigrants' religious practices and traditional agriculture and cuisine. She tells Mme Fontan, "En Amérique il ne faut pas être catholique. [In America you must not be Catholic.] It's not good to be catholique… It's like the dry law" (347). Although it certainly doesn't feel like it to the Fontans, Catholicism grew rapidly due to the "mass immigration of nearly 9 million Roman Catholics between 1890 and 1925," making it "the largest denomination in the United States" (Olson 101). However, this increased visibility led to increased intolerance and "triggered another round of anti-Catholicism, led by the American Protective Association in the 1890s and the Ku Klux Klan after World War I"

(101). Historian Norman H. Clark observes a "kind of class-conscious hostility to non-Protestant foreigners which . . . had occasionally gripped Prohibitionists when they observed the drinking habits of recent immigrants—'the ignorant horde,' a Prohibitionist newspaper reported, 'that Europe sends over here to rule America'" (80).

The repeated mentions of Al Smith's presidential campaign implies that this story is specifically set in September 1928. Al Smith (1873–1944) was the 1928 Democratic presidential candidate, who lost to Herbert Hoover after, as Kenneth Johnston points out, multiple attacks on his Catholic faith, which "clearly revealed that ancient prejudices had flourished in the new world" (162). Smith was Irish American, the grandchild of immigrants, and, Johnston writes, "political analysts agree that his origins and Catholicism were major factors" in his loss to Hoover, receiving only eighty-seven electoral votes to Hoover's 444 (163). However, these same traits are what endears him to the Fontan family within the story, themselves Catholic immigrants to America. Mme. Fontan asks the narrator, "If he's the president, you think we get the wine and beer all right?" (348). Mme. Fontan wants to believe that, if Smith is elected, their dry law troubles will be over. The Fontans have already paid heavy fines, and M. Fontan went to jail. Wyoming's fines for violating the dry laws were initially closer to $200 but by 1929 (believing the punishment was not severe enough to deter anyone) the state legislature passed penalties that went as high as $10,000 and up to five years in jail (Larson 441).

But, as Hemingway and readers knew, "despite his campaign promises to change the dry laws," Smith's official platform promised to uphold them (Johnston 165). The story's readers, first in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1930, then in the 1933 collection, also would already be aware of Smith's eventual defeat, lending an odd dramatic irony to the story as the American narrator (knowing his country too well) and the reader (knowing the real

results of the election) both recognize the futility of the Fontans' hopes for a president who represents the Catholic immigrant population.

The story's setting in 1928 is significant for another reason; readers know what will happen to the characters next. As they drive away from the Fontans' house for the last time, the narrator's unnamed companion says, "I hope they have a lot of good luck." The narrator replies, "They won't…and Schmidt [Al Smith] won't be President either" (353). His predictions are prophetic, but already known to the story's readers. Smith would lose the 1928 election by a landslide and that only bad luck would follow with the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression.