

WINE TO WATER

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Ernest Hemingway began to write the short story “The Wine of Wyoming”¹ in October 1928, some seven months after his return to the United States from Paris, where he had been living since late 1921. And although he was technically a resident of the United States, living on the rim of America in Key West, Florida, his values and point of view had changed forever. Often he felt like a stranger in his native land. He could hunt and fish in Wyoming, but his thoughts were of Europe, as reflected in a letter written in Wyoming to his friend Waldo Pierce in August 1928: “I’ve got to see some toros. By God every Sunday evening this summer at 5 o’clock seems as if my whole life were pointless.”² The narrator of the story, who has also been living in France, looks at the country: “It looked like Spain, but it was Wyoming”(p. 353). The narrator is in America, and he sees the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming in the distance, one of the emblematic scenes of the American West, but “they looked more like Spain than ever” (353). Up in Wyoming, death in the afternoon was the shooting of prairie dogs from a Ford roadster. It was a long journey to Spain.

Describing both Hemingway and his second wife Pauline at the time of their arrival in the United States, Michael Reynolds has noted “the fact was that neither of them, Ernest or Pauline, was any longer merely an American; they had lived too long in Europe and the experience had changed them irrevocably.”³ Wyoming was in another country, and in that country, his native land, Hemingway felt disoriented. Consequently, as he often did, Hemingway converted his internal turmoil into fiction. In “The Wine of Wyoming,” Hemingway creates a character whose curious idiolect, composed of an admixture of English and French, and confusing use of English syntax reflect his own sense of disorientation, and which, in turn, causes the reader to experience a similar sensation.

It is not imperative that the translator be aware of Hemingway’s personal situation in order to translate the story; only the nuances of both the idiolect and the syntactic anomalies need be captured – for example, by adaptation of the former, and through some form of equivalence of the latter – and a communicative rendering will follow. As will be demonstrated, it is evident that J. Gómez del Castillo, the Spanish translator of “The Wine of Wyoming,”⁴ either was not aware of

1 Ernest Hemingway, “The Wine of Wyoming,” in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, The Finca Vigía Edition (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons/Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 342-354. All further quotations will be taken from this edition.

2 Carlos Baker, ed., *Ernest Hemingway, Selected Letters, 1917-1961* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1981), pp. 282-283.

3 Michael Reynolds, *Hemingway: The American Homecoming* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 198.

4 Ernest Hemingway, “El vino de Wyoming,” in *Los asesinos*, Trans. J. Gómez del Castillo, third ed. (Barcelona: Caralt, 1991), pp. 127-145. All further quotations will be taken from this edition.

said nuances or chose to ignore them, adopting what could be classified as an explicatory translation strategy, a conscientious effort to clarify those elements in the source text that create ambiguity and perplexity. This approach not only negates Hemingway's stylistic devices and their effect on the reader, but also obfuscates the characterization of the principal character.

The use of French is one of the two stylistic devices Hemingway employs to induce disorientation, a device which both reflects the feelings of the main protagonist while at the same time causing readers to find themselves confused and disoriented. Madame Fontan and her husband are French immigrants who live near Sheridan, Wyoming, and earn their living by running a boarding house and selling bootleg wine as a sideline in Prohibition-era America. Although Mr. Fontan appears to have adapted relatively well to his adopted land, Madame Fontan is unable to comprehend fully the customs of this strange country. She is a foreigner and will forever remain so, for her values and cultural heritage have not prepared her to live in a foreign land that is for her, at times, incomprehensible.

She is not fluent in English, and often what has been said in English must be explained to her in French. In her speech, she frequently alternates between French and what has become her idiolect - English/French. Referring to her daughter-in-law, an American Indian, Madame Fontan says: "All the time she reads. Rien que des books. Tout le temps elle stay in bed and read books" (343).

It would be logical to suppose that average American readers are not familiar with French and, therefore, when confronted with ubiquitous dialogues such as these they are likely to be, at least, perplexed. Much of what she says in French can be ascertained from the text in English, but some of it cannot.

In an attempt at preserving the multilingual dialogue, the translator does maintain the patois in translation: "Lee todo el tiempo. *Rien que des* libros. *Tout le temps elle* (5) está en la cama y lee libros" (130). Although the study of French has been somewhat more widespread in Spain than in the United States, it could be argued that not all Spanish speaking readers are so sufficiently familiar with French that the use of it would not create problems of understanding and, therefore, that Castillo has managed to recreate the effect produced by the source text. Unfortunately, as we will see, this is not the case.

Madame Fontan is surprised by much of the behavior of the Americans; she is baffled by many of their customs; and the move to America has also meant the end of something important to her. It has signified the loss of any close contact with her religion – Catholicism. In contrast to France, where there was a vast majority of Catholics and very few Protestants, there are many Protestants and Baptists in Wyoming and very few Catholics: "Ici il y a trop de churches. En France il y a seulement les catholiques et les protestants-et très peu de protestants. Mais ici rien que de churches. Quand j'étais venu ici je disais [. . .]" (347). Although she remains a Catholic, she no longer attends mass. Here Madame Fontan expresses another factor which adds to her alienation, and readers who do not understand the French, are alienated from the text, for in order to capture some sense of the above dialogue they must recur to contextual clues in English that afford a related idea.

In the translation, the above dialogue, apart from slight syntactical modifications, appears to be faithfully reproduced: "*Ici il y a trop des iglesias. En France il y a seulement les catholiques et les*

protestants. Ce et très peu des protestants. Mais ici rien que des iglesias. Quand j'étais venue ici je disais"⁵ [. . .] (135).

It has been mentioned that Castillo's treatment of the French in the story appears to reflect that of the original. Two disruptive elements, however, intrude not on the resonance of the prose but rather on the visual effect achieved by Hemingway. The translator resorts to both italics and footnotes when he transcribes the French. In the original, the lack of italics lends authenticity to the dialogues, avoiding the appearance of academic prose occasioned by the use of italics in the translation. The footnotes in the translation which provide the Spanish translation of the French used in the original not only interrupt the flow of the dialogue but also, because of their explicatory nature, nullify the disorienting effect they produce in the source text. And the first drop of water is added to the wine.

Although he was writing for an English-speaking public, Hemingway believed that the use of French was essential to the story, as he stated in a letter to his editor Maxwell Perkins: "The French is necessary in this." (5) The French is fundamental for more than one reason. Madame Fontan's idiolect certainly contributes to her characterization, but the extensive use of French or French/English seems excessive if it is viewed as exclusively having this purpose. Even if the readers understand French and are thus able to decipher Madame Fontan's linguistic pastiche, they are perplexed by the incessant barrage. If, however, they do not understand French and are consequently unable to decipher the mixture of French and English, they are, just as Madame Fontan, confused and disoriented, and Hemingway's purpose has been served.

The second element in the story which causes perplexity and disorientation is Madame Fontan's use of English syntax. The effect is more subtle and cumulative, like a slightly off-key note played throughout a symphony. Structurally, the story is centered around dialogues between an effaced narrator and Madame Fontan, who relates various incidents which demonstrate her sense of confusion when confronted by a culture she cannot fully comprehend. Hemingway manipulates her syntax in such a way that on one hand her speech is in the character of a foreigner who is not fluent in English; on the other hand readers are confronted with syntactical anomalies that cause them to pause or to search the text for clarification. In the translated story, more water is added to the wine. If the translator adopted the strategy of explication concerning the translation composed of French/English, he now takes the tact of clarification concerning the translation of Madame Fontan's English syntax, as will be evident in the following passages.

While the narrator and the Fontans are drinking home-brewed beer, they tell him about some trout they had once caught. Madame Fontan suddenly exclaims: "Good trout, all right, too. My God, yes. All the same; half-pound one ounce." Confused, the narrator asks, "How big?" (345). Madame Fontan, accustomed to not being understood, repeats: "Half-pound one ounce. Just right to eat. All the same size; half-pound one ounce" (345). Madame Fontan's peculiar way of expressing weight causes both the narrator and the reader a moment of confusion, for something either weighs a half-pound or it does not, in which case the weight is given in ounces if it does not surpass a pound. In the translation the weight of the trout is increased and the effect is lost: "Buenas truchas, también. ¡Dios mío!, sí. Casi todas iguales; pesaban más de medio kilo cada una." "¡Qué grandes!" (134) is the flat response of the narrator in the translation.

5 Baker, p. 323.

It is when we are confronted with Madame Fontan's use –or misuse– of the verb tenses that we find ourselves in the most treacherous terrain. Nevertheless, we do have at our disposal a type of compass to guide us across this landscape with figures. In general she employs the present or the bare infinitive to express the past, although, it may added, her confusion of the tenses is not restricted to the two mentioned above. Normally in any one dialogue sequence Madame Fontan, when she is referring to the past, will either employ a verb in past tense somewhere within the sequence or an adverb of time with reference to the past. In the following example, she relates how she prepared a jack-rabbit, describing the past action with two verbs in present and linking the sequence to the contextual past of the passage with a past tense verb: “My God, I make the sauce all right, and he eat it all and said, ‘La sauce est meilliure que le jack’” (349). Even in this rather straightforward example, we are momentarily disoriented, for we expect the past tense but we are confronted with the present.

In the translation, however, all paths are clearly marked, and if the story is read only in translation, the reader is led to believe that Madame Fontan speaks standard, grammatical English, as the following translation of the example given above clearly demonstrates: “¡Dios mío! Hice bien la salsa y él la comió y dijo: “*La sauce est meilliure que le liebre.*” (138).

Aspect in the following example is postponed until the final independent clause; when it is finally revealed, the reader must then anaphorically convert the two initial independent clauses to the past: “There's a farmer comes to see what's the matter, and we give him something to drink, and he stayed with us a while” (345). The translation, “vino un agricultor para ver qué pasaba y le dimos algo de beber y se quedó con nosotros un rato,” (133) is as transparent as spring water.

There are many things that Madame Fontan does not understand, but she is long past the point of asking for explanations. On the other hand the perceptive reader does seek explanations. It is a simple enquiry: when did the event described by Madame Fontan occur? The key in the following sequence of dialogue lies, as has been mentioned, in the adverb of time. At an Indian camp the elder of Madam Fontan's two sons met an American Indian woman and married her. The woman is beyond Madame Fontan's grasp, as she explains to the narrator:

When he brought her home I thought I would die. He's such a good boy and works hard all the time and never run around or make any trouble. Then he goes away to work in the oil-fields and brings home this Indienne that weighs right then one hundred eighty-five pounds (343).

The stylistic device that causes the reader to pause and mentally recast the sentence in this passage, as in many others, is the denial of what is syntactically expected. The signposts exist, but they are askew. The first sentence –a verb in past tense followed by another past and then a conditional– is a comfortable one.

The second sentence is composed of verbs in the present indicative. Upon reading “then”, however, we expect it to be followed by a verb in past tense, just as we expect the verb preceding the second use of “then” to be in past tense. The verbs following and preceding “then” are in present indicative, and in order to correctly interpret the sentence we must either carry along with us the linguistic baggage of “brought” or rely upon the adverb *then*, or both.

The translation of this passage, as with the translation of the story in general, leads us to the question of “what to do with a diminished thing.”⁶

Cuando la trajo a casa creí que iba a morir. Es un muchacho tan bueno y trabaja tanto todo el tiempo y nunca anda por ahí dando vueltas ni metiéndose en líos. De pronto se fué a trabajar en los yacimientos petrolíferos y se trajo a casa a esa india que pesaba entonces ochenta y cuatro kilos (131).

In the previously cited examples we have seen that whenever Madame Fontan employs a verb in past tense, regardless of its position within the dialogue sequence, it is a clear signal that at least one of the other sentences in the dialogue group also refers to the past. But in the following passage the terrain is mined:

‘There was one man,’ Madame Fontan said, ‘and his wife never lets him out. So he tells her he’s tired, and goes to bed, and when she goes to the show he comes straight down here, sometimes in his pyjamas just with a coat over them’ (350).

It would appear, based on prior experience, that the interpretation of the passage hinges on “there was one man,” since the verb is in past, and, consequently, that this was indeed a past action. Later, however, we discover that this is habitual behavior on the part of the man:

‘C’est un original,’ Fontan said, ‘mais vraiment gentil. He’s a nice fellow’.

‘My God, yes, nice fellow all right,’ Madame Fontan said. ‘He’s always in bed when his wife gets back from the show’ (350).

It could be argued that since Madame Fontan’s grammar is not to be trusted, we cannot be sure when she says that he is always in bed when his wife returns whether she is referring to the present or to the past. Mr. Fontan, however, is a reliable informant whose command of English is far superior to that of his wife, and the implication in “c’est un original, he’s a nice fellow,” is that he will continue to make his nocturnal visits to the Fontan’s house in order to drink bootleg wine. With this, and the fact of Madame Fontan’s repetition of the present tense in the final sentence, in mind, we now, contrary to the norm, convert the past tense to the present.

Disoriented, the translator, perhaps because he has also relied on the normal linguistic pattern of Madame Fontan’s speech, does not find his way through the mine field:

‘Había un hombre,’ dijo *Madame*, ‘que su esposa nunca le dejaba venir. Él le decía que estaba cansado y se iba a la cama, y cuando ella salía al cine, él venía directamente aquí en pijama con solo un abrigo encima.’

‘*C’est un original,*’ dijo Fontan, ‘*mais vraiment gentil* (1). Es un buen tipo.

‘¡Oh sí! Un buen tipo, tienes razón. Siempre estaba en la cama cuando su mujer volvía del cine’ (140).

By employing the Spanish imperfect, the translator converts what is most probably habitual behavior in the present, and in the future by extension, to habitual action in the past.

6 Peter Griffin, *Less Than A Treason: Hemingway in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. vii.

In the following passage, Hemingway manipulates syntax in such a way as to create a more subtle effect. Once again the voice is that of Madame Fontan:

One time a fellow comes here came here and said he wanted me to cook them a big supper and they drink one two bottles of wine, and their girls come too, and then they go to the dance. All right, I said. So I made a big supper, and when they come already they drank a lot (349).

Madame Fontan's confusion with respect to the verb tenses – *comes here/came here* – mirrors the reader's initial confusion concerning this passage in general. The juxtaposition of past and present, a technique foreshadowing Hemingway's concern with time, the melding of past and present, that would coalesce in *Green Hills of Africa*, is an effective design: it demonstrates Madame Fontan's cultural bewilderment, as well as presenting a narrator who often feels displaced, one who, in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, sees the mountains of Spain – all of which transmits a sense of disconcertment to the reader. The customary guideposts are standing in the passage above, and Hemingway, by the technique of repetition, has taught us to read them. When Madame Fontan employs the present tense verb form in conjunction with adverbials of time referring to the past or verbs in the simple past, we have become accustomed to transforming the present tense to the simple past. Following the author's lead, the choice between "comes here/came here," contextually placed between "one time" and "he wanted," is clear, as is the mental conversion of "they come" to *they came* preceded by "So I made a big supper...."

In this passage, however, Hemingway increases temporal confusion. The guideposts are no longer to be trusted. "They drink", "girls come," and "they go" must be interpreted not as simple past but rather as the simple future of a past action, resulting in *they would drink, girls would come, they would go*. The normal adverbial signs are now also deceptive. The use of *already* in "when they come already they drank a lot" channels the reader to convert the simple past to the pluperfect: *they had already drunk a lot*. Time and place. Spain or Wyoming. France or Wyoming.

Faithful to his translation strategy, Castillo resorts to clarification and simplification, including the addition of the conjunction *or*, thus negating the effect of the story on the reader, as well as its major intent:

Una vez un tipo vino aquí y me dijo que quería que le hiciera una gran comida y que beberían una o dos botellas de vino y sus muchachas también. Luego todos irían a bailar. Bueno, dije. De modo que hice una gran comida, y cuando vinieron bebieron bastante (139).

Let us add one last metaphorical drop of water to the wine. There are many instances in the story in which the pronoun and its referent are slightly confusing. As has already been mentioned, it is again caused by the denial of what is normally expected of the syntax. Madame Fontan tells the narrator how she came to acquire a taste for beer:

The man that owns the brewery said to me and my sister to go to the brewery and drink the beer, and then we'd like the hops. That's true. Then we liked them all right. He had them give us the beer. We liked them all right then (349).

That “them” refers anaphorically to the hops in the third sentence is clear, for Madame Fontan has previously said that she did not like the odor of hops coming from the brewery. The confusion arises in the final use of “them”, the confusion stemming from the proximity of “beer” and from what is logically expected. It is not normally the taste of hops that a beer drinker likes; it is the generic taste of beer. With this in mind, when we read “beer” in the penultimate sentence followed by “we liked,” the expected pronoun is “it.” “Them” causes us to bypass the logical referent and make the anaphoric connection with hops. Although this argument may appear to leak upon close examination, there are in the text various instances in which reference is manipulated so as to cause the effect just mentioned. It has a cumulative effect. It is another discordant resonance reverberating throughout the text.

Perhaps in the translated passage some equivalent ambiguity has been retained:

El propietario de la cervecería nos dijo a mí y a mi hermana que fuéramos a la cervecería y bebiéramos cerveza y luego nos gustó el olor del lúpulo. Es verdad. Luego nos gustaba mucho. Él nos daba la cerveza y entonces nos gustaba (138).

While there is the transposition of “them” to “el olor del lúpulo” in the final sentence, the subject of the verb *gustaba* could be either “el olor del lúpulo” or “la cerveza.” In any case, the normal procedure is to clarify any reference in the text that might cause ambiguity or confusion.

“Wine of Wyoming” often causes the reader to pause and ask himself “what on earth is this all about.”⁷ It is the same question that Madame Fontan, confused by a culture that she does not fully comprehend, has probably asked herself on many occasions. The feeling of disorientation that the use of French and the cunning manipulation of syntax produces on the reader reflects the bewilderment felt by Madame Fontan. In this “story of lost amenities and displaced customs,” as Michael Reynolds has classified it,⁸ the reader must traverse difficult terrain patiently, as patiently as the Fontans wait for their wine to reach the right moment. Castillo, the Spanish translator, has also crossed difficult terrain, and in so doing he has righted the sign posts and lighted the way. Hemingway biographer Kenneth Lynn dismisses the story, writing that “far from giving promise that the Rocky Mountain West would someday figure importantly in his fiction, “Wine of Wyoming” indicated that he didn’t wish to cope with it ...” (409)⁹. Perhaps the translator has also approached the story with the same attitude, for he has given us a translation that explains and clarifies the source text. He has given us a map with all the routes clearly marked. And the wine of Wyoming that he serves is not of Hemingway vintage.

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