Quote Analysis Of Montana 1948

1. “The harshness of the land and the flattening effect of wind and sky probably accounted for the relative tranquility of Mercer County. Life was simply too hard…nothing was left over for raising hell or making trouble.”

In this chapter, David immediately draws a connection between the people of Mercer County, Montana, and the natural world. The environment itself is harsh and desolate--there's not much around but wind and dust. Humans have had to fight a long battle with the natural world in order to build civilization in this part of Montana. Such a battle is so long and difficult that there's not much time left over for 'mischief.' In other words, Mercer County is a calm, tranquil place because everyone works so hard just to get by. The quote is suspenseful, even theatrical, because it immediately suggests that there was , in fact, some 'trouble' in Montana--and that's what David is going to tell us about. And yet, as David will show, much of the 'trouble' in Mercer County took place in secret, beneath this facade of tranquility and hard work. As David matures, he'll become more aware of the secret evils taking place in his beloved hometown.

2. “As long as my father was going to be a sheriff, a position with so much potential for excitement, danger, and bravery, why couldn’t some of that promise be fulfilled?”

In this quote, we're introduced to Wesley Hayden, David's father. Wesley isn't at all like the stereotypical sheriffs David has met in 'cowboy and Indian' Westerns--on the contrary, he's polite, laid back, and generally mild-mannered. In this, Wesley seems to be a disappointment his son: David wants a father who fights heroic battles and arrests lots of criminals. In short, David is bored. He wishes that his life in Montana were a little more interesting--as far as he can tell, nothing of any importance happens anywhere nearby. As David learns more about his community, though, he'll come to realize that there is, in fact, a great deal of crime going on beneath the surface--and furthermore, he'll come to see how childish and narrow-minded his longings for violence and crime (and his ideas about heroism) were all along.

3. “The sheriff of Mercer County was elected, but such was my grandfather’s popularity and influence—and the weight of the Hayden name—that it was enough for my grandfather to say…now I want my son to have this job…It would never have occurred to my father to refuse.”

In this quote , David explains that his family is, essentially, Montana royalty. David's grandfather, Julian Hayden, is a well-known figure, prosperous and well-respected. As a result, David's father, Wesley, has a lot to live up to: he wants to impress his father and honor the Hayden name. Thus, when Julian pulls some strings to ensure that Wesley will become the next

sheriff, Wesley has to accept: he doesn't want to disappoint his dad. The quote shows the first hints of corruption in town. For now, the corruption is pretty 'standard,' just some 'good ole boy' nepotism (a father getting his son a good job, but potentially ousting others who were more qualified). And yet the quote shows signs of a tension in the Hayden family: Wesley is loyal and indebted to his family, but he also seems to resent his father telling him what to do at all times. Deliberately, Watson doesn't tell us right away what the crime in Montana was --he leaves us to guess. For now, it seems possible that the crime might have had something to do with Wesley and his father.

4. “I never wondered then, as I do now, why a college didn’t snap up an athlete like Ronnie. Then, I knew, without being told, as if it were knowledge that I drank in the water, that college was not for Indians.”

In this quote, David mentions some of the racism and bigotry inherent in Montana society in the 1940s. David knew of a young Native American man named Ronnie Tall Bear, who was an exceptionally gifted athlete. Ronnie would have made a fine athlete at any number of great colleges--and yet, David recalls, Ronnie never attended a college. At the time, David didn't think too deeply about why Ronnie never went to college; he just accepted that college wasn't a place for Native Americans like Ronnie. Now, it seems perfectly obvious to question why Ronnie would never have been allowed in a college--and to see the unwritten racist rules of higher education and society itself. Thus, the quote conveys the extent of the apartheid state in America in the 1940s: certain races and ethnicities simply weren't treated fairly.

5. “I was beginning already to think of Uncle Frank as a criminal…Charming, affable Uncle Frank was gone for good.”

David begins to believe what his mother has been saying about Frank: that he's a molester of his patients, abusing his relationship with Native Americans. It's worth noting how quickly David changes his mind about Frank--it happens almost immediately. David isn't quite old enough to understand the nature of Frank's sexual improprieties (he barely understands his own sexuality, much less his uncle's), but merely witnessing his parents' fraught exchange about Frank has already changed the image of 'Uncle Frank' in David's mind forever. The old idea of the 'charming, affable Uncle Frank' whom David was unquestionably loyal to was a kind of innocence for David, and once that innocence has been lost--even if it turns out that the charges against Frank are baseless--it can never be wholly gotten back.

6. “He was not only her husband, he was a brother…brother to a pervert!”

In this quote, David becomes aware of his father's resemblance to Uncle Frank--a man David now suddenly regards as a sexual pervert. David notices that his father is calmly eating a piece of pie--a strange behavior, considering how recently he found out about Marie's molestation. Furthermore, David is disgusted by Wesley's resemblance to Frank, and suddenly finds it impossible to look his father in the face.

The quote is interesting because it shows David adopting an instinctive moral pose. He seems to be judging his father for acting so casually--suggesting that David has matured almost overnight because of the incident with Frank. Furthermore, while David's response to his father's resemblance to Frank is a little immature, it brings up a serious point: should we ever be judged for our family's actions? Intuitively, it seems, the answer is no: Wesley might look like Frank, but he's not responsible for Frank's sins in any way. Wesley's actions, however--trying to downplay the accusations against Frank, and (at this point) seemingly choosing family loyalty over unbiased justice--are worth judging.