



Internal Strife, Bond of Companionship and Death of the Ideals in Ernest Hemingway's *for Whom the Bell Tolls*

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Abstract: *This study explores internal strife, bond of companionship and death of the ideals in the face of impending death in Ernest Hemingway's celebrated novel For Whom the Bell Tolls. Most of the Hemingway heroes are men on mission, a life dedicated to a great cause. This research emphasizes upon the futility of war and the false ideals for which men are ready to sacrifice their life. This paper aims to investigate how the characters start losing faith in the ongoing conflict, get disillusioned and learn some life shattering lessons. This research affirms that Hemingway's For Whom The Bell Tolls is a die-hard romance which ultimately gives strength to bear the atrocities of life.*

Key Words: *Internal strife, companionship, impending death, life shattering lessons, die-hard romance.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

Based on the experiences gathered as a reporter in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Ernest Hemingway's celebrated novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) portrays a brief span in the life of a young American volunteer, Robert Jordan, who was assigned a task to blow a fascist controlled bridge in the hills of Segovia ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/For Whom the Bell Tolls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/For_Whom_the_Bell_Tolls)). The narrative lays bare the power struggle, war strategies and human treachery at various levels of command. The ironical commentary on the death of the ideals elevates the scope of the novel up to the level of an epic. The novel unfolds the struggle, sacrifice and suffering of the Spanish peasants, known as republicans, fighting against Franco's fascist forces. The conflict, which began in 1936, served as a prelude to the Second World War, and became a proxy for the competing ideologies of communism and fascism (Matt, 2008).

Robert Jordan

Steadfast and resolute, Robert Jordan, a young American instructor of Spanish, and a staunch supporter of the republican cause, is committed to his mission of blowing the bridge. The fascist controlled bridge has to be blown taking support from the guerillas hiding in a cave amidst dark pine woods in the Franco's territory. Jordan meets Pablo, Pilar, Anselmo and other members of the band to seek their aid in his mission of blowing up the bridge. In the dark mountain cave, among the guerrillas, Jordan comes across the beautiful Maria, who, immediately, falls for him. "Maria looked at him and laughed, then blushed suddenly, but kept on looking at him" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.15). However, "the bridge must be blown at the precise moment, when a big loyalist offensive begins. There is a rationale behind blowing up the bridge, if the bridge is destroyed, perhaps, the struggle of the human race would advance a few steps" (Rothman, 2015). As the novel progresses, so does Jordan's realization of man's duality, and it is because of this realization he insists on being left alone at the end of the narrative. Even with such setbacks, Jordan succeeds in accomplishing his mission. When the fascist soldiers and reinforcements arrive, they fire at the retreating guerrillas. Unfortunately, Jordan's horse is hit by a bullet; he falls off his horseback and breaks his thigh-bone. He didn't follow the retreating guerrillas, rather stayed there to ensure the guerrillas' safe passage. Robert Jordan is a great character, known above-all for his stoicism, grace under pressure and toughness. (Stampberg, 1940).



Pilar

Pilar, the mistress of Pablo, is a robust, multi-faceted character. Displaying a close resemblance to an oracle of the ancient Greece than to an ordinary Spanish peasant woman of the 1930s, Pilar is a larger than life character. Jordan, whom the guerrillas call *Inglis*, admires Pilar's commitment to the republican cause. Pilar is a manly woman, "A hundred times braver than Pablo" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P. 30). It is through Pilar, Jordan comes to know about the organizing capacity of Pablo in the killing of the fascists. Pilar upholds her allegiance to the *cause* dead in Pablo and dying in Jordan. "I am for the Republic," she, vehemently claimed, "And, the Republic is the bridge" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.54).

Pilar is a mythic character, a prophet, a seer and a palm reader. She plays a significant role by reading Jordan's palm, and maintains courage and dignity against the impending doom. Shrewd, mystical and manipulative, she is the glue holding the band together, and also the leader motivating and setting everything in motion (Matt, 2008). One particular name, Pilar repeatedly mentions, is that of Finito, a matador, a bull fighter. Pilar, in her memory of Finito, reveals traces of female sensuality even during the difficult times.

And what did thee do when not eating nor drinking?"

"We made love in the room with the strip wood blinds hanging over the balcony and a breeze through the opening of the top of the door which turned on hinges. We made love there, the room dark in the day time from the hanging blinds, and from the streets there was the scent of the flower market and the smell of burned powder (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.81).

Most of the characters in the novel appear fatigued and exhausted, and take a cynical view of human life. Nevertheless, the character of Pilar gives a glimpse of hope for a romantic love amidst the desperate environment. Pilar upholds the traditional characteristics of a gypsy way of life, and lives life at its fullest. In the past, she had many lovers and sexual partners, but she is not ashamed of her experiences, rather she is proud of them.

"Life is very curious," she said, and blew smoke from her nostrils. "I would have made a good man, but I am all woman and all ugly. Yet many men have loved me and I have loved many men (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.92).

In the beginning, Pilar was enamoured by Pablo's organizational skill in manoeuvring the killing of the fascists. But, very soon, she got disillusioned, and took the rein of leadership in her own hands. Pilar is a strong character who upholds unflinching belief in the age old gypsy culture. She is almost like a mother figure to Robert and Maria, and facilitates love and sexual relationships between them. "I would leave the two of you" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.143).

Pablo

Pablo is an aging leader, and has lost much of his youthful fervour. Over the years, he has grown cunning and selfish, and for his own petty gain, he is ready to betray the Republican cause. For him, the cause of Republic, no longer holds any significance, rather, the safety of the tribe and the comfort of an easy life attracts him more than anything else. He, grudgingly, tells Robert, "If you make a disturbance here, we will be hunted out of these mountains. It is only by doing nothing here, we are able to live in these mountains. It is the principle of the fox" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.18). Over the years, Pablo developed the mindset of a capitalist. He is more interested in his horses, and would like to rob a train where there is the possibility of having some booty. Even in the first meeting, Pablo greets Jordan with hostility, and opposes his idea of the 'bridge operation'

If it is in this territory, it is my business. You cannot blow bridges close to where you live. You must live in one place and operate in another. I know my business. One who is alive, now, after a year, knows his business (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.17).

Pablo is against the bridge operation, as he believes, blowing the bridge would endanger the guerrillas' safety. Sitting in the cave, half drunk, he mumbles, "thou wilt no bridge here" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P. 53). In order to thwart Jordan's mission of blowing the bridge, Pablo steals explosives from Robert's bag and throws them into the stream.



Maria

Maria is a young Spanish girl who represents the traditional psyche of a Spanish peasant woman. She was found in a train compartment when the guerrillas had blown the fascist operated train. Since then, Maria has been living with the guerrillas in the mountain cave under the guardianship of Pilar. In the very first meeting, she falls in love with Robert Jordan, and remains committed to him throughout. Maria was abducted, raped and traumatized by the fascists, yet, she was not profane. Though she was violated, she had not lost her feminine charm and sensuality. Her submission to Jordan is divinely ordained. She views Robert as her redeemer, as someone who could restore her lost dignity. Maria stands for the symbol of selfless and unconditional love to whom Jordan finds himself emotionally connected. She has no political or social ambitions of her own. Maria's limitless love for Robert symbolizes her primitive gypsy belief, "If I am to be thy woman, I should please thee in all ways" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.146).

Robert and Maria

Despite the 'lethal assignment', Robert and Maria are immediately drawn to each other. Robert is fortunate to find Maria, as her submission was something he could trust ; something he could integrate into his life. He wanted to make Maria his life- long companion. In the narrative, there are sexual encounters between Robert and Maria, but the most important one is when they made love in the day time in the forest. When they were making love on the pine floor, during the day time, the earth moved beneath them:

..... they were both there, time having stopped and he felt the earth move out and away from under them. (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.145) -----

"The earth moved," Maria said, not looking at the woman.
"Truly. It was a thing I cannot tell thee." (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.158).

Human sexual intercourse under the open sky is a sacred ritual in many of the tribal societies. As per the traditional gypsy belief, love making in the open was considered to be divine and sanctified. "We know nothing about what happens to us in the nights. When it happens in the day though, it is something" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.160). Pilar validated it and confirmed that the union between Robert and Maria was sanctified by god. Moving of the earth, during the sexual intercourse, is a divine act which gives a sacred seal upon the union, "for, it never moves more than three times in a life time. Did it really move?" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.159), and "for most people, the profane ones, it never moves" (Teunissen, 1976). This sexual act between Robert and Maria, in the forest, was not orgasmic, it was ritualistic. "Human sacred marriage is an imitation, a recreation of the original marriage of earth and sky, of gods and goddesses, or of god and human" (Teunissen, 1976).

The union between Robert and Maria is "an integral part of three days and three nights of life lived by two young people facing death"(Clifton, 1940). It was Maria's passionate and selfless submission that transformed Robert, and he started feeling integrated. Robert's love for the beautiful Maria is symbolically represented by the pine needle floor of the forest, both at the beginning and at the end of the narrative. "In the scene just before Robert goes out to blow up the bridge, knowing that he will almost surely die, when he makes love to Maria, describing, his heart breaking, the fine life he knows they will never lead, he arrives at an identification of which Hemingway's other heroes were incapable" (Clifton, 1940).

Death and Suicide

Death is the major concern in the minds of all the characters in the narrative. Robert Jordan, the protagonist, knows that there is every possibility that he wouldn't survive. Almost all characters in the narrative, contemplate death. They would prefer to die before falling in the hands of the enemies. As the novel comes to an end, Jordan, wounded and exhausted, awaits a final ambush that will end his life. He hates suicide, but at the same time, he prepares himself against the eventual outcome of suicide to avoid inevitable torture at the hands of the enemy. In Hemingway's *Far Whom the Bell Tolls*, the characters are prepared to kill themselves. Karkov always carries pills to kill himself if he is ever captured, and Maria carries "a Gem type, single-edged razor blade"(*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.155) to kill herself. In the narrative, suicide lurks as an alternative to torture in the hands of the fascists.



Robert Jordan, who appears to be an *alter ego* of Ernest Hemingway, wishes to avoid suicide, partly because his father, whom he views as a coward, had committed suicide. Though, he contemplates suicide, he, initially, rejects the idea, and prefers to struggle and stay awake despite the severe pain. The most significant aspect in the character of Robert Jordan is his inner strength which differentiates him from other characters in the narrative. Jordan's struggle and fortitude teaches us that the will to continue living, requires spiritual strength.

Quest for Comradery

Before his romantic encounter with Maria, Robert Jordan was a lonely man. He had nothing concrete in his mind. He had undertaken this arduous job of bridge demolition to fill the empty state of his mind. He knew that his life was at risk, but he was not bothered. He wanted to have a sense of purpose in his life. It was Maria's devotion and commitment which transformed his attitude towards life and its meaning. He remained resolute on two things : his love for Maria and his mission to destroy the bridge. Jordan was seeking something significant to believe in "wholly and completely" and also sought communion, an absolute brotherhood, a feeling of comradery with which he could associate himself emotionally.

It gave you a part in something that you could believe in wholly and completely and in which you felt an absolute brotherhood with the others who were engaged in it (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.210).

Robert's participation in the 'crusade' indicates that fighting for the republican cause became a 'substitute religion' for him. However, after getting close to the guerillas, he felt disillusioned to see the internal conflict, the party strife and the apathy of the leaders towards the cause of republic. Jordan dies while accomplishing his arduous mission, and through his life and death, Hemingway seems to confirm the resilience and tenacity of human life. The cruel reality of warfare shattered the false grandeur of Robert's ideals.

For Whom the Bell Tolls is Hemingway's quest for brotherhood, comradery and belongingness. During the time of crisis, a secret bond grows, and the members become a close-knit family. Staying with the guerillas and 'savoring' the love of Maria, Jordan, for the first time in his life, feels integrated with this new world. Getting associated with guerillas he felt that he had found a family, an absolute brotherhood. He claims, it seems that "I have been all my life in these hills since I have been here. Anselmo is my oldest friend..... Augustine, with his vile mouth, is my brother..... Maria is my true love and my wife. I never had a true love. I never had a wife.....I hate to leave a thing that is so good" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P.335).

Transition and the Death of the Ideals

A shift from a shallow belief to a deeper human cause, is the major theme, inherent in the structure of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. In the beginning, Robert Jordan arrives with his grand idealistic belief of doing something for a great cause, but, after being involved in the activities, and understanding the background of the conflict, he becomes cynical about the republican cause and loses much of his initial motivation. He comes to know that ruffians in the Pablo's hometown had also massacred a good number of fascists, and in retaliation, the republicans had to face the ire of the fascists. "Hemingway suggests that morality is subjective and conditional, and that the idea of right and wrong is almost never clear-cut" (Zuo, 2015). Both the sides, the republicans and the loyalists, are equally to be blamed for the massacre. Both "were convinced that they were fighting for civilization against the powers of darkness" (Turnbull, 1978). Jordan comes to a realization that the republican cause was nothing more than a mirage. In fact, Maria's love and Pablo's skepticism became the chief agent for Jordan to see things in a different perspective. While talking to Anselmo, Jordan remembers that a man named Golz had told him, "To blow a bridge is nothing-----Absolutely nothing. Merely to blow the bridge was a failure" (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, P. 12).

2. CONCLUSION :

Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* depicts the courage and fortitude of a young American volunteer, Robert Jordan, who comes to fight in an alien country for a humanitarian cause. Trained in the explosive detonation, Jordan takes pride in his work. However, the struggle and suffering of Robert Jordan is ultimately linked to the fate of all mankind. The Spanish Civil War with its physical and psychological violence symbolizes man's fragility and vulnerability. Confrontation between Jordan and Pablo, and between Pablo and Pilar, brings out the existential crisis



inherent in the human psyche. What makes *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, a die-hard romance, is the passion and intensity of love a young man experiences amidst a desperate mission to blow a strategically located bridge, situated in the deep gorges of the mountains.

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