

Death In Spain

**Time magazine review of
For Whom The Bell Tolls, Oct 1940.**

IN THE '20s Ernest Hemingway created stripped, hard-boiled prose for telling terse, hard-boiled stories about broken-down bullfighters, ham prizefighters, gallant trollops, homosexuals, mugs, spiritual victims of the war. 'The lost generation' quickly turned his books into bestsellers as they sipped raw alcohol in speakeasies, tried to write Hemingway stories in garrets and penthouses. None wrote as well as he.

In the '30s Ernest Hemingway expounded the mystique of bullfighting in *Death In The Afternoon*. It was a best-seller too, but *Green Hills Of Africa*, in which Hemingway expounded the mystique of big-game hunting showed a falling-off. The depression was on; strident voices were asking when Ernest Hemingway was going to become socially conscious. He kept on boxing, riding, hunting, fishing, did not say.

Some feared that the legendary Hemingway virility was about to develop into a new Byronism. Quipped Westbrook Pegler: 'Ernest Hemingway — the fur-bearing author. Critic Bernard de Voto observed: 'So far none of Ernest Hemingway's characters has had any more consciousness than a jaguar.' Critic Max Eastman wrote his *Bull In The Afternoon*, one day traded blows with angry Author Hemingway in the most diverting literary brawl since Theodore Dreiser punch Sinclair Lewis. There was a feeling abroad that Hemingway was a little too obsessed with sex, a little too obsessed with blood for the sake of blood, killing for the sake of killing. Even his admirers wondered where he was going to find another experience big enough to make him write another *A Farewell To Arms*. If ever he did, they thought, he would produce another great book. They misunderstood Hemingway's apparent obsession with killing, forgot that the dominant experience of this age is violent death.

In 1936 Hemingway found the great experience — the Spanish Civil War. This week he published the great novel — *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. He took the title from a passage by Preacher Poet John Donne:

*'No man is an iland intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the
Continent, a part of the maine; if a clod bee washed away be the
Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were . . . any
mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde;
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls: It tolls
for thee'.*

For Whom The Bell Tolls is 1) a great Hemingway love story; 2) a tense story of adventure in war; 3) a grave and somber tragedy of Spanish peasants fighting for their lives. But above all it is about death. The plot is simple: about a bridge over a deep gorge behind Franco's lines. Robert Jordan a young American International Brigader is ordered to blow up the bridge. He must get help from the guerillas who live in Franco's territory. The bridge must be destroyed at the precise moment when a big Loyalist offensive begins. If the bridge can be destroyed, the offensive may succeed. If the offensive succeeds the struggle of the human race against fascism may be advanced a step. The courage of the Spanish peasants is linked to the fate of mankind.

The Spaniards know they may be killed. Jordan senses it when he hears the orders. The general senses it when he gives them. So does Pablo, the pig-eyed, cunning guerilla leader when Jordan asks for his help. So does Pilar, his big, ugly, wise, foul-mouthed wife. Pilar is a gypsy: she reads doom in Jordan's palm. She smelt death-to-come on the last dynamiter who went through, and he was killed. In one of the books terrible, eloquent passages ('All right, Ingles, learn . . .') the woman with her ancient wisdom actually conveys in words what the smell of death-to-come is like.

The greatness of this book is the greatness of these people's triumph over their foreknowledge of death-to-come if they blow up the bridge. Jordan goes through with it because he is intellectually convinced that he is helping to defeat fascism. Pilar goes through with it because she is part of the revolution and cannot stop. Pablo's strong instinct to live makes him desert at the last moment and destroy the detonator. Then he, too, realises in his own way that 'no man is an island'. He cannot stand the loneliness of desertion, returns to help dynamite the bridge.

For Whom The Bell Tolls, unlike other novels of the Spanish Civil War, is told not in terms of the heroics and dubious politics of the International Brigade, but of a simple human struggle of the Spanish people.

Leftists may claim the book, but they will not like realistic descriptions of the cynical G.P.U. agents, or of the Spanish peasants liquidating their local bourgeoisie: 'And I saw the priest with his skirts tucked up scrambling over a bench and those after him were chopping at him with the sickles and the reaping hooks . . . and there was another scream and another scream and I saw two men chopping into his back with sickles . . .' However he may fancy himself as a leftist sympathizer, as great and sensitive artist Ernest Hemingway is well over of the Red rash. The bell in this book tolls for all mankind.