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## For Whom the Bell Tolls in Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom The Bell Tolls*

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### Hemingway: The Man



**Ernest Hemingway**

No study of Ernest Hemingway's works can be completed without an understanding of the author's life because he is one of those authors whose life and works are interdependent. In fact, there are three Hemingways: Hemingway the man, Hemingway the author, and Hemingway the legend. It is difficult to say where one ends and the other

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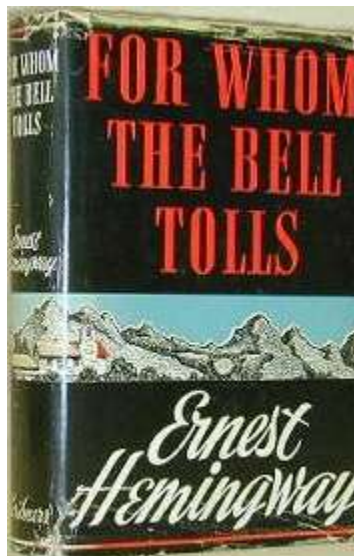
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begins. The author has derived most of his raw material for his novels and short stories from his personal experiences and his books have influenced his life tremendously. Hemingway the author and Hemingway the man produced the legendary Hemingway.

### **Hemingway: The Author**

As an author, throughout his life, he has captured those realities which he observed from very close quarters. Deep and profound is his knowledge, whether those are the brutalities of Spanish civil war or those are the sufferings of ‘Lost Generation’ or those are the adventures of matadors in a bull fighting ring. His first-hand knowledge about all these realities has enabled him to portray what is true and to delineate those characters with whom he encountered in real life. Hemingway has had a life, full of diversity. He had been so involved and engrossed in activities such as an ambulance driver, as a news reporter, as an expatriate, as a big game hunter that nothing seems impossible to him when he gives vent to his feelings by taking into account his experiences of life.

### **The Background of the Novel**



“*For Whom the Bell Tolls*” has been written in the backdrop of Spanish civil war, Hemingway experienced as a news reporter. Therefore, the chances of exaggeration are almost equal to nothing and he leaves no stone unturned to expose the sufferings, the brutalities and the miseries of common human beings. These are some factors that caused him to write “*For Whom The Bell Tolls*”.

The Spanish civil war was fought in 1930s between Fascist and Republicans with an impression that both sides were considering themselves right in their own scenarios. It is a general phenomenon that two opposite forces, involved in a war consider themselves always right and their purpose behind the war. They damn care of how much there is a

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blood shed and how much there is a loss of humanity on both sides. Hemingway in “*For Whom The Bell Tolls*” recounts those memories, which were nerve-shattering experience not only for him, but also for those human beings, who had seen the catastrophe of the 1<sup>st</sup> world war, were experiencing this in the Spanish civil war and unfortunately were destined to experience this in the form of 2<sup>nd</sup> world war in the coming years.

### **The Protagonist of the Novel**

Robert Jordan is a protagonist of the novel. The novel narrates what happens in the life of an American volunteer, Robert Jordan, who has been assigned the task of blowing up a bridge in the hills. He goes through the same nerve-shattering experience, when he takes part in the war in actual life. He is on the Republican side, fights against Fascist. He participates in the war with a hope to do something for Republicans. His endurance, determination and persistence have been presented by Hemingway with a unique touch of patriotism. He is a warrior, who is sincere to his cause more than anything else.

What happens to this cause, when with the passage of time, he becomes able to distinguish the difference between appearance and reality and what happens to his determination and sincerity, when he comes to realize that the resulting effects of war are nothing but a massacre and a loss of humanity on a greater scale. This is exactly what Hemingway has been concerned as an author throughout his life. He is not interested in telling the cock and bull stories, related to bold and audacious adventures of his heroes, rather he describes the inner turmoil, the sufferings and pains, people experience in the name of war. He takes the responsibility on his shoulders to bring to light the hideous sides and heinous aspects of wars, fought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps no other 20<sup>th</sup> century writer has been this much involved to capture the inner conflict, the hollowness of minds and the spiritual emptiness of the lost generation, who experienced this entire era and became a lost generation in the long run.

### **The Concept of ‘Lost Generation’**

‘Lost Generation’ was a term, Hemingway made famous by using it permanently in his novels. As a matter of fact, all his protagonists are lost generation, wandering aimlessly in the post-war world without any ambition and without any ray of hope. They cut a sorry figure in terms of moral, social and religious values. They have seen this much destruction and annihilation that their beliefs have been destroyed. They take refuge in drink and sex to forget their miseries, but love and sex have lost their sacredness and their glamour and having the act of sex is just like having a glass of beer or wine. Religion was also on the verge of disaster and those religious values had been declined, which 19<sup>th</sup> century cherished. They had become the victims of indispensable inner dilapidation. They were all wounded physically, spiritually or psychologically after seeing violence and deaths in its various manifestations.

This is the overwhelming impression of ‘Lost Generation’, powerful and realistic,

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Hemingway has created in his works. He has been successful in his juxtaposition of the pre-war and post-war scenarios and values to reveal the adverse effects of war on the minds of his generation. It is not just one war, Hemingway talks about, rather it is a series of wars, he experienced and observed throughout the first fifty years of the previous century. As an acute observer, he was fully aware, how these wars are undermining moral values and social structure of an entire generation and society. The occurrence of these wars was the catalyst that finally created the 'Lost Generation'. Hemingway grabs this opportunity to foment feelings against the war and war effects through his novels.

### **Clash between the Individual and the Environment**

Hemingway deliberately has portrayed those post-war scenarios to reveal the aftermath of wars, due to which there was a clash between the individual and the environment. There had remained nothing charming, attractive and respectable to them in the world, where there was a chaos or rapidly declined moral, social and religious values. It was felt by the people as God has disappeared from this universe by leaving it at the mercy of circumstances or at the mercy of some cruel forces, which were ruthless to such an extent that they showed no mercy in killing innocent people regardless of age, race, color and religion. There had been a merciless manslaughter all over the world and the 1<sup>st</sup> half century of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a true evident of it. In this perspective, what else Hemingway could write, if he had not written all this?

Though he himself led a life as an extrovert, which was full of excitement, thrill and adventures but when he chooses pen as his medium of expression, he writes about the physical, mental and spiritual pangs of the generation of his era. Whether it is a physical impairment of his protagonist Jack Barnes in '*The Sun Also Rises*' who is a casualty of the 1<sup>st</sup> world war and cannot have any sex life with the girl he loves, or it is the mental anguish of Fredrick Henry in '*A Farewell To The Arms*' who is left all alone in the world after the loss of his love, Catherine, or it is the spiritual conflict of Robert Jordan in '*For Whom The Bell Tolls*' who has lost the charm of his ambition and sufferings of Maria, the Spanish girl whom he loves, who has been raped by Fascists. Heart-rending realities are scattered everywhere in the veneer of deceptive appearance.

### **Confrontation with Nothingness**

Hemingway delineates his heroes with unique truthfulness with the strong impression that they are the guys who have confrontation in their lives either with violence or deaths. Nevertheless, they do tireless efforts to achieve their cause and fulfill their tasks assigned to them. In this interim, how much they do suffer and how they do prove themselves indefatigable warriors and how much they do endeavor to complete their onerous assignments, it gives a reader a true account of 20<sup>th</sup> century war era. Hemingway's pragmatic approach in creating such characters is undoubtedly undeniable. He presents his heroes as obdurate, courageous, loyal to their cause, so what if they are naive and artless.

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Perhaps Hemingway's approach behind these characters is that it's not only experience and armament, require to win the war but passion and determination are also required and in this capacity, his heroes show a great amount of zeal. Isn't the irony of life that these courageous and passionate heroes lose all of the charm of their cause, when they do confront the futility of war and experience a feeling of nothingness. As humanity is dying at both sides, they remain indecisive, who is innocent and who is culpable. In '*For Whom The Bell Tolls*', if Robert Jordan does confront the same nothingness, how could he justify his cause behind the war, he is fighting for. The very inability of Hemingway's heroes leads them eventually to a life of senses: drink, sex and so on. Once determined, audacious and loyal, they become wandering souls with a sense of alienation. To mitigate this sense of alienation, they involve themselves in such activities so much so that they could justify their existence. This is a world, exasperated by the war, Hemingway shows in his novels where his heroes are born and brought up and live their lives in a smug complacency.

### **Hemingway's Themes - Violence and Death**

Violence and death have been Hemingway's unstated themes. His era was the period of destruction and spiritual and emotional disillusionment. This disillusionment is vividly described with his infinite capacity to capture the cynicism of war in '*For Whom The Bell Tolls*'. He very enthusiastically states the enthusiasm of his heroes regarding with their participation in the war and how disillusionment do replace their enthusiasm is the gist of all his war novels.

The cruelties and casualties of Spanish civil war disillusion Robert Jordan's vision. He becomes unable to withstand the violence and death all around him. His inner conflict makes him realize that his cause is merely a mirage. Though he is determined to fulfill his duty and he does so as Hemingway's heroes do. Dexterously, Hemingway establishes an atmosphere of reconciliation in which his heroes reconcile with the existing conditions and don't neglect their duty. Robert Jordan does the same. He recognizes the futility and absurdity of war. Yet, he prefers to die and not leave his mission incomplete.

### **War - A Universal Theme**

Although he writes about the Spanish civil war, his narration extends beyond the war and beyond the Spain where the central events take place. It becomes the universal theme beyond the limits of time and space - a timeless story of war period. This universality imparts a significant place to Hemingway's works in the cannon of English literature. His description of war, violence, death, man's alienation to society, man's place in this universe and the drastic effects of war are the themes, on which he spent a great deal of time as an author. Consequently, he transfers to the paper the entirety of his age precisely with no intention to do any mythmaking with regard to war. By ignoring any inconsequential detail in his war novels, he crafts a story with an undercurrent theme of

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nothingness with the integral theme of war.

### **Title of the Novel**

Hemingway's circumspect approach in choosing the title of the novel is truly matchless. It's not just a title. There can be felt an echo of the present time, years or century. The universality of the title broadens the horizon of the novel.

Everyman's death kills me  
Because I am involved with humanity  
Send not therefore to ask  
For whom the bell tolls  
It tolls for thee.

This bell doesn't toll only for Robert Jordan or for his other heroes. It tolls for every single man who loses his life in a man-made catastrophe, that is, war. On one hand, he does focus on the melancholic lives of his heroes and on the other hand, he seems to strive for this purpose that he could prove his heroes' death purposeful. It can be felt as he had found something for his protagonists to die - a death of dignity, in case of unavailability of dignified life.

Hemingway as a spokesman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is at his best, when he transforms the valueless human life into worth-dying death. His novels are the precious contribution to the kernel of American Literature. Hemingway as a representative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century 'Lost Generation' feels for everyman's death as he was involved with humanity. The world today, is in a dire need of another Hemingway, who could expose the futility of wars, going on in the world and could bring the atrocities of these wars to the forefront, so that no one do feel the need to ask '*For Whom The Bell Tolls*', everyone must know, *it can toll for thee*.

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