



For Whom the Bell Tolls

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Robert Jordan has been assigned the difficult military mission of blowing up a bridge behind enemy lines. After making contact with a small band of guerrilla fighters, he plans the bridge-blowing operation against the wishes of Pablo, the leader of the band. During the three-day period of the novel's action, Robert Jordan falls in love with Maria, a young woman living with the guerrillas. The two have an intense affair in which they become committed to each other.

The structure of the novel is centered on the bridge-blowing operation, with flashbacks and narrative subplots which reach out from this central focus to the larger incidents and issues of the war to create an epic scope.

Like other Hemingway heroes, Robert Jordan has a life filled with the enjoyment of simple, sensuous pleasures--the experiences of eating and drinking, the brotherhood of comrades dedicated to living life fully, the intense bond between man and nature. As the novel builds toward its climax, he also exemplifies the Hemingway ideal of commitment to meaningful physical action.

Although fatally wounded, Jordan completes his mission. In his very struggle to live life in the best possible way, whatever the cost, he achieves the status of a tragic hero, and thus he affirms our existence.

Bibliography:

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Chelsea House, 1985. Although no essay in this collection deals exclusively with *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the novel is mentioned in many of them. Of particular interest may be Robert Penn Warren's discussion of irony in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Includes a good index.

Josephs, Allen. "*For Whom the Bell Tolls*": *Ernest Hemingway's Undiscovered Country*. New York: Twayne, 1994. Considers the literary and historical context for the novel and gives a detailed reading. An interesting and accessible discussion. Includes an excellent annotated bibliography.

Reynolds, Michael. "Ringing the Changes: Hemingway's Bell Tolls Fifty." *Virginia Quarterly Review* 67 (Winter, 1991): 1-18. In this good general reference, Reynolds presents the novel in historical context and suggests ways in which it can be seen to transcend its own time.

Rovit, Earl, and Gerry Brenner. *Ernest Hemingway*. Rev. ed. Boston: Twayne, 1986. Focuses on the totality of Hemingway's fiction rather than on individual works. A useful and accessible source, with fairly detailed explication of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Also includes an index.

Sanderson, Rena, ed. *Blowing the Bridge: Essays on Hemingway and "For Whom the Bell Tolls."* New York: Greenwood Press, 1992. A collection of twelve essays that take a fresh look at Hemingway and his most neglected major novel. The introduction gives an overview of the novel's composition and critical reception and offers a reassessment fifty years after publication.

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