CHAPTER - III
EPIC STRUGGLE AND NEAR TRANSFIGURATION

Based on *For Whom the Bell Tolls*
Hemingway's pre-occupation with the human predicament makes it impossible for the reader to avoid the impression that the writer was dealing with something of final importance to us all. Like the Elizabethans, whom he evidently loved, he never lets us quite forget that death awaits every man at some turn perhaps not far along the way. And in his peculiarly distinguished manner as an artist he continually reminds us that it is our performance enroute that is of vital importance.

His incursion into the world of love, war and death as had been depicted in *A Farewell To Arms* again finds expression in his next novel, *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. The title of the novel itself is paradoxically furnished, aptly enough, by a quotation from John Donne, -

"And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls: It tolls for thee" ¹

What Hemingway wished to propound here is that no man is an island in isolation. We are all part of a greater design; governed by rules and enclosed in an environment which is positively hostile and unpredictable. It is in this

¹ *For Whom The Bell Tolls* - Ernest Hemingway

awesome landscape that Hemingway places Robert Jordan, the hero of *For Whom The Bell Tolls*.

In this novel he takes a more complex view of humanity at war than he had projected in *A Farewell To Arms*.

"A plague on both your houses" - the prevailing mood of Frederick Henry, has been replaced by Robert Jordan's unillusioned sense of the community of the human predicament. "No man is an island, it turns out; but the storms that sweep the human continent are of such force, and the quakes that rock its surface so disruptive, that none of us can depend on better fortune than that of Robert Jordan, who died making his own small and paradoxical effort to maintain its integrity."²

As in *A Farewell To Arms*, the story of *For Whom The Bell Tolls* is also told in the first person through Robert Jordan, an American teacher of Spanish, who at the outbreak of hostilities enlists himself on the side of the loyalists. His commanding officer, Golz, who is a Russian General, "I am General Sovietýue"³, orders him deep inside enemy country to blow up a bridge in order to facilitate an attack.

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2. *Interpretations of American Literature*; Edited by Charles Feidelson Jr. and Charles Brodkorb Jr.
O.U.P. 1959. p. 313

3. *For Whom The Bell Tolls* - Ernest Hemingway
and advance on the fascist enemy. Notwithstanding the fact that he is a foreigner, he is chosen for the task because he is an educated man and a staunch loyalist and can be trusted to do the job satisfactorily. In addition, he is fluent in the local language and is also familiar with the particular area having "walked over it on his way to La Granja on a walking trip in 1933." Also, as he himself explains to Augustin, "I came first twelve years ago to study the country and the language. I teach Spanish in a University."  

A close study of the text makes it evident that Jordan liked to live dangerously, and thereby invites his own death. When Golz questions him, "How do you like partizan work", Robert Jordan cheerfully replies that he liked it "very much" adding "It is very healthy in the open air." Golz reiterates that "To blow the bridge is nothing", but "To blow the bridge at a stated hour based on the time set for the attack is how it should be done. You see naturally." Golz also instructs him that he is to "blow the bridge after the attack has started", because "That is the only road on which they can get tanks, or artillery or even

4. Ibid. p 8
5. Ibid. p 202
6. Ibid. p 11
7. Ibid. p 8
8. Ibid. p 8
9. Ibid. p 9
move a truck towards the pass which I attack. I must know that the bridge is gone. Not before, so it can be repaired if the attack is postponed. No. It must go when the attack starts and I must know it is gone."

In order to carry out the plan, Jordan must at first penetrate the enemy positions, and secondly, he has to enlist the aid of the various groups of partisan guerillas operating at the site of the bridge. To help him achieve these ends Golz extends to him the assistance of the old man Anselmo, who "has just come from there. He is a very reliable man, they say. You will see. He has people in the mountains." Both the tasks are accomplished without a hitch for Anselmo not only takes him behind the enemy lines but also brings him into contact with Pablo and his band of loyalist guerillas who are operating in the immediate vicinity of the targeted bridge.

Pablo however, is not happy with the arrival of the stranger, Jordan. A born leader with acute instincts, he at once realises the after-effects Jordan's plan would have on him and his men if the plan were to be effected. The intended attack would not only put his men

10. Ibid. p 9
11. Ibid. p 14
in great peril but there was every possibility of his followers being wiped out altogether. He vainly tries to dissuade Jordan, "If it is in this territory, it is my business. You cannot blow the bridge 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." The fact that Jordan is a foreigner only add to his suspicions. Jordan however, sincerely argues "I come only for my duty." That I am a foreigner is not my fault. I would rather have been born here."

Jordan's sincerity prevails over Pablo's wife Pilar and it is she who brushes aside all opposition and pitches in her lot with him. This acts as a signal for the rest of the band to throw in their lot with him also, leaving their leader Pablo the lone outsider in his own band. Throughout the narrative Pablo does all in his power to try and stop Jordan from blowing the bridge. He is sure that such an act would definitely jeopardise the lives of his men but instead of heeding his words the men of his band only curse him and are even ready to shoot him as a coward. Here there is the suggestion that a divine hand was pulling the actors to their doom without their even suspecting it.

12. Ibid. p 14
13. Ibid. p 19
Never the one to give in easily, Pablo makes repeated attempts to foul up Jordan's intention of destroying the bridge. He even goes to the extent of stealing the fuses and detonators, "the square box of the exploder was gone. So was the cigar box with the carefully wrapped and packed detonators", 14 a day before the attack. It is only when he realises the resoluteness of the whole gang, including his wife Pilar to forge ahead nevertheless, does he return to their fold. He even assists in the attack, because he feels "Nine of you could never have done it. Never. I knew that last night when the Ingles explained it." 15 He was also aware that unless he aided in the escape after the attack they would all be wiped out. The ironical twist of fate is such that Pablo who had been so cruel and who had been responsible for so many deaths at the beginning of the movement should escape with his life when people like Jordan, old Anselmo, Fernando and even It. Berrando who were guilty of much less, should meet their end. This factor only strengthens the view that human beings are but toys in the hands of divinity without any say or choice.

Jordan's introduction to Pablo and his band of guerillas also bring him into contact with Maria, the

14. Ibid. p 341
15. Ibid. p 367
heroine of the novel under discussion. Maria, a young
girl of nineteen years of age, had been rescued by
Pablo's band when they had attacked and derailed a
train carrying fascist soldiers and their prisoners.
Like Catherine in *A Farewell To Arms* she too is shown
to be suffering from the trauma of her past experiences.
As Rafael explains, "When we picked up the girl at the
time of the train she was very strange." She would not
speak and she cried all the time and if anyone touched
her she would shiver like a wet dog."16 Pilar also tells
Jordan to be "very good and careful about the girl. She
has had a bad time."17 And Maria herself explains "things
were done to me. I fought until I could not see. I fought
until---until---until one sat upon my head---and I bit
him---and then they tied my mouth and held my arms behind
my head --- and others did things to me."18

We are also given to understand that her "father
was the Mayor of the village and an honourable man."19
He was a loyalist Republican who had been captured and
put to death. Her mother had also met a similar fate
even though she was no loyalist but only a God-fearing
and devoted wife who "would not say,' Viva la Republica!'
but only Viva my father who lay there, on his face, by her feet." She herself is shorn of her hair, dragged into her father’s office chamber and brutally raped by the fascist soldiers, - " they were shoving me across the square, and into the doorway, and up the stairs of the city hall and into the office of my father where they laid me on the couch: And it was there that the bad things were done." She tells Robert Jordan later that she did resist and fight but to no avail " Always I fought and always it took two of them or more to do me the harm." The odds against her had been to heavy.

When we first come across Maria she still bears the scars of her sordid misfortune. Her hair has not yet grown and she is lovingly referred to as the "cropped head" by the members of Pablo’s gang. Like Henry in A Farewell To Arms Jordan initially had no intention of falling in love with or in playing around with any woman - " there is no time for girls" --- " I have no time for any woman." But then he falls head over heels in love with Maria at the very first sight " and he could feel the thickness coming in his throat." His feelings for her is, in turn, also reciprocated by Maria immediately. Their love is very unlike that of Henry

20. Ibid. p 332
21. Ibid. p 334
22. Ibid. p 331
23. Ibid. p 11
24. Ibid. p 27
25. Ibid. p 27
and Catherine in *A Farewell To Arms* where feelings develop gradually and after many tribulations. The attachment in *For Whom The Bell Tolls* blossoms at the very first meeting and it is an attachment that is intense and all-enveloping and is sustained right till the bitter end when Jordan tells Maria "Thou wilt go now, rabbit. But I go with thee. As long as there is one of us there is both of us." 26 "There is no good-bye, guapa, because we are not apart." 27 Here it appears that Jordan whether knowingly or unknowingly does have a hunch that he and Maria are nothing but expressions of the universal Will which can never cease to exist and therefore no one can really die in the true sense of the term. Only the body dies but the soul goes on living. Since they are expressions of the same universal Will, Jordan knows that death cannot part them. They will always be united—even in death.

The story of the novel *For Whom The Bell Tolls* covers the time span of only three days "Well, we had all our luck in four days. Not four days. It was afternoon when I first got there and it will not be noon today. That makes not quite three days and three nights." 28 It is within this very short span of time that the love

26. Ibid. p 436
27. Ibid. p 437
28. Ibid. p 439
between Jordan and Maria not only develop to infinite proportions but is also consummated. Their love is almost sublime in its sincerity and innocence. Never did they ever imagine the fate that awaited them. Their love is totally different from the love between Henry and Catherine which develop only after a considerable period of time spread over several months.

What is common to both these novels is the sense of tragic inevitability that is present throughout the narrative. Jordan suspects all along that he might meet his end. But so total is his commitment — " We'll be killed but we'll blow the bridge " to the cause that he is not at all afraid as is reflected by Maria's statement, " The Pilar told me that we would all die tomorrow and that you know it as well as she does and that you give it no importance. " His sole aim is to fulfil his given assignment no matter what the cost might be. He anticipates the dangers lurking ahead but is unwilling to retreat. To gain his objective he is also not averse to sacrificing the lives of his innocent comrades, " Whatever happens to Andres doesn't matter " and put the lives of many others in grave peril. He justifies himself by saying " no man has a right to take

29. Ibid. p 351
30. Ibid. p 326
31. Ibid. p 322
another man's life unless it is to prevent something worse happening to other people." He firmly believes in his cause and thinks that there is no harm in doing anything wrong if the ultimate result signified victory for the cause. "You see that we are working for one thing. To win the war. Unless we win, all other things are futile." The irony of his beliefs and justifications is such that he is now allied with Pablo and his band who were guilty of cruelly flailing and putting to death many innocent villagers whose only wrong had been that they were fascist supporters. - "Pilar's account of the start of the movement in Pablo's home-town with its unflinching report of the steadily mounting sadism which infused the execution of the local fascists. There is a remarkable tone to this report, as if Pilar were at confession, anxious to tell the whole truth and omitting not even the most shameful details, yet seeking at the same time to make it understood how these grisly acts could have occurred among normally decent Spanish peasants. She tells how, at first, many of the peasants were sickened by Pablo's plan to flail the peasants down between a double line of men leading to the edge of a steep cliff." 34

The guerilla leader Sordo and a few of his band meet

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32. Ibid. p 288
33. Ibid. p 278
34. Interpretations of American Literature ; Edited by Charles Feidelson Jr. and Paul Brodtkorb Jr..
O.U.P. 1959. p 314
their end when they go to steal horses to aid Jordan in his attack on the bridge. The valiant Sordo is noticed, given chase and eventually cornered by the Fascists atop a hill. He realises that he is trapped and is not at all happy with the situation he finds himself in. But he is left without a choice. He knows that he is going to die and is willing to accept his death philosophically, "You will have to take death as an aspirin." Like all Hemingway code heroes, Sordo too stands up bravely to the inevitable and hurls defiance at his impending death. He is unafraid and unwilling to either submit or surrender and he laughs in the face of the enemy and promises to take a heavy toll of the enemy. He does succeed in tricking and taking the life of Captain Mora as a "comrade voyager."

Tragedy and death seem to stalk every character in the novel. Sordo takes the life of Lt. Julien and Captain Mora but is himself done to death by the fascists. Lt. Berrando who, albeit reluctantly, decapitates Sordo and his followers also does not escape for it is he who looms on the sight of a mortally wounded and dying Jordan. Old Anselmo who hated to kill, himself becomes a casualty. Fernando too is dead and so are most of the companions of the fleeing Pablo. For all of them the same bell had tolled. An ironical turn to the entire sequence of events

35. For Whom The Bell Tolls - Ernest Hemingway
36. Ibid. p 302
is the knowledge that the blowing up of the bridge was not necessary at all, "but the Generals will not cancel it until it is too late."37

It is indeed tragic that the young and innocent Maria should be struck by misfortune again and again. She had lost all: her mother, her father and even her honour. She had found comfort and solace and a ray of hope and joy in Robert Jordan. It is a pity that she should lose him also. What is frightening is the fact that the long arm of death does not care to choose between the good and the bad but strikes suddenly and at will without any rhyme or reason. How else does one explain the death of Maria's mother who did nothing wrong by loving and being devoted to her husband. For unlike Maria's father "my mother was not a Republican and she would not say, 'Viva la Republica', but only Viva my father who lay there, on his face, by her feet."38

Unfortunate and tragic too are the deaths of so many of the so-called fascists from the town of Avilla from where Pilar hailed.

A point to be noted is that death does not differentiate between the good and the bad. It strikes one and

38. *For Whom The Bell Tolls* — Ernest Hemingway
Penguin Books. p 332
all alike and offers no chance or choice in the matter. After all it must be accepted that death is the ultimate reality. What is of significance however is the manner in which death is accepted by an individual. Hemingway propounds that death being a reality and inevitable, it is expected that one should submit to it in an honourable manner. That is why Sordo refuses to surrender and accepts and awaits for death with a smile, "he knew that they would die as soon as the mortar came up."

He prepares "to take death as an aspirin." He looked up at the bright, high, blue early-summer sky as he raised the leather wine bottle with his good arm. He was fifty two years old and he was sure this was the last time he would see the sky. He was not at all afraid of dying --- "He joked about it to himself ----- If one must die, he thought, and clearly one must, I can die. But I hate it. Dying was nothing and he had no picture of it nor fear of it in his mind."  

Similar is the outlook of the wounded Fernando who waits for the enemy bullets to strike him. Jordan himself, though mortally wounded and in great pain, shies away from shooting himself and ending his misery. Instead he chooses to train his gun at the enemy and waits to go down in a blaze of glory.

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39. Ibid. p 293
40. Ibid. p 291
41. Ibid. p 295
42. Ibid. pp 295, 296
Even old Anselmo who disliked killing, "All that I am sorry for is the killing" accepts death calmly, "If I die on this morning now it is all right." Though plagued with the realisation of the loneliness of his being he yet retains his composure, "But there was no excitement. It was all calm now and the sun beat down on his neck and on his shoulders as he crouched and as he looked up he saw the high, cloudless sky and the slope of the mountain rising beyond the river and he was not happy but he was neither lonely nor afraid."

The calm courage shown by the fascists of Pilar's village in the face of death is also exemplary. The land owner Don Ricardo comforts his mates and fellow condemned by saying "Do'nt be sad. To die is nothing. The only bad thing is to die at the hands of this canalla." The courage exhibited by many of the others is also praise-worthy.

Even the blustering Captain Mora, though courageous, foolishly mocks at death and pays the ultimate price.

All these incidents only go to show that human beings are under the control of and at the mercy of the menacing and awesome unknown that is hovering over them. The good

43. Ibid. p 191
44. Ibid. p 416
45. Ibid. p 416
46. Ibid. p 108
and the bad are both equally subjected to the traumatic viscidities of life and then violently swept away by the benign indifference of the universe. The uncertainties of life can be ascertained from Robert Jordan's ruminations, "Two days ago I never knew that Pilar, Pablo, nor the rest existed, he thought. There was no such thing as Maria in the world. It certainly was a much simpler world. I had instructions from Golz that were perfectly clear and seemed perfectly possible to carry out although they presented certain difficulties and involved certain consequences. After we blew the bridge I expected either to get back to the lines or not get back and if we got back I was going to ask for some time in Madrid." But instead he is mortally wounded and left behind by his fleeing comrades. In such situations it is expected that one does not flinch but face the reality with courage and fortitude as has been depicted in the response of the various characters in the novel.

"There are many passages in which Jordan appears more to be struggling for the faith on which he acts than to have achieved it. The hero is still the wounded man and incidents from his past are supplied to explain why this is so; two of the characters remark pointedly that he was too young to experience the things he tells them of having

47. Ibid. pp 218, 219
experienced. But Jordan has learnt a lot, since the old days, about how to live and function with his wounds, and he behaves well. He dies, but he has done his job, and the manner of his dying convinces us of what his thinking had failed to do: that life is worth living and that there are causes worth dying for." At the end of the novel, as he lies dying, he himself says "I have fought for what I believed in for a year now. If we win here we will win everywhere. The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for --- ." 

There is much in common between the two novels A Farewell To Arms and For Whom The Bell Tolls. Both these novels are love stories drawn in the background of war. Both the stories have a tragic end. But unlike Shakespeare's Romeo And Juliet where both the lovers die, in Hemingway's novels only one lover dies; Catherine in A Farewell To Arms and Jordan in For Whom The Bell Tolls. In both the novels the heroes are placed in a land far removed from their own homes. The action too, namely the wars, take place in a foreign country far away from their parental homes. Perhaps it was Hemingway's contention that if death was to overtake one, it could do so at any time and any place. There was no escaping it, be it at home or elsewhere.

48. An Introduction: Seven Modern American Novelists; Edited by William Van O'Connor; University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A. 1964. p 166

49. For Whom The Bell Tolls - Ernest Hemingway
Penguin Books. p 440
Both novels present stories of courage and bravery; morally, physically and spiritually where the tormented characters refuse to yield and rather choose to go down fighting.

Another point of similarity in the novels is that the heroines in both the novels have a traumatic past. Catherine has lost her fiancee "blown to bits" at the front and she is left in a shocked state. She is even considered to be slightly crazy. Maria, on the other hand, is also a pathetic figure who has lost her parents and who had been raped and humiliated by the fascist soldiers that killed her parents. Each of them is made to suffer for no fault of theirs and it is because of this fact that we sympathise with them in their sorry plight and feel pity for them.

As is discerned in Shakespearean tragedies, the element of chance also plays a vital role in Hemingway's scheme. If Pablo had not stolen the fuses and detonators the lives of many including those of Jordan, Anselmo and Fernando might have been spared.

The attitude of the heroes, Henry and Jordan, towards the wars in which they find themselves engulfed, differ. After the initial interest shown till the time
when he is wounded and rudely awakened to the realities of war and also during the retreat Henry loses all interest in the war. He deserts with a couldn't-care-less attitude. He himself says "Anger was washed away in the river along with any obligation." "It was not my show anymore." He had made a separate peace.

Jordan, on the other hand, unlike Henry is totally committed to his war as is seen in his explanation to Pilar "Remember thee in this of a bridge there is no money and no loot and in thy reservations of talking, much danger, and that afterwards there must be a moving from these mountains. Many will oppose this of the bridge." His total commitment to the cause can also be seen from the statement he makes to Maria, "We'll be killed but we'll blow the bridge." He considers everything else of no consequence except the task at hand. Even his intense love for Maria does not dissuade him from carrying out his objective. The incident wherein he shoots a fascist cavalryman clearly brings home this point,—"She had no place in his life now." Jordan also does not hesitate to put the lives of other innocent men in danger as long as his objective is gained. One could call him selfish but he does nothing for self gain, only for the common

50. Ibid. p 181
51. Ibid. p 36
52. Ibid. p 351
53. Ibid. p 255
gain or cause. At the end of the novel when he lies dying he refuses even to try and escape. On the contrary he volunteers to keep a rear-guard action in order that he may at least buy some time for his beloved Maria and the rest of Pablo's band of guerrillas and enable them to escape to safety.

The fact that he was chosen for the task of blowing the bridge in spite of his being a foreigner, itself speaks volumes of the trust and faith the powers that be had in him. Unlike Henry, for Robert Jordan there was only one road, duty above all and the ultimate price one has to pay - death. There is no doubt however, that he is a fighter to the core and determined to succeed. So enroiling is the intensity of his interest that it ultimately consumes him.

The lovers too are different in their respective attitude towards each other. For Jordan and Maria it is love at first sight; total and all-enveloping, tilting towards the mystic. The love between Henry and Catherine is flirtatious and gradual.

Tragedy seems to have been a way of life with Hemingway and is the only thread connecting most of his novels. Jake Barnes (The Sun Also Rises) is the
first of the tragic heroes. He is closely followed by Frederick Henry in *A Farewell To Arms*. *Death In The Afternoon* presents the heroism and death of Maera the bull-fighter. *To Have And Have Not* pits Harry Morgan against the callousness of his fellow man. His tragedy is that it takes him an entire life to learn that "One man alone ain't got no chance." The irony of the statement is that his realisation put into words the predicament of the whole human race. Robert Jordan is the next tragic hero presented in *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. The next in line is Colonel Cantwell in *Across The River And Into The Trees*. And finally the pinnacle of his tragic achievement finds expression in his Nobel-prize winning novelette *The Old Man And The Sea*.

If *A Farewell To Arms* was Hemingway's first attempt at writing a love tragedy based on war, *For Whom The Bell Tolls* was his second foray into the world of love, war and death. Love and death appear to have had some special place of interest in Hemingway's heart as these two aspects of life appear again and again in his novels albeit in slightly different or variegated forms. If Jake Barnes loses Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*, in *A Farewell To Arms* it is Frederick Henry who is denied by fate a happy life with Catherine. She is snatched away by the cold
clutch of death just when things were brightening up for them and at a time when they were enjoying their newfound freedom. Harry Morgan of To Have And Have Not burns out his life in an effort to keep himself, his wife and his children on the upper fringe of the have-nots. The pathetic heroine of For Whom The Bell Tolls despite the curse of a tormenting past loses out yet again when her lover, Robert Jordan, becomes a casualty in the war in which they are caught up. Whereas the luckless old man in The Old Man And The Sea has to lose out to the maraudering sharks.

Hemingway's repeated excursions into the world of love, struggle, death and near transfiguration perhaps find fuller expression in The Old Man And The Sea. It is in this novel that Hemingway ultimately triumphs in his delineation of the tragic concept of life. The earlier novels, A Farewell To Arms and For Whom The Bell Tolls, which have been discussed, are pointers to and clearly anticipate The Old Man And The Sea.