DEATH AND DEHUMANIZATION IN "FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS"

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Abstract: *Exploiting the much representative triad of concepts for Hemingway's prose, For Whom the Bell Tolls becomes another crucial writing in deciphering the author's moral evolution, along with his inner turmoils. The impetuous need to defend one's own principles and values freezes any extrinsic movement and time. Such poignant matter had war been, that it had followed Hemingway disregarding time. There is no other man-made happening to equal war in terms of dehumanization and corrosion of the self. The novel also unveils the attempt of love to become disentangled from this wretched entity.*

Keywords: *war, loss, love.*

Hemingway's predisposition to relate to death had always been present in his writings, in his behaviour, and even in his thoughts. The ubiquitous element which fascinated him in such manner could be represented as a governing leitmotiv of his whole existence. From the early years of his childhood, perhaps unwillingly, fulfilling the role of an autodidact, he taught himself to have an equal regard to death as to that of life. There were perpetual and consistent feelings of love and appreciation he had for his father, the man who taught him how to handle guns, and he thought of him as "a great hunter and fisherman and he had wonderful eyes" (Hemingway, E, 1997: 13). His suicidal death haunted Ernest for the rest of his life, hardening his hatred towards his mother. The heterotopic entanglement of two unique spaces, that of the home and of the subconscious cemetery, as his father had killed himself in their house, made Hemingway perfectly aware of the closeness and immanency of death. It was undoubtedly going to be the most unsettling event in the latter's life for quite a long period of time. There is no other writing in which Hemingway lets himself be governed by his intrinsic emotions, as when Robert Jordan recounts the remembrances of his father and grandfather, it is actually Hemingway who is openly relieved from the burden he had been carrying: "He was just a coward and that was the worst luck any man could have. But if he wasn't a coward he would have stood up to that woman and not let her bully him. […] Maybe the bully in her helped to supply what was missing in the other." (Hemingway, E, 1994: 361)

As young Hemingway's life unveiled throughout the passage of time, death seemed to follow him, disregarding his relocation or his reasons. What is more, he no longer feared it, but rather showed a defying and controlling attitude towards this intermission within the cyclic time. It was Clarence who had bequeathed and endowed him with such abilities. That is, both Hemingway and the characters he continuously projects upon enterprise in perilous adventures, while being iconic code heroes at the same time. *The Sun Also Rises*, as many other Spain related writings, centres onto the figure of the matador and that of the bull, who become a unique being and transform the act of bullfighting into art, while having the matadors' life under constant threat. Frederick Henry, in *A Farewell to Arms*, is wounded in war, as Jake Barnes had been, tasting the sour flavour of pain

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and death on their very own. At the moment of the precipitated interaction of the two realms, so to speak, the chronotope is rendered ignorant, as its constitutive counterparts dilute one another, yet growing apart, only to clash again, allowing the protagonist to spring back to life and take possession of his evanescent body. The frailty of life and death surrounds the characters, no matter where they travel and act, be it France, Spain, or the primeval continent of Africa.

The growing threat of fascism in the 1930s was chief among the factors that had endangered Hemingway's new values: this was something wholly evil, and the solidarity to defeat it acquired the status of a virtue. The writer himself took part in the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil war. He even addressed the Writer's Congress in New York, speaking against the fascists who had taken over Spain: "There is only one form of government that cannot produce good writers, and that system is fascism. For fascism is a lie told by bullies. A writer who will not lie cannot live and work under fascism" (Hemingway, E, 1986: 193). It is said that strong evidence has been found so as to support the idea of Hemingway's taking part in a clandestine guerrilla operation, blowing up a bridge in northern Spain. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* reflects this faith while exploiting an incident of that war. Love ceases to be entirely personal, as it is more than just dedicating yourself to one person. Published in 1941, the extended novel displays the dehumanization of the anthropological element, regarding the latter's freedom of thought and act and the perpetual fighting against those who mean to deprive humanity of its rights. The intensity of the thoughts and of the political conflagrations he brings into discussion constitutes another of Hemingway's reasons to be considered one of the most complex figures of the American literature. Still, it could not be appropriate to consider the matter of an American's penetrating interest and implication in the political situation of a land so distant from his/her own. Neglecting the Spanish predisposition towards an open-minded attitude and a welcoming behaviour towards any foreigner, there have been some who regarded his probably too serious involvement more as a threat than as anything else, as the leader of the Republican movement, Pablo, wonders "'What right have you, a foreigner, to come to me and tell me what I must do?'". The retort is at the very least, surprising and essential for the narrative that is yet to unfold: "'That I am a foreigner is not my fault. I would rather have been born here.'" (Hemingway, E, *op. cit.*: 16)

It is as if *For Whom the Bell Tolls* constitutes another cleansing of the inner self, as through the transfer of mental and physical turmoil onto the characters, and implicitly, onto the readers, the creator reaches peacefulness and completion. Intellectual catharsis can be attained solely by a handful of writers, who develop a more cavernous bond with the writing. That is, it could be considered that beyond the simultaneity of the post-partum depression sensed by the now hollow metaphysical womb, or even better said, by the core, and the accomplishment of the creator when his/her sibling is concluded, there is the fulfilling emotion of having produced a worthy piece of inheritance for society to build upon, to flourish upon. A more than fruitful exchange could be established between literature and being-toward-death, as the latter is able to fulfil his/her troubled intrinsic voices and wishes by achieving the transference onto a part of literature, with its didactic, cultural, philosophical and cultural purposes. Therefore, the purposes tend to acquire a larger panoply of directions than that acquired by a human being. Nonetheless, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel

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provides a dissonant perspective upon the work and the purposes it serves after having been separated from its author. Losing the bond with the nourishing core, it is given signification only through the granting of the others. Instead of coming up with a manifest of individualism, Hegel states that what it achieves is exactly the opposite: "Thus the work is, in general, something perishable, which is obliterated by the counter-action of other forces and interests, and really exhibits the reality of the individuality as vanishing rather than as achieved." (Hegel, G.W.F., 1997: 243-244)

For Whom the Bell Tolls comes to display Hemingway's purposes, in a variety of forms. It is more than certain that he wished to achieve a thorough portrayal of the "carnival of treachery and rotten-ness" of the war, which he had beautifully accomplished, but also to surpass the element of a simple, apparently objective narration of facts. His desire to become a creator of a masterpiece, to successfully place the innocent love of an American intellectual and a Spanish local on the background of the war has been turned into reality. The realism of the novel is somewhat intertwined with momentous episodes of naturalistic representation, amplifying the truthfulness of the rendered facts. For endowing the reader to plunge into the heartlessness of any kind of war stands for a mastery of the self, of the thought, and of the facts in such an outstanding manner, that there is no competing element to surpass or to rise above it.

The thematic triad – death, love, and war is undoubtedly dealt with in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. This comes to reinforce the idea of the inability of separating the three and their outstanding embroiderment upon each single narrative. Disregarding how they may be concealed within multifarious patterns, they are still to be found imprinted in the narrative. For instance, the war in *The Sun Also Rises* is a pervasive torment, which virtually shadows Jake's smallest attempt of physically fulfilling both the act of love and himself as a mature individual. Therefore, love and death fuse in the timeless present. Maria, the epitomizing figure of Spain, which is, at the moment, convalescent and emotionally crippled by the fascists, becomes indistinguishable from Robert, whose empathy, utter appreciation and reflection into the surrounding scenery, make it indisputably acceptable for an American to become one with a Spaniard. They are metamorphosed into only one being, one who is ready to face any horrendous repercussions of the civil war. The life of both is always "Now, ahora, maintenant, heute […] Esta noche, tonight, ce soir, heute abend. Life and Wife, Vie and Mari." (Hemingway, E, *op. cit.*: 179), as it is transferred into a perpetual present, in which the moment of speaking becomes diluted. The present created by this double co-ordinate devours all memory and circumstance. Their two beings pour into one another until becoming one who is ready to face any ironical glance, any interference of life and any doom of what is yet to come, as they "make an alliance against death" (*ibidem*: 282). What is more, the narrator even comes to identify love and death, according to their resembling intensity and the nature of the feelings arisen within the cores of the participants, when Robert Jordan once again declares his love to Maria "'I love thee as I love all we have fought for. I love thee as I love liberty and dignity and the rights of all men to work and not be hungry.'" (*ibidem*: 371)

As Alphonso Lingis puts it, death becomes, from a law of nature, a categorical impediment which precedes the veridical approximation. He also asserts that there are two different sides of death, that is, the one corresponding to

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the passing of time, and death itself, towards which every living creature is headed, hence, the imminent death. Death can also be perceived not as an annihilating moment of the self, but as a passage, as a thorough and ultimate fulfilment of the cycle of life. Nonetheless, the linear time which ends in death at the end of the horizontal axis of life may be the one to scatter misery and wretchedness amongst those who witness it, and even from this standpoint the traditional perspective can be overturned and hence, regarded as an evidence of the cyclicity of life. Furthermore, on the vertical axis, what is handed down through the various encompassing experiences during the earthly life is much too precious to be devoured by the closeness of death. What is more, he even asserts that "The world is not a shelter from death; on the contrary death is everywhere in the world, is the world itself" (Lingis, A, 1989: 123). Then again, from a dreaded, and yet irrefutable event within the human life, death comes to be transposed into the definition of existence itself. It could be rendered as the bias of life, its background, its topos.

Sharing the existentialist views of Heidegger on death, who claimed that death could be defined as nothingness, Hemingway also asserts through one of his characters that "To die is nothing" (*ibidem*: 119). He is proven to be a fierce adept of the belief that the human individual stands at the very core of every philosophical thinking, and therefore willingly bestowing upon the so very feared natural course of events a trivial veil, once again, turning it into an event of high importance, one of closure. Focusing on the human subject as the main nucleus of rational thinking, it emphasizes the importance of the individual in every aspect pertaining to his existence. Heidegger also claims that our existence and its nature projects itself onto its death, that is, life in itself follows a cyclic trajectory of the unfolding of events, until reaching its starting point. Henceforth, death should be depicted as an oxymoronic component of existence. The idea that death is nothing is constantly rendered throughout the novel, as a leitmotiv that chants Hemingway's principles. Nonetheless, no matter how present, accurate or thrilling death may be, there is always its so-called nemesis, life, that lures the human beings into not yielding and into utterly seizing it for as much as they can, as it "was a hawk in the sky. Living was an earthen jar of water in the dust of the threshing with the grain flailed out and the chaff blowing. Living was a horse between your legs and a carbine under one leg." (Hemingway, E, *op. cit.*: 332)

Hemingway found consistency in the Spanish perspective upon death, as for a man who had seen and almost experienced it, it would have been impossible to return to the previous ignorant thought of his fellow English speakers. The apprehension of death is a stimulus to living, with the sole purpose of reaching a better stage of comprehension towards human life. Even by the constant remembrance of the bustling, vivacious act of bullfighting which is so characteristic to the iberic topos, there is a mingling of violence and death that ardently needs to be portrayed, and that is actually rendered as mundane. The portrayal of one of Pilar's lovers is expansive and vividly depicted, and yet, the rendering was a matter of current affairs, as every matador was meant to deal with such happenings:

> She saw him stand, now, facing the five-year-old bull, facing the horns that had lifted the horses high, the great neck thrusting the horse up, up, as the rider poked into that neck with the spiked pole, thrusting up and up until the horse went over with a crash and the rider fell against the wooden fence and,

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> with the bull's legs thrusting him forward, the big neck swung the horns that searched the horse for the life that was in him. She saw him, Finito, the not-so-good matador, now standing in front of the bull and turning sideways toward him. She saw him now clearly as he furled the heavy flannel cloth around the stick; the flannel hanging blood-heavy from the passes where it had swept over the bull's head and shoulder and the wet streaming shine of his withers and on down and over his back as the bull raised into the air and the banderillas clattered. (*ibidem*: 196)

The variety of deaths one could live is outstanding in the novel. The presence of death is cast onto every character, at every step they may take, and beneath every line. If Heidegger annihilated the future into becoming one with death, Hemingway interpenetrates the past, the present and what is yet to come within one being who is on the brink of achieving a human countenance. According to Pilar, the most masculine embodiment of a female, as she mentions "'I saw death there as plainly as though it were sitting on his shoulder. And what is more he [Kashkin] smelt of death'" (*ibidem*: 268), there is a certain fragrance of death that announces its presence that makes it more bearable, or, at least, contributes to the outlining of the feeling of anticipation. As Heidegger put it, the anticipation of dying is rehearsed in the anxiety found in conscience. In fact, the anticipation of death is already a dying. For every reiteration of the act of dying of others gradually reaches the self, withstanding its every item. What is more, its perpetual closeness to the living has made it overcome its status as a unique moment in time, and has borrowed the olfactory aspect from life. Pilar portrays a heterogeneous olfactory portrayal of death, strengthening the concept of death as divided into numerous, small, and yet incredible powerful beings:

> part of it is the smell that comes when, on a ship, there is a storm and the portholes are closed up. Put your nose against the brass handle of screwed-tight porthole on a rolling ship that is swaying under you so you are faint and hollow in the stomach and you have a part of that smell […] After that of the ship you must go down the fill in Madrid to the Puente de Toledo early in the morning to the *matadero* and stand there on the wet paving when there is a fog from the Manzanares and wait for the old women who go before daylight to drink the blood of the beasts that are slaughtered. When such an old woman comes out of the *matadero*, holding her shawl around her, with her face gray and her eyes hollow, and the whiskers of age on her chin, and on her cheeks, set in the waxen white of her face as the sprouts grow from the sea of a bean, not bristles, but pale sprouts in the death of her face; put your arms tight around her, *Inglés*, and hold her to you and kiss her on the mouth and you will know the second part that odor is made of […] with his in thy nostrils, walk back up into the city and when thou sees a refuse pail with dead flowers in it plunge thy nose deep into it and inhale so that scent mixes with those thou hast already in thy nasal passages […] thou shouldst continue to walk through the city and down to Calle de Salud smelling what thou wilt smell where they are sweeping out *casas de putas* and emptying the slop jars into the drains and, with this odor of love's labor lost mixed sweetly with soapy water and cigarette butts only faintly reaching thy nostrils, thou shouldst go on to the Jardín Botánico where at night those girls who can no longer work in the houses do their work against the iron gates of the park and the iron picketed fences and upon the sidewalks. It is there in the shadow of the trees against the iron railings that they will perform all that a man wishes; from the simplest requests at a

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> remuneration of ten centimos up to a peseta for that great act that we are born to and there, on a dead flower bed that has not yet been plucked out and replanted, and so serves to soften the earth that is so much softer than the sidewalk, thou wilt find an abandoned gunny sack with the odor of the wet earth, the dead flowers, and the doings of that night. In that sack will be contained the essence of it all, both the dead earth and the dead stalks of the flowers and their rotted blooms and the smell that is both the death and birth of a man. […] Thou wilt wrap this sack around thy head and try to breathe and then, if thou hast not lost any of the previous odors, when thou inhalest deeply, thou wilt smell the odor of death-to-come as we know it. (Hemingway, E, *op. cit.*: 271-274)

There is a mentioning of the moment of a mutual ground between the death and the birth of a man, hinting towards the same origin of life, when dealing with a symbolical death of the man, as he sheds his masculinity when becoming one with his counterpart. It has already been shown that death and life are intertwined, in the end, confusing one another. The sexual connotations of the smell endow the others with their own semantic contamination. Probably the most anthropological of all the senses, the smell can be easily engraved onto the memory of the male characters, who, affected by the scarcity of diversity in life, are more prone to engulfing themselves onto Pilar's lurid and striking depiction.

Then, there is the death found within love, which endows the partakers to die several times before reaching their final death. They are all based on the dissolution of the self within the other and of the other within the self, that is, a yielding in favour of a thorough completion. One the one hand, there is the sexual act which is based on the union between two distinct elements within one being, as though a magnetic force would lead both onto a transient mingling of selves, only to throw them apart. The two lovers become increasingly aware of the looming sight of death, despite its representation under a much too desirable form, as they wonder: "'I feel as though I wanted to die when I am loving thee.' 'Oh', she said. 'I die each time. Do you not die?'" (Hemingway, E, *op. cit.*: 172). Renouncing to one's individuality in favour of the other does not only display a mere tendency towards self-gifting or lack of selfishness, but also, a clash of two identities within one. Love dissipates the individual and promotes the central figure of the common core. It is another union-related aspect that governs the novel, as bewildering and complex their coming together may be. With every reaffirmation of their love "neither one can tell that one of us is one and not the other" (*ibidem*: 280), it becomes increasingly intricate to withdraw oneself from it. However, Robert Jordan's inner pragmatism comes to surface and takes control, when it is time to prioritize accordingly: "'Say that you love me' 'No. Not now.' 'Not love me now?''Déjamos. Get thee back. One does not do that and love all the same moment.'" (*ibidem*: 288). This demonstration of masculinity maintains the idea of the female weakness, as the latter utterly loses her emotions and her sensibility within the troubled sea of feelings, deviating from the main aim, that of winning the war. Notwithstanding, from the feminist standpoint, Robert Jordan's decision could make him less of a man, as Maria is not entirely separated from the war, but not actually involved in it, either. She seems to be drifting among the reality of her own existence, her love for *Inglés* being the only connection to the shore. In every relationship she has, she appears to be submissive, as within her friendship with Pilar, it is outstandingly clear that the latter is dominant, whereas in the

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relationship with Robert Jordan, she acts as to constantly please her beloved: "'Is there not some other thing that I can do for thee?'" (ibidem: 365), "'I would do anything for thee that thou should wish'" (*ibidem*: 373). Maria is the perfect embodiment of a spouse who is obedient and entirely devoted to him, displaying Hemingway's wish to be dominant in the couple, to save and look after the women who could not save themselves. At a subconscious level, the Oedipus complex is fulfilled, as Hemingway's desire to stand up and be superior to his counterparts finds its origins within his family. Replacing his father's figure, he manages to prevent his mother from bullying him and from turning him into a coward. Therefore, the choice of his demeanour is motivated by his tormented childhood and adolescence.

Maria is, still, the living representation of the result of men's dehumanization of war, as she had been objectified, mistreated and taken into possession against her will "'Where 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'" (*ibidem*: 75). Maria was put through extreme suffering because of the mere fact that she was the mayor's daughter, and even so, she was the living portrayal of a form of politics, even though she may not have shared the same political inclinations as her father. Her mistreatment symbolizes the Spaniards' developing oblivion of the values they once believed in, and the utter dehumanization of the anthropological element within a modern society. In contrast with the principles that should at least be cast upon the contemporaneity and then slowly evolved, it seems that society is returning to its old self, to its primeval and cruel temperaments, which were governed only by the wish to quench their thirst of blood, vengeance, and apparent justice. What is more, Maria could also embody the current state of Spain, as it is described in Hemingway's novel, as governed by frailty, destruction and perversity, which is slowly rejuvenating and returning to its old self. After having overcome the recovering time and gradually recuperating her old self, she is now willing to get involved in the combat, without having forgotten what had happened to her. The hair that is still growing is a constant remembrance of what her fellow men were capable of achieving and how the bustling of her land had been turned against it. She also seeks for the cleansing of her soul, especially in the eyes of her beloved, Robert Jordan, willingly putting herself to suffering for the completion of the act of love. Maria also stands for the embodiment of the modern society, found in a despondent state, as with the preeminent development of the technological and warfare related processes, the involution of the human ethics conceptualizes the reverse proportionality of the two. Decrepitude is to be found at any step, both regarding the surrounding landscape, that was once flourishing, and also within every contender of the war.

The death also comes by choice, as the fighters of the Republic decide to fight for their values on their own, aiming to be at ease with themselves, despite being forced to kill other men. Being the actant of the lack of physical existence, so to speak, enriches the feeling of guilt and revives consciousness. Dealing with the unsolved reiteration of being the provider of the other's death is a constant, apparently never-ending matter, consistently rotting the psyche from the inside. There is the figure of the protagonist, of the American power, cruel man, who finds his motivation in his aim, reaching even a state of likelihood towards the act, as Robert Jordan makes himself reveal: "admit that you have liked to kill as all who

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are soldiers by choice have enjoyed it at some time whether they lie about it or not." (Hemingway, E, *op. cit.*: 306). The Republic and the end of the war develop a deeper significance for Robert Jordan than for any other character of the novel. Feeling deprived of the land he has chosen to become his own by others who would prohibit him from living in its most bare meaning, the protagonist finds pleasure in accumulating deaths as small victories of his own. Man returns to his role as a warrior, more likely, as a defender of his territory, which is threatened and visibly destroyed. His strong motivations are different from the ones Anselmo possesses, as the latter confesses to himself: "I hope I am not for the killing […] If we no longer have religion after the war I think there must be some form of civic penance organized that all may be cleansed from the killing or else we will never have a true and human basis for living. The killing is necessary, I know […]" (*ibidem*: 211-212)

Anselmo differs greatly from Robert Jordan, as his soliloquy turned into prayer is meant for all his fellow Spanish inhabitants, and his desire stands for an achievement of a better life for the Spanish people, more that Jordan's does. The synthetizing of a great conflict to the self comes as an important evidence of individualism. The latter projects himself onto the figure of another comrade, who shares a different outlook on the war, while Anselmo, the sagacious gypsy, projects himself onto the others, reaching out towards a collective consciousness. This attitude of his led Robert Jordan into treating him with superiority, and yet, he manages to find the strength to restrain himself from conducting in a different manner, as he uncovers himself "Anselmo does not like to kill because he is a hunter, not a soldier. Don't idealize him, either. Hunters kill animals and soldiers kill men. […] And do not think against Anselmo either. He is a Christian. Something very rare in Catholic countries" (Hemingway, E, *op. cit.*: 306). Robert Jordan's restraint, however, shows a more eloquent manner of behaving than that of the Spaniards, being a proof of his pride and intellectuality, which, however, he does not render obvious to the others. As many other values have been dismembered and destroyed by the civil war, so has religion. It seems that no moral value is still standing, but that of fighting for the Republic. Nevertheless, the necessity of choosing one side, as there is no mutual ground between the two, may have annulled one's dreams and principles, turning them into blind fighters for the cause. Upon Jordan's arrival, the Spanish civil war had already turned its population against themselves, to begin with, and against their own. The war is reduced to a difference in pride, level of acceptance and incongruous outlooks on life and on the governing of a society.

But in spite of its amplitude of character, of incident, despite its earthly setting and available reference, the novel clings to Hemingway's original vision. In comparison to other typical Hemingway protagonists, Robert Jordan is the sole being that can act, as he is able to befriend death and cast it upon other humans who fight to gain his beloved territory of Spain, as "There are no other countries like Spain" (*ibidem*: 89). The protagonist's complexity of character undoubtedly mirrors that of Hemingway, as he stands for another example supporting the idea that the latter projects himself onto every male character. He manages to tear tiny pieces of himself and metamorphose them into successful novels. Inglés, as he is called, despite his American origins, is a moral man, one of action, who is meant to follow the orders disregarding any turning of events. He lives, he loves, he allows himself to be absorbed by the feminine element, but not as much as to transform

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him into the prisoner of an emotion. He is perfectly aware that the sweet making believe of the future is not perpetual and that there is a strong likelihood for death to come at dawn. Robert Jordan is introspective, and yet never absent, and he shows a great restraint from anger and careless replies or reactions.

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