

EXPLORING EXISTENTIALISTS THEMES IN HEMINGWAY'S FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

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Abstract: *The novel 'For Whom the Bell Tolls' published in 1940 is a story of an American Volunteer Robert Jordan set against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War. The novel explores the various themes related to the philosophy of existentialism concerned with the meaning and purpose of life. Throughout the novel the protagonist Robert Jordan grapples with questions about the value of human existence and the purpose of life. In this novel Hemingway portrays the characters as being faced with an uncertain and hostile world, where life is fragile and death is always present. The character have to come to terms with the fact that their own lives have no inherent meaning or purpose and must find meaning in their actions and relationship with others. The present paper is an effort to find the reflection of the philosophy of existentialism in this novel.*

Key words: *human value, death, uncertainty and alienation.*

Existentialism is a philosophical movement which emphasizes the freedom of individuals to make their own choices and take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. It places emphasis on individual existence, freedom, and choice, as opposed to the determinism of traditional philosophies such as rationalism or materialism. Existentialists argue that life has no pre-determined meaning and that each person must find purpose through their own experiences and decisions. Existentialists emphasize human experience over abstract theories or logic; they are skeptical of social conventions, traditions, institutions, and dogma because they believe these can limit an individual's potential for self-expression and growth.

The fundamental problem of existentialism is concerned with ontology, the study of being. The human being existence is the first and basic fact; the human being has no essence that comes before his existence. The human being as being is nothing. This nothingness and the non-existence of an essence is the central source of the freedom the human being faces in each and every moment.

This philosophy of existentialism flourished in modern period, it gained its popularity in the years following the war, the time when Europe was in a despairing mood, perhaps not without the hope of social reconstruction but pessimistic and morbid enough to accept the existentialist outlook of the lack of design and intention in the universe and the nausea of human existence and its frustration.

Hemingway is known for his novels and short stories which deal with the inner struggles of mankind. His writings often deals with the themes of existentialism such as purpose of life, identity, alienation, freewill and mortality. In particular, Hemingway's works show a deep engagement with existentialist philosophy: that life is fundamentally meaningless and only our choices give it meaning. Through characters who grapple with questions of personal freedom versus societal constraints, guilt over wrongdoings or failed relationships, or an inability to find truth in their lives; Hemingway reveals the painful but essential process of developing one's own sense of self-identity. In addition to his exploration of existentialism, Hemingway often juxtaposes external forces such as war or societal conventions with our personal desires and longings for freedom.

The novel 'For Whom the Bells Tolls' published in 1940 tells the story of Robert Jordan, a young American in the International Brigades attached to a communist guerilla unit during the Spanish Civil War. As an expert in the use of explosives, he is assigned to blow up a bridge during an attack on the city of Segovia. The novel reflects the clash between his strong sense of duty and unwillingness to commit to a covert operation which would have repercussions. The novel graphically describes the brutality of war.

If we look at the theme of the novel we find that death is the main theme of the novel. When Jordan is assigned with the task of blowing up the bridge, he is fully aware that he will be killed. All the main characters contemplate their death in the novel. Other theme is the novel is that of suicide. Many of the characters including Robert Jordan, wishes to die instead of getting capture. They are prepared to kill themselves, be killed, or kill to avoid it. At the end of the novel we find Robert Jordan wounded and unable to travel with his companions awaits death in a final ambush. He prepares himself for suicide but still he hoped to avoid it because his father whom he regards as a coward committed suicide.

Brutality of war is prominently featured in the novel it also shows how innocence is lost due to this brutality. Every character in the novel experiences the cruelty of the war and as a consequence of it innocence of an individual is lost. Maria who experiences cruelties from the Fascists loses her innate nature of being innocent. As for the case of Anselmo he has to bear the decisions that he makes and continues living. The novel prominently features the existential attitude of characters and existential idea of death and alienation in a hostile world.

Robert Jordan is a typical Hemingway hero having all the qualities of a person who deals with existential dilemma and suffers from detachment. He fights for the loyalist cause in Spain which shows his search for the meaning of life. Jordan is devoted to the cause and his mission at the beginning of the book; however during the course of the novel he becomes disillusioned. First he realizes the folly of the General Golz's order to destroy the bridge in daylight, making the mission more dangerous than it has to be. When he kills the fascist cavalryman, he realizes that the enemy is just another human being like himself. When he falls in love with Maria, he suddenly has the strong desire to be out of the war, for he simply wants to settle down and live a peaceful life with her. In the last chapter, when he kills enemy guard on the bridge and then sees Anselmo needlessly killed, he realizes the gross and needless brutality of war and becomes totally disenchanted.

Jordan's experience of the system operating in the Republican military and Politics make him lose his earlier idealist feeling and we find him participating in war with the feeling of disinterest. But despite his feeling of detachment Jordan accepts the duty of blowing up the bridge. He is aware of the futility of his action, as Robert Lewis says, "Jordan never withdrew from his involvement even when the futility and the absurdity of it became clear to him" (Lewis,152). This proves that Robert Jordan is Hemingway's existential hero. Even though he realizes the dangerous nature of his mission and questions the order of General Goltz to carry it out in daylight after the offensive has commenced, he never doubts his own ability to accomplish the task. Even after Pablo steals and destroys some of his key equipment, he does not run away from the danger. Instead he carefully plans the task at hand and carries it out methodically. It is not surprising that he successfully destroys the bridge. He is however upset that Anselmo is killed in the process, for he knows that if Pablo had not destroyed the detonator, Anselmo would have been spared.

Jordan more clearly displays grace under pressure after he has been injured by fascist gunfire. Paralyzed and unable to easily escape with the others, he insists upon being left behind with a gun. He promises to fire at the approaching fascists, giving the others more time to escape. When Maria begs to stay with him, he convinces her to leave by telling her his mission would have been worthwhile if her life is saved. He also refuses to let Agustín put an end to his life, for that would be cowardly. Instead, he positions himself behind a tree and stoically waits for his certain death, showing tremendous grace under pressure. Thus Robert Jordan can be regarded as an existential hero trying to establish his individual identity by persisting in his idealistic struggle.

In this novel Hemingway is preoccupied with the theme of the forces of aggression, alienation, restraint and individualism. Robert Jordan is the hero in whose mind the forces of restraint and aggression battle for supremacy. Jordan is aware of the value of dying well with courage and style. Also he is aware of the value of dying for a moral cause, risking his life for an ideal worth dying for. Hemingway through Jordan shows us that in order to encounter violence and the possibility of death man has to summon whatever resources he can gather. As we know the theory of existentialism lays stress on choices man makes in life. Jordan knows that his immediate task will have no practical consequences, he chooses to act. His is an act which affirms the possibility of human dignity in the mist of violence. He emerges as an existential hero who feels and thinks and acts with unselfish dedication to something outside his own life. Here violence does not disintegrate or isolate the Hemingway's man, rather it integrates him. Through this novel one can see how a man can achieve dignity and maintain his integrity in a violent world, encountering disasters. This is the existential approach reflected in the novel.

After analyzing the novel it can be seen that existentialism plays a vital role in the themes and characters. Hemingway here explores ideas of mortality, freedom and personal responsibility through Robert Jordan's and other characters' choices and interactions with each other. It ultimately reveals that life is filled with difficult decisions which one must weigh carefully against potential repercussions in order to live a meaningful existence.

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