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Transformation from Idealism to Disillusionment in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

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Abstract:

This paper proposes to examine the transformation that the Characters in Hemingway's war-novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* go through from Idealism to disillusionment, bringing out the disillusionment and the futility of war. There is always a great difference between seeing war from outside and seeing it from inside. The outcome and the effects of war are usually a great deal different from the outcome and effects thought or imagined at onset of it. As a result of this great difference in outcome and effects, there comes disillusionment in the life of those soldiers who participated in it with the hope that war would bring good to the humanity. The novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* shows two distinct picture of war- the one at the beginning of the novel when the soldiers are enthusiastic, idealistic and determined to bring change in the country; the other at the end of the novel when the soldiers are disillusioned, remorseful, disenchanted and in a conflict whether their decision to participate in the war was right or wrong.

Keywords: Idealism, Disillusionment, Futility, War-Novels, Transformation.

Introduction:

The title of this study has been chosen 'From Idealism to Disillusionment in For Whom The Bell Tolls' as most of the characters of Hemingway's this war-novel, *For Whom The Bell Tolls* exhibit the quality of perfect idealism in the early part of the novel but as the novel progresses or the war drags on, they come more and more in touch with the reality of the war, and as result come to the realization that the ideals and values which they held valuable, dear and important were false, hollow and of no use to them. It is quite noticeable to observe about Hemingway's character that he "...is an idealist whose knowledge of the ugly social and moral truth shatters his idealism forcing him to change, adjust, transform or develop a new philosophy of life" (Bakshi 28). This Hemingway does as part his strategy to portray the reality of war as

when disillusionment is portrayed with earlier idealism and romanticism, reality of war becomes more visible and distinct.

Transformation of Characters from Idealism to Disillusionment:

The transformation from idealism to disillusionment, which we see in Hemingway's war-novels results from his personal experience in the war. His war-novels cannot be seen, keeping aside his personal experience on the battlefield. Both are interdependent upon each other. It is out of this romanticism about war that he himself participated in the first world war as an ambulance driver from the side of Italian army, and had the first hand experience about war. This experience of working as an ambulance driver in the World War I finds expression in the novel, *Farewell to Arms*, the protagonist, of which resembles Hemingway to a great extent. On the battlefield of first world war and Spanish Civil war, he came to the realization that war is not as spectacular as is often dreamed by the naïve romantic soldiers; rather it is quite opposite to their romantic dreaming, which was beautifully depicted in his works like *Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* which is result of his working as a war correspondent in the Spanish Civil War. His first hand experience on the battlefield helped him to depict war realistically, bringing out the disillusionment and futility of war. He wrote exactly what he saw on the battlefield. "He felt he could write only about what he had actually experienced and his literary credo was to tell as it was" (Meyers 238). Hemingway has learned this realistic style of portraying war from his predecessor, Stephen Crane who brought out the realities of war in his novel *Red Badge of Courage*.

The novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* tells about the Spanish Civil War which was fought between the Fascists and the Republicans. Hemingway covered Spanish Civil War as a war correspondent. This first-hand experience of covering the Spanish Civil War makes him acquainted with the harsh reality of war. Seeing the harsh realities of war, trench warfare, devastation, suffering and the mental trauma the war causes, Hemingway becomes disillusioned about the war. These feelings of disillusionment and futility of war have crept in this novel. At the time when this novel was written, republican ideals were gaining ground all round and people were mad after these ideals. This enthusiasm for the republican ideals can be seen in almost all the characters of this novel. The protagonist of this novel, Robert Jordan who is an American and has a job but he is so much fascinated by the republican notions or the Civil War going on in Spain between the republicans and the fascists that he is ready to do anything for the republican cause or go to any extent to protect the ideals which he holds dear. Even his life, family, job and country are not so much dear to him as the republican cause. He leaves his country and enlists in the war from the republican side. At the time he joined it he felt like he was going in religious war or crusade. He said, "At either of those places you felt that you were taking part in a crusade" (Hemingway 243). He has such a strong belief in republican ideals as a religious person has and seems to find a link of brotherhood with all the comrades of republican faction. He says, "It gave you a part in something that you could believe in wholly and completely and in which you felt an absolute brotherhood with the others who were engaged in it" (Hemingway 243). He

is so much devoted to republican cause that he does not care even for his life. When the General asks him about whether or not he is interested in blowing up the bridge- the most difficult task. He does not think even for a while what this task entails. He says that he will execute the task as ordered. Robert Jordan Says, “I will do it, I will do it all right” (Hemingway 8).

These are some of the instances of the early enthusiasm of Robert Jordan. As the novel moves forward, the war drags on and he comes in contact with reality of war, he drifts more and more towards disillusionment. He hears the different narrations of atrocities committed by both the fascists and the republicans. Looking at pathetic condition of Maria, hearing about her pathetic tale of suffering, pain and agony that her parents were brutally murdered and she herself was raped by a group of fascist soldiers, he says that atrocities have been committed from both the sides in name of republican or true ideals. He becomes so much disillusioned that he is not able to differentiate between republicans and fascist; he can't recognize which is good side and which is the bad side as both the side have committed atrocities in their extreme ways. Pablo, another important character in the novel killed a large number of fascists in the name of republican cause in the beginning of war. All these things led to the disillusionment of Robert Jordan who does not find ideals on the battlefield for which he joined the republican side. Interior monologues clearly indicate the struggle and conflict that is going on in Robert Jordan's mind. Although throughout the novel, he seems to be fighting, he is completely disillusioned with republican cause. When he does not seek anything to justify his enlistment in the republican side, he goes to the extent of saying that he joined the republican side as he is anti fascist though in the beginning he joined the republican side being influenced by the republican ideals which he has found hollow and empty. When Maria asks him whether he is republican, he simply says, “No I am an anti-fascist” (Hemingway 69).

Towards the end of novel, he repents for joining the republican side and wishes for others to run away from the battlefield. When he has been wounded and is about to die, he says, “Think about them being away. Think about them going through the timber. Think about them crossing a creek. Think about them riding through the heather. Think about them going up the slope. Think about them” (Hemingway 489). He says this as he does not want to see anyone entangled in the web of hollow ideals as he himself got entangled. A close look at the life of Robert Jordan from his enlistment in the war till his death present two contrasting picture- the one full of enthusiasm and zeal for the republican ideals at the time of joining the republican side and the other full of disillusionment, remorse and repentance towards the end of novel.

This same strain of disillusionment with the war is found in the other characters of this novel. Just like Robert Jordan, Pablo too was enthusiastic and romantic about the Republic cause. He is one of the main characters in this novel. At the onset of fighting, he plays the most dominating role in the war. In the beginning, he was a very ferocious and brutal fighter. His early enthusiasm can be seen in his killing a large number of fascist soldiers and blowing their trains up. When Robert Jordan comes to join the republican, he asks Pablo whether he killed civilian guards in the fight. He says, “Several, But only these two without injury to the horses”

(Hemingway 16). Far and wide he is famous as devoted soldier for the republican cause. Anselmo, an experienced soldier, tells Robert Jordan about the early enthusiasm of Pablo in the beginning of the novel. He says, “It was Pablo who blew up the train at Arevalo, that was Pablo” (Hemingway 16). There is not the least doubt about it that Pablo was very much ferocious in the beginning but as the war drags on, it causes loss to the public life and property. There is no end to the war. It continues for a long time causing devastation, massacre, bloodshed and mental trauma and hunting men out of their houses. All these realities of war bring Pablo to the realization that war brings no good to humanity. The results and outcome of this fight were quite in opposition to what Pablo had imagined at the onset of war. This is not only the result of this particular war rather it is the reality of almost each war that took place or is taking around the globe. As a result of this great contrast between the romantic dreaming and reality of war, there comes a great change the personality of Pablo. He has undergone a great transformation, changing his perception about war in the new light of reality and experience. He becomes disillusioned with the war. After some time when the war continues, he transforms from an idealistic and enthusiastic soldier to a realist. Now his policy about war has also suffered a great change. Now he doesn’t want to get involved any more in bloodshed and tries as best as possible to remain away from the face to face confrontation. He has been in hiding for a long time without killing anyone so that there may not start fierce fighting from both the sides. This attitude of Pablo shows that a soldier who has witnessed the harsh realities of war understands the value of peace more than a person who has not seen the fierce fighting on the battlefield. What he is concerned with now is only the self-preservation which is quite opposite to the romantic notions of war that a soldier is always ready to sacrifice himself for the cause which he supports. This is quite in opposition to Pablo’s early enthusiasm and ferocity. Prolongation of war has compelled him to drift more and more towards realism and disillusionment about war.

When Jordan joins him, he simply asks him not to create any kind of disturbance on the hill. He knows it best that if Jordan starts fight there, they will be hunted out of the hill by the fascists and the peace of the region will be disturbed. He says to Robert Jordan, “I live here and I operate beyond Segovia. If you make a disturbance here, we will be hunted out of these mountains. It is only by doing nothing here that we are able to live in these mountains” (Hemingway 14). These words of Pablo clearly indicate that he is disillusioned with war and now what he wants is an escape from fight and living life with peace and comfort. This is what every realist soldier wants as after being on the battlefield for quite some time, he has made himself acquainted with the reality of war and he has known the truth behind the so called hollow notions of war. Pablo also runs away with the explosive Robert Jordan brought with him to blow up the fascist-controlled bridge so that Jordan may not blow up the bridge and there may not start fresh fighting. All this goes to show that Pablo at no cost is ready to get himself involved in fighting as he has seen the devastation of war himself.

There is one more characteristic of disillusionment that a person becomes repentant over his past or over the decision he took under the illusion of so called hollow notions and ideals.

Pablo is repented over his past deeds. Under the illusion of republican ideals, he was too much enthusiastic and as a result in the beginning of the fight killed a large number of soldiers very brutally which he repents over and thinks of compensating it if he had the power of undoing it or making the dead soldiers alive again which was quite impossible. The only thing he could do now is mere repentance and grieving over the past. He says, “If I could restore them to life, I would, I would bring them all back to life” (Hemingway 217). The same repentance is on the other side of the battlefield, the Fascist General is repentant over cutting the heads of the republican sides. Thus both the sides on battlefield are repentant over the past atrocities committed by them. These atrocities are usually perpetrated by the romantic soldiers at the beginning of almost each war as they are not aware with reality of war and the repercussions of their rash actions. The repercussions of any war are usually much more dire, fatal and opposite to what are thought or imagined at the onset of it.

Being on the battlefield for a long time, he has come to know that a soldier on the battlefield gets no more than a painful death. When he hears about the painful death of Kashkin, he becomes a bit philosophical and utters the words which are not true only about Kashkin or the Spanish civil rather these words carry universal significance and can be applied to any war anywhere in the world. He says, “That is what happens to everybody. That is the way we will all finish” (Hemingway 17). It is not only Pablo and Robert who have come this realization rather there are a number other characters in this particular novel who have come to know this truth about war, after being on the battlefield for quite some time and having the horrific experiences about it. Anselmo, another important character, realises the same thing. He says, “That is the way all men end. That is the way men have always ended” (Hemingway 17). These words of Pablo and Anselmo bring out the universal truth which can be applied in context of any war in the world; the surest thing in these wars is death of the soldiers who are taking part in them. These characters’ conversation towards the close of the war bring out the disillusionment and futility the war causes and present a sharp contrast to the words and actions at the onset of war which were full of romantic dreaming, enthusiasm and hope.

The above discussion clearly points out that both Jordan and Pablo start the fight as enthusiastic soldiers under the illusion of republican ideals but prolongation of war and the devastation, mental trauma, reality of war bring them both out of the illusion of hollow republican ideals and notions. As the war continues, they come more and more in touch with the reality of war and realize the hollowness, emptiness and deception behind the ideals which they thought were very much essential and valuable. As a result of this realization of truth and reality they eventually transform themselves from early idealism and romanticism about war to realism and disillusionment. It also emerges from the above discussion that Hemingway’s war novels bring out the futility and reality of war, displaying clearly devastation, mental trauma, loss of life it causes to the soldiers who are involved in it. All this he brings out through the transformation of his characters from idealism and enthusiasm to realism. In the early part of the war novels, he shows the hero full of idealism and enthusiasm and in the later part he shows the same character

drifting towards realism which he realizes after experiencing the harsh realities of war on the battlefield. Hemingway brings both the romantic and realistic element of war within the framework of the same novel as part of his strategy for bringing the reality of war as when both the things are put together reality becomes more obvious and easily noticeable even to the common reader.

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