



For Whom the Bell Tolls

Ernest Hemingway

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In 1937 Ernest Hemingway traveled to Spain to cover the civil war there for the North American Newspaper Alliance. Three years later he completed the greatest novel to emerge from "the good fight", *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

The story of Robert Jordan, a young American in the International Brigades attached to an antifascist guerilla unit in the mountains of Spain, it tells of loyalty and courage, love and defeat, and the tragic death of an ideal. In his portrayal of Jordan's love for the beautiful Maria and his superb account of El Sordo's last stand, in his brilliant travesty of La Pasionaria and his unwillingness to believe in blind faith, Hemingway surpasses his achievement in *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* to create a work at once rare and beautiful, strong and brutal, compassionate, moving and wise.

"If the function of a writer is to reveal reality," Maxwell Perkins wrote to Hemingway after reading the manuscript, "no one ever so completely performed it." Greater in power, broader in scope, and more intensely emotional than any of the author's previous works, it stands as one of the best war novels of all time.

For Whom the Bell Tolls Details

Date : Published March 3rd 2018 by CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (first published October 1940)

ISBN : 9781986158824

Author : Ernest Hemingway

Format : Paperback 102 pages

Genre : Classics, Fiction, Literature, Historical, Historical Fiction, War

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From Reader Review For Whom the Bell Tolls for online ebook

stew says

I obscenity your transmission. I obscenity in the milk of your ancestors. I, and always and forever I; wandering I, mucking I, obscene obscenity forever and always and milking and transmitting and mucking wandering amongst the forever and the always I; obscenity obscene, mucking milking milk ancestral forever and ever to have and to hold and to be and now and always and forever; this now, wandering now, transmitting now, mucking now, milking now, obscene obscenity now, ancestral now, forever to be and to hold and to have always.

Tom says

Ok, before I commit the sacrilege of dismissing this "classic," permit me to establish my Hemingway bona fides: I have read and loved just about everything else he wrote, and have taught *Sun Also Rises*, *Farewell to Arms*, and many short stories, and had a blast doing it. I've read Carlos Baker's classic bio, and numerous critical articles on H. I've made the pilgrimage to Key West and taken pictures of his study and the hordes of 6-toed cats. I dig Papa, ok?

But I can not stand this book! I should say up front that I've never been able to tolerate it long enough to finish it -- twice. First time was nearly 30 years ago, and as a fairly recently discharged Army troop, I took up this book with much anticipation and excitement. I couldn't get past about half way through. I found the prose so incredibly flat and dull as to be soporific (and, yes, I fully understand and appreciate H's famous "Iceberg Principle" of writing -- "the thing left unsaid" etc). The problem wasn't the "thing left unsaid;" the problem was too many things said, and in a very boring fashion. How could a book with such a dramatic plot be so dull, I wondered in shock? It's all in the language, or lack thereof. I have a theory that great short story writers often don't make great, or even good, novelists, because the voice and style that works so well in the shorter genre just doesn't translate to the longer one (John Cheever, case in point; IB Singer, to a lesser extent). Now, of course, H. did write great novels; this just isn't one of them. Take away the language in H's novels, and what are you left with -- borderline juvenile adventures and fantasies, or at best, semi-journalistic accounts.

Compare the opening of *Bells* with the opening of *Farewell to Arms*: be honest and tell me if you hear even one faint echo of the magical rhythm of that famous opening in *Bells* -- anywhere, not just the beginning? And the dialogue, sweet Jesus, Joseph and Mary, I've heard corporate phone recordings with more intonation and human warmth.

A few months ago, our book club selected this novel. At first, I kept my opinions to myself and hoped I would have a different response reading this time. I readily acknowledge that my reading tastes have evolved -- matured, I hope -- significantly over the years, and maybe I just had a tin ear 30 years ago. Not the case. I couldn't even get beyond the first 6 pgs this time. That flat voice was duller than ever! "Waterboarding would be more tolerable than reading 400+ pages of this stuff," I thought. I've choked down some mediocre books before for the sake of fulfilling my civic duty as a long-standing member of our book club, but I couldn't do it this time.

This is not to suggest that the rest of you are wrong. I have a dear friend who's read more great literature than

I can remember, and he loves this book, and expresses great shock when I tell him how much I hate it. But there it is.

Natalie Vellacott says

Oh dear, I fear this review will be lambasted and that people will note that this is the second time I have dismissed a "classic" this week. In my defence, I did enjoy Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

I really wanted to like this and persevered to past the half way point. But when I got to the stage where I was dreading picking up the book as I was finding it so monotonous, I decided enough was enough--it was going back to the library from whence it came.

The lengthy novel tells the story of Robert Jordan, a young American in the International Brigades attached to a republican guerrilla unit during the Spanish Civil War. As a dynamiter, he is assigned to blow up a bridge during an attack on the city of Segovia.

By the half-way point, he still hadn't blown up the bridge but was instead engaging in seemingly never-ending debate about why it needed blowing up, how to do it, whether or not everyone in his group was in favour of the destructionthe list could go on but I will spare you. I turned each page wondering if it would be the culmination of 250 pages of planning but sadly it was not to be. Or maybe that was a good thing because the soldiers guarding the bridge were spared for another day.

Imagine writing down every single action you take in a typical day from morning until evening whether relevant and interesting or not. Then gather a group of people and ask them to do the same. Then merge the pages and you have this book.

There is limited bad language although I found it amusing that for the stronger language they have simply inserted the word "obscenity" whether it made sense or not. There is some violence and some sexual content. The content wasn't offensive enough to put me off. I just thought this was extremely dull...

I now await the barrage of comments bemoaning my ignorance and explaining why I should have been excited about this book.....please feel free.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

587. For Whom The Bell Tolls, Ernest Hemingway

For Whom the Bell Tolls is a novel by Ernest Hemingway published in 1940. It tells the story of Robert Jordan, a young American in the International Brigades attached to a republican guerrilla unit during the Spanish Civil War. As a dynamiter, he is assigned to blow up a bridge during an attack on the city of Segovia. The novel is regarded as one of Hemingway's best works, along with *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and *A Farewell to Arms*.

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Mutasim Billah says

“If we win here we will win everywhere. The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it.”

Set in the middle of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* tells the tale of one Robert Jordan, an American who is given an assignment to work with a republican guerrilla unit to blow up a bridge during an attack on the city of Segovia.

The story explores various wartime sentiments such as thoughts of mortality, the possibility of suicide to escape torture and execution at the hands of enemy, camaraderie, betrayal, different political ideologies and bigotry.

Ernest Hemingway (center) in 1937 with Ilya Ehrenburg (Russian author, left) and Gustav Regler (German writer, right) during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)

The book garnered much attention for Hemingway's incorporation of a strange semi-archaic form of English to represent text translated from Spanish. Several real-life figures of Marxist background who played a part in the war are mentioned in the text as well. The book was unanimously recommended for the Pulitzer back in 1941 but the decision was controversially reversed by the board and no award was given that year.

Side-notes:

Hemingway himself was involved in the Spanish Civil War as a journalist. In 1937, Hemingway agreed to report on the Spanish Civil War for the North American Newspaper Alliance (NANA), arriving in Spain in March with Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens. Ivens was filming *The Spanish Earth*, a propaganda film in support of the Republican side. He wanted Hemingway to replace John Dos Passos as screenwriter, since Dos Passos had left the project when his friend José Robles was arrested and later executed.

Hemingway (center) with Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens and German writer Ludwig Renn (serving as an International Brigades officer) in Spain during Spanish Civil War, 1937

Jeffrey Keeten says

"No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

-----John Donne

Robert Capa's iconic 1936 photo of a falling soldier.

Between 1936-1939 a war happened in Spain. The world refers to it as the Spanish Civil War, but to the citizens of Spain it is called **The Civil War**. It was a war for control of the soul of a country. It was fought between the Republicans, who were democratically elected and the Nationalists, a Fascist group wanting to overthrow the government. Most people were not aware at the time, but really this Civil War was a precursor, a warming pan for World War Two. The Soviet Union and a coalition of other future allies who stayed behind the scenes provided help and advice for the Republicans. Germany and Italy provided support for the Nationalists. There were international brigades formed up of volunteers from all over the world who came to Spain to fight against fascism.

They lost.

Francisco Franco, leader of the Nationalists, was the dictator of Spain until his death in 1975.

Ernest Hemingway went to Spain as a war correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance and was hoping to find some great material for a book. The dialogue is written in an archaic style implying that it is the most correct translation from the Spanish. The thees and thous are distracting and certainly added some ponderousness to a book that was set in the 1930s not the 1630s.

Hemingway in Spain.

Robert Jordan is an American who has been trained to be a dynamiter. He joins a band of gypsy freedom fighters up in the hills of Sierra de Guadarrama with orders to blow a bridge that may or may not be important. The chances of survival are slender because they are too few and the timeline too tight. He meets Maria who has been saved by the band from the Fascists who had tortured and raped her.

He falls head over heels in love.

"I loved you when I saw you today and I loved you always though I have never seen you before."

It could be the added tension of facing certain death coupled with her very real vulnerability that made him protective and lustful for her. Their relationship quickly goes medieval with her begging him for ways to

help him: shining his shoes, pouring him wine, mending his clothes, or fetching him something to eat. She is constantly insecure about her appearance because the Fascists had cut off her hair and she only had a stubble grown back. The relationship is built on the most shallow grounds. It is difficult to conceive that it would have survived a move back into a regular life.

“But did thee feel the earth move?”

I’m not sure if this is where the concept of sex being cosmic originated, but it certainly provided some eye rolling moments for this reader. Especially when the gypsy witch Pilar tells Maria that she will only feel the earth move three times in her lifetime.

Why three times?

It is not known, but Pilar is most certain it can only happen three times.

There is a 1943 movie starring Ingrid Bergman and Gary Cooper.

Jordan’s relationship with the rest of the band is one of uncertainty and shifting alliances. He certainly is stepping on the toes of the original leader Pablo who used to be a man of great courage, but had lost his desire to want to kill or be killed. He is considered a coward or in my opinion maybe he’d just had his belly full of it. He commits an act of treason in an attempt to save the band, but decides in the final moment to come back and help. In some ways he is the most interesting character in the book. A man who is evolved past mindlessness and wants more reason for blowing a bridge or killing people than just to follow orders.

The best scene in the book is the death of a band of guerrillas who are lead by El Sordo. They are trapped on a hill by the Nationalists and it is some of the most compelling writing in the book as the action shifts between Jordan’s band who want to help, but know it is suicide to help, and the band on the hill wondering if help will arrive. Courage is something Hemingway respects and cowardice is something he worries about. The potential of experiencing his own bout of cowardice or finding it in others is a theme of his life.

Jordan’s father had committed suicide, an act of cowardice as far as Jordan was concerned. He is worried that he will be captured and would be forced to kill himself like his father. It puts into question his whole feelings about his father and the way he died. I found myself wincing as I was reading these passages seeing Hemingway’s own mind so glaringly revealed. Hemingway’s father killed himself, as did his sister and brother. The curse continued into another generation with the suicide of his granddaughter Margaux. If Hemingway felt the way Jordan did (I believe he did.) I do wonder if he finally forgave his own father when he became the mechanism of his own death or did he maybe blame his father for cursing the family with suicidal thoughts?

Hemingway posing with his favorite shogun. Later he used it to end his life.

I read this book as a teenager and was suitably impressed with Hemingway at the time. I’d read *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* and enjoyed them. I approached *For Whom the Bell Tolls* convinced I would love it as well. Rereading it now, at this point in my life was a struggle. The story is actually very simple, but this is a book that has fallen in a barrel of water and been bloated beyond recognition. Hemingway is famous for his concise sentences and for the precision of his plots, but in this novel he certainly moves away from both of those concepts. There is a wonderful short novel here hidden behind too much ink. The plot actually

becomes tedious and repetitive. Words I thought I would never use to describe a Hemingway novel. I can't begin to convey how disappointed I felt. It makes me fearful to read others of his books that I have such fine memories of reading.

This book was very popular and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

Adrianne Mathiowetz says

At some point in high school, I decided that I hated Ernest Hemingway. Was it the short story we read in English class? Was it the furniture collection named after him at Gabbert's? Something made me decide that Hemingway was a prick, and after that I dismissed him entirely.

This book was beautiful.

I don't even like books about war. (Case in point: I scanned half of *War and Peace*. I think which half is obvious.) But this book took five hundred pages to blow up a single bridge. There were tanks to count, grenades to gather, diagrams to be drawn and generals to contact. Somehow all of this managed to be completely enthralling to a reader whose eyes would otherwise glaze over at the mere mention of battalions.

I have to admit, a big part of my interest in it was likely due to the whole "American escapes America to live in caves and drink absinthe with the gypsies" thing. Who doesn't want to fantasize about that? And sleeping on pine needles, and falling in love with the gypsy girl! YES.

But mostly: I love how Hemingway writes his dialogue as though it were being directly translated. I love the slow sense of living, the feeling of being in the open air, the way you enter his main character's head through his stream of conscious ramblings. And I love that Robert Jordan is referred to as Robert Jordan throughout the entire book -- the way you refer to famous people, historical figures, the names you must commit to memory.

Garrett Burnett says

I have a hard time with Mr. Hemingway, I guess. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* didn't involve as much rampant drinking as many of his other books, but I blame that on the setting—a cave in the mountains where only a few gallons of wine were available (and a flask of absinthe, the flavor of which is described over the course of about thirty pages). However, his standard sexism toward the female characters still applied. Here are a few more things I didn't like about the book:

*Did he really have to write "rope-soled shoes" every time he mentioned their footwear or even their feet?

*The dialogue was the standard stiff Hemingway dialogue, but somehow it seemed even more wooden.

*Every Spanish character goes by a first name or a nickname. Not Robert Jordan, the American. He is Robert Jordan (full name) at every mention.

*Robert Jordan finds the love of his life in about 17 minutes. Leave it to the Papa to churn out a beautiful and realistic love story.

*Every character is so up front with every emotion and the writing was so repetitive (here is my dramatic interpretation): *He was frightened. "I say these things because I am frightened," said the frightened man. or She felt herself falling in love with the Hemingway-like main character. "I feel myself falling in love with*

you," she told him. "Yes," he replied. "You are falling in love with me."

I liked a few things about this one: the power struggles, the descriptions of war strategies at various levels of command... Also, it must have been all right because it held my weak attention pretty well despite how slowly the story unfolded. Also, it ended well. Well, it ended, anyway.

Fionnuala says

Reviewed in May 2012

The last Hemingway I read was *A Moveable Feast* and I enjoyed it a lot. It helped that I was staying in Paris when I read it so there was that extra special feeling we get when we walk the very streets an author describes in his stories. I think it suited Hemingway to write stories, and perhaps short novels - I also remember enjoying *The Old Man and the Sea* and images from that book stayed with me for years.

In spite of those good experiences, I couldn't relate to this book. I had just finished reading Xavier Cercas' *Soldiers of Salamis: A Novel* when I picked up *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Cercas' book is a mixture of fact and fiction revolving around events and personalities associated with the Spanish civil war so I figured it was a good idea to follow that reading with this book by Hemingway since it concerns some of the same events. Everything recounted by Cercas, even the fictional parts, have an aura of 'truth' about them. You just believe these events happened and that the characters reacted in the way described. Such a 'truth' is not easy task to convey, especially when the author is working with events which took place more than 60 years previously.

Hemingway wrote his novel much closer to the time of the events described yet I couldn't manage to make that leap into believing in the fiction he was presenting. Most of the characters didn't seem credible to me. The main character, Robert Jordan, whom Hemingway continually refers to by his full name in an awkward way, is not so much a character as a monument to male ego tripping. He is big, he is blonde, he is strong, he is an expert in explosives, he is wise, he is always right and he gets the only girl in the place within minutes of meeting her.

Another of the main characters, who is constantly referred to by Hemingway as 'the wife of Pablo' rather than Pablo's wife, is also a larger than life creation, bearing closer resemblance to some sybil of the ancient world than to a Spanish peasant woman of the 1930's. You admire her wisdom but you just can't believe she's real. Most of the characters speak a dialect of Spanish which H tries to render in English using lots of 'thees' and 'thous' and some convoluted constructions similar to 'the wife of Pablo' above. When this is done in dialogue, I can see the point of it as it reinforces the idea that this is all taking place in Spain, in Spanish. When the author also uses such constructions in narrative passages, it just becomes wearisome to read.

The writing is stiff and awkward, as if written under some invisible constraint, and it lacks any kind of emotion. I am tempted to compare it to watching a man walking about in trousers which are too tight around the crotch, there is that kind of jerky limbs and stilted movement.

Perhaps I would have had a different reaction to this book had I read it at an earlier point in my life. Perhaps then I would have ignored these idiosyncrasies and just concentrated on getting to the end to see how the story turned out. These days, I'm less interested in how the story turns out.

Loretta says

Suffice it to say, I am not a Hemingway fan.

Madeline says

Just when I'd decided that Hemingway only ever wrote books about people getting drunk in cafes and thinking about how miserable they are, he surprises me and comes out with something like this. Naturally, the characters still get drunk and think about how miserable they are, but they do it while being guerrilla fighters in the Spanish Civil War, which makes it awesome.

In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien writes that, "If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie." I kept coming back to that quote as I read this book, because it proves that Robbins was absolutely right. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is not an uplifting story, and it's not moral. And when you're writing about a ragtag bunch of rebels fighting a fascist army, that's not easy to do. There are no good guys in this story, and no bad guys - not even the fascists.

"Good" and "Bad" in this story isn't divided by such clear lines. Instead, the biggest enemy that the protagonist (I won't use the word "hero") Robert Jordan faces is within the rebel group itself - a lot of strong personalities are drawn together by this war, and throwing them all together and making them live in a cave maybe wasn't the best way to go about things. The result is a fascinating portrait of a small group of people under enormous pressure, all trying to do the right thing even as they question what the right thing really is. Even when you're fighting fascists, nothing is black and white.

Another observation: having previously believed that Hemingway was incapable of writing compelling female characters, I am now forced to revise that opinion. There are only two women in this book, but they are both fully realized and compelling. Other reviewers found Maria one-dimensional, but I thought she was fascinating because of what was hinted at, but not revealed, about her. Her staggering understatement to describe her time as a prisoner of war - "Things were done to me" - is wonderful. She was tragic and sweet, and on a related note, Hemingway writes some surprisingly good sex scenes, so there's that.

And Pilar. Holy crap. Probably one of the most well-done characters I've ever read, she's alternately the mother figure, the best friend, the confidante, and the villain. Pilar is my new spirit animal.

A war story without heroes or villains, full of hollow victories and rage against the bureaucracy of war and what people under pressure can be forced to do, filled with some very good meditations on killing and war and love, and the importance of acting beyond personal gain. Well done, Mr. Hemingway.

(I should also add that Campbell Scott, who read the audiobook, does a fantastic job - he makes the characters' voices different enough for you to tell them apart without difficulty, and his Robert Jordan voice is exactly how I imagine Hemingway sounded in real life. If you're considering reading this, I'd recommend tracking down the audio version)

Carlos says

Lo bueno que me dejó este libro fue la curiosidad que me dio por leer más acerca de la guerra civil española. Por otro lado, Hemingway demuestra lo que sabe: escribir buenas novelas.

Lo que me gusta, es que siendo sólo cinco días de guerra, logra hacer un libro completo, lleno de recuerdos e historias emocionantes. Me toca un poco el hecho de saber que podrían ser la últimas horas de mi vida, me pongo en ese lugar y como que reflexiono. Me da vueltas en la cabeza cómo sería ser experto en explosivos y volar un puente.

¿Recomendado? Sí, los personajes son muy cercanos y "vivos", y de pasada, da a conocer un poco sobre la guerra civil española.

Chris says

I can't understand how anyone would dislike this book. I loved "The Windup Bird Chronicle," but I understand how one wouldn't enjoy it. "For Whom the Bell Tolls," however, was one of those classics that was so perfect, so profoundly moving and yet just enjoyable to read, that I can't comprehend the negative review. Like "Anna Karenina," "Crime and Punishment," or "Native Son," its one of those cornerstones of literature that utterly justified its spot in the cannon. The characters were perfectly wrought, and achingly human, with each life being so significant and yet miniscule in the face of war.

It's true that Hemingway can't write a real woman to save his life (Pilar is fantastic, but really he writes her as a man), and Maria's adoration of Robert gets tiresome, but really that's the only false note in this entire epic. For everyone who complains about the stilted dialogue, the dialogue is one of the strokes of absolute genius. Yes, it sounds unnatural, but that's because Hemingway is perfectly capturing how people who don't speak the same native language communicate -- the dialogue is in actually in Spanish between the American Robert and the Spanish guerillas. It's brilliant.

Lisa says

Not my favourite Hemingway, a little bit too slow.

But the topic of the Spanish Civil War makes it a good read, and the John Donne poem that gave the novel its title should be yelled, shouted, sung, recited, hummed and whispered by heart over and over again, especially in these times of outlandishly islandish people destroying the world again:

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know FOR WHOM
THE BELL TOLLS; it tolls for thee.

Thank you Hemingway for being involved in mankind!

Barry Pierce says

'Robert Jordan sits on the pine needle floor of the pine forest, the scent of pine drifting through the pine trees which surround him. Gazing through the pines he sees a mountain which reminds him of a breast. It is domed, like a breast, but without a nipple, unlike a breast. The breastness of the mountain is superb. If only it was covered in pine needles and pine trees and had the scent of pine wafting around it. Then Robert would truly be happy.'

For Whom the Bell Tolls is allegedly a novel by Ernest Hemingway. Set during the Spanish Civil War, it is a story about an American dynamiter who is attempting to blow up a bridge in order to counteract Franco's forces.

Our main character, Robert Jordan, who is essentially a bad haircut personified, might win the title of 'most boring protagonist to ever appear in print'. Robert spends most of his time sitting on the forest floor and thinking about breasts. Poor Robert, his life really stinks! When he isn't thinking about boobs, he goes off on fifty-page long flashbacks to his life before the war when he was a young American in Madrid, cornering young girls at house parties and telling them how *Kid A* is actually the connoisseurs' choice when it comes to Radiohead albums but he has a soft spot for *Pablo Honey*.

What Robert needs is a feminine foil. A woman who can really stand-up to him and someone the reader can truly get behind. So Papa Hemingway shits out Maria, a woman so badly written that the only thing I can remember about her is that her nipples point upwards. Possibly the most lamentable aspect of Maria's character is the fact that she was raped by a group of fascists, a tragic backstory that Hemingway glosses over into order to talk about what a *fantastic* rack she has.

Hemingway's prose has always been an easy target. I would never, ever stoop so low. In fact, I will say thank god for Hemingway's prose! If *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was actually written at a literacy level higher than that of a kindergartener then it would genuinely be unreadable. On top of that, Hemingway makes the frankly strange decision to self-censor all of the obscenities throughout the novel. 'What the fuck' becomes 'what the muck' and so on. hilariously, he also often substitutes obscenities with the word 'obscurity'. So there are genuinely moments in this novel where characters say 'what the obscenity are you doing?' and 'go obscenity yourself'.

My advice to all of you is to stay well away from this mess. There's nothing to see here folks. If you are interested in a book on the Spanish Civil War, read Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. If you want a good book about a bridge, and hey who doesn't, read Willa Cather's *Alexander's Bridge*. God, for whom the bell tolls? It tolls for me.
