



THE EQUIVOCAL BELL

Truth and falsehood struggle for control over the film version of Hemingway's novel about Spain. Some remarkably fine acting. Reviewed by Joy Davidman.

THERE is likely to be a sizzling cross-fire of controversy over *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. Its sins of omission and commission—half-truths, evasions, and confusions of the issue—are black enough to damn three ordinary films. But *For Whom The Bell Tolls* is no ordinary film. Artistically, it is for the most part a beautiful thing. And its emotional understanding of the war in Spain transcends its factual inaccuracy. Here is one of the most tragic and heroic subjects of our time, presented with considerable sympathy; and when you have subtracted all of its sins you find that there is still some virtue left in it.

How much? That's where the controversy comes in. The lies in this picture are fairly explicit. You can put your finger on them; here, and here, history is falsified. The evasions are similarly glaring. So much that ought to have been said—even the name Franco, even the word fascism—has been shirked. The truth, on the other hand, is only occasionally stated in so many words; for the most part, it is intangible and indirect. You see an American and some Spaniards—decent people, with whom you identify yourself. You watch them fighting the German and Italian panzer divisions. You hear them speak of the republic, and see them die for it. Emotionally, you are part of their struggle.

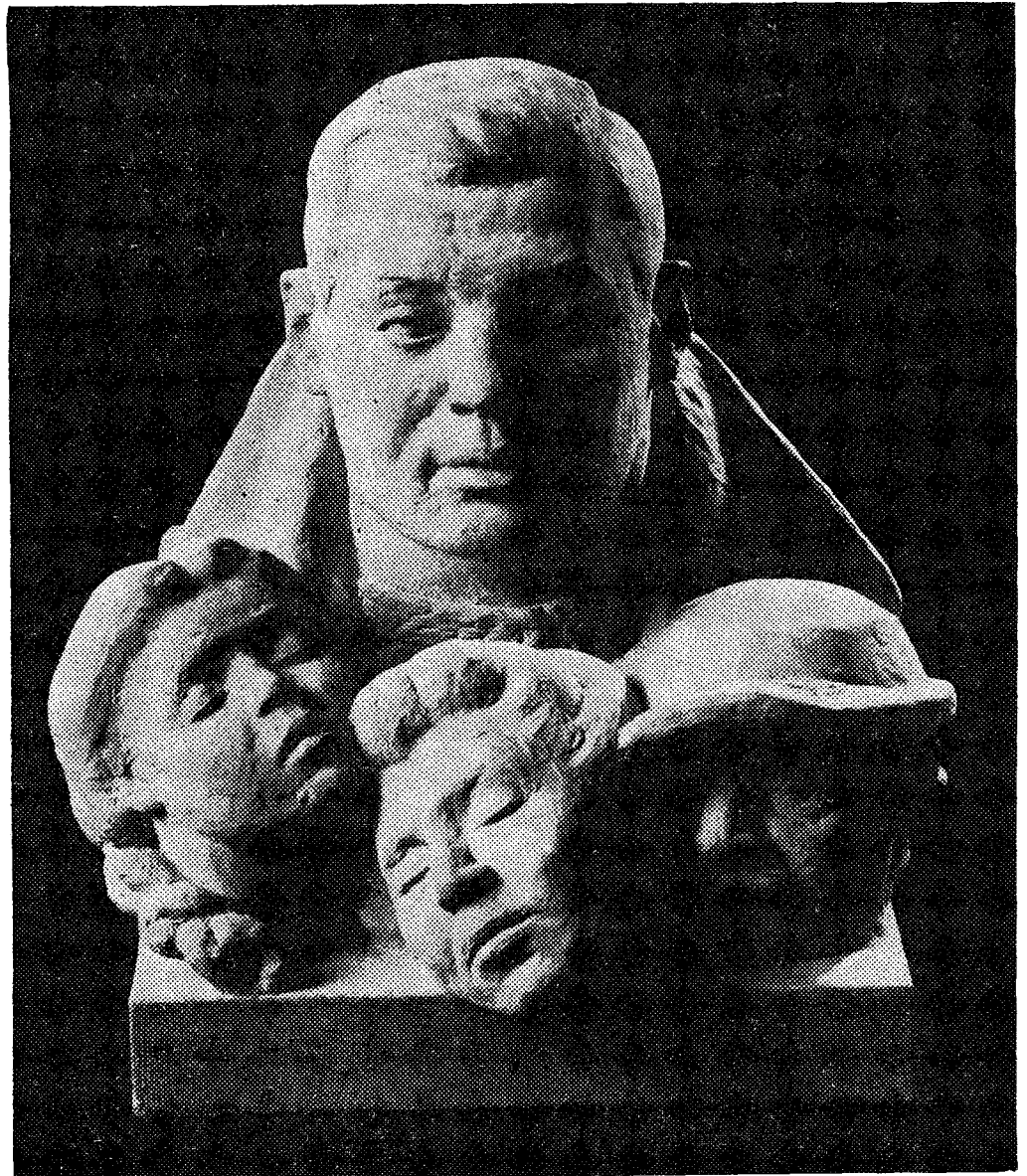
For some people, the film's inaccuracies will completely destroy its emotional effect. But others, and this reviewer among them, will feel that *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is, after all, the story of men and women who fought for freedom against an unmistakably fascist enemy. It is impossible to see this film without recognizing that the struggle of Spain's people against German and Italian invaders is the same struggle we are all engaged in now. And to recognize that is to know the basic truth of this war.

It cannot be denied that the film started with three strikes called against it. Strike One, Hemingway's misconception of the Spanish struggle. Strike Two, the sentimental-sensual lushness of the love story. Strike Three, the tedious and incongruous use of Jordan as a mere vehicle for Hemingway's own conflicts. Dudley Nichols has made a screen play that takes some of the strikes off; and that is a remarkable

achievement, when you consider that he was limited not only by Hemingway's distorted conception but by our State Department's insistence on appeasing Franco.

There remain, however, many things which neither Hemingway nor Nichols has made clear. The report that the film holds "nothing Franco could object to" is far from the truth; but concessions have been made, to the extent of eliminating the word fascist and mentioning Franco's party only as "Nationalists." These "Na-

tionalists" are too sharply characterized to fool any movie-goer about their identity; but the actual issues of the war are left to our intuition. How did the war start? What was the history of the Spanish republic? Why did Germany and Italy take a hand? Who was on each side, and what were they fighting for? *For Whom the Bell Tolls* gives only the vaguest answers. And many of its points are open to double interpretation. You are shown two Russians; you may conclude correctly that a



"Tribute to Stalingrad," by Hannah Pendrell of Philadelphia. The sculpture was presented to the Russian Embassy for the City of Stalingrad at the June 22 Tribute to Russia Rally held in Convention Hall, Philadelphia.

few Russian volunteers came to help like the American volunteers, or you may infer wrongly that Russia had an army in Spain. Indeed, at one point Jordan remarks that Germany and Italy are on one side, Russia on the other, and the Spanish people in the middle. It is true that he immediately qualifies that outrageous statement, declaring that the Spanish people, with American volunteers like himself, are fighting for democracy, and that the Axis is anti-democratic as well as anti-Communist. But the inconsistency breeds confusion.

Similarly with the book's despicable attack on Andre Marty, which has been changed but hardly clarified. In the film we have merely a minor incident; an officious commissar (not named Marty) delays Jordan's message to his general. Later a quiet man walks in, rebukes the commissar stingingly, sets everything right, and announces, "I come from Stalin." A praiseworthy attempt, no doubt, to show that all the republic's officials were not bunglers. But a remark like that, flung at you out of the blue, is bewildering. Are you supposed to assume that Stalin is personally directing the war?

SO MUCH for the omissions and the confusions. There is something far worse. The book flashed back to a lynching of local fascists by the guerrilla leader Pablo; the film has kept that flashback, although it is an artistic offense against the story's otherwise unbroken continuity. You *hear* about fascist atrocities, but you really *see* the fascists themselves killed. The episode has been straightened out a little; it is now Pablo's personal guilt, deplored by the honest republicans. But there is no attempt to give it a background, to explain the crimes committed by fascists and Guardia Civil against the people who finally destroyed them; merely the inference that a republican leader could indulge in an unprovoked lynching. This is sabotage not only of history but of the film's own clarity and purpose; the one really unforgivable thing in the screen version of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

All these things, however, do not prevent the basic anti-fascism of the film from emerging. You learn it partly from words—from the guerrilleros who consent to risk everything for the republic; from the girl Maria as she tells how fascists murdered her mother and father, raped and mutilated her, and slaughtered all the town's union members; above all, you learn it from Robert Jordan. He tells why he has come to Spain; because he is an American, and an attack on democracy anywhere in the world is an attack on him, and the Germans and Italians who are trying to murder the Spanish republic will go on if they can to murder all republics. Here, at any rate, there is no lack of clarity.

And the story carries the lesson of anti-fascism; and the characters carry it. Jordan, the American idealist; Maria, the

tortured, lovely child; Pilar, a heroic woman who might well symbolize Spain itself; Rafael, the merry gypsy; Anselmo, the gentle and courageous old man.

THEY are surrounded by mechanized fascist armies; Nazi tanks rumble through their mountains, Nazi planes bomb them off their hilltops. They have a little, precarious island of safety, a few acres of their own country left them to hide in. And the guerrilleros give up even that to blow up a bridge, so that the republic can open its offensive. When you look at them, and share emotionally in their struggle, you know them for your people and you know their enemies for yours.

The film has contributed much to the character portraits. Jordan is no longer the negative, irresolute maunderer of the book, but a man as strong as a rock, a true type of those who fought in Spain. Pablo is revealed more clearly for what he is—an unprincipled opportunist, abhorred by the true republicans. And magnificent acting brings all the book's people to life. There are hardly, in all the language, words adequate to praise Katina Paxinou as Pilar. This Greek woman portrays the Spanish woman with intensity and insight that make her a universal type of the people's struggle. The excruciatingly difficult role of Maria is handled by the sensitive Ingrid Bergman as no other actress on our screen could have handled it, and her story of what the fascists have done to her is heartbreaking. Gary Cooper's characteristic underplaying is admirably in keeping with the Jordan role; and Akim Tamiroff, with new restraint, makes the brutal Pablo memorable. The individual guerrilleros are each masterpieces of character study, Joseph Calleia's El Sordo being perhaps the most striking. Indeed, there is no acting in the film that is not far above the merely competent.

CONSIDERED solely as a study of people *For Whom the Bell Tolls* has one very annoying flaw—its length. Cut down by about forty-five minutes, it would be a clearer and more incisive film, and it would still be two hours long. It suffers from a tendency to pad its love scenes, which are sensitive and moving, but which also prove that you *can* sometimes have too much of a good thing. And some of its incidents are played with inhuman deliberation. Judicious cutting could remove the occasional tediousness and the political confusions with one stroke of the scissors.

Pictorially it has no flaw at all. Its technicolor, deliberately somber, makes the most of mountain scenery and contributes a good deal to the tragic atmosphere; this is the first completely successful use of color I have seen outside of Disney. Sam Wood's direction maintains the mood, if it sometimes loses speed to do so.

JOY DAVIDMAN.

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