I find as little merit in the notion that Hemingway was a Johnny-one-note as in the similar notion about Jane Austen’s “husband-hunting” novels.* For Whom the Bell Tolls should have laid to rest the notion. Glaring dissimilarities between it and his other novels brought it immediate attention and have continued to do so. But the attention has created two bands of commentators who regard the novel as though it were a replica of that bridge in the Guadarrama mountains. And they are determined to preserve or to detonate it. One band hurls “concentrated action” against the other’s volley, “diffuse digressions”; “political orientation” against “contradictory politics”; “stylistic range” against “strained and verbose language”; “in-depth characterization” against “stereotyped puppets”; “positive theme” against “forced conception”; “tragedy” against “melodrama.” One cause for the conflict between these bands is that they have not identified the object that has stimulated their responses. Certainly For Whom the Bell Tolls deserves classification under the rubric “novel.” But it has alloys alien to Hemingway’s other novels and to most novels. Those alloys are nothing less than epic machinery.

In Death in the Afternoon Hemingway disarmingly cautions, “Remember this too: all bad writers are in love with the epic” (54). For Whom the Bell Tolls finds even a good writer unable to resist its allure. And within at least three years of its publication the novel was described as epical, as it has since been, both in derogation and praise. But as Carlos Baker’s representative discussion shows, the term gets used loosely. Indeed, his scant catalogue of

*An earlier version of this chapter appeared under the title “Epic Machinery in Hemingway’s For Whom the Bell Tolls,” Modern Fiction Studies © 1971 by Purdue Research Foundation, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907 U.S.A.
epic traits—timelessness, heroic allusions, heightened language, and characterization—uses the term *epic* honorifically, not substantively. He conveys a subjective impression that Hemingway toyed casually with the epic, tantalized by a few of its mechanics. I find that Hemingway must have studied its machinery thoroughly. But although he superimposes that machinery upon the novel’s materials, he carefully camouflages it. We can, of course, ignore its presence and proceed to judge the novel as a success or a failure on the conventional grounds of theme, plot, characterization, and the like. But once we hear the whir—or perhaps the clank—of that machinery, we should judge the novel on the grounds of Hemingway’s intent—to create an epic. And we should be able to see clearly Hemingway’s craft and craftiness. For he offers to his reading public what seems like a realistic, historically based war novel wrought only of personal experience, observation, and creative imagination, when in fact it was wrought also of the antique machinery of a classical, literary mode.

The first signal of any epic is that celebrated trope, the “extended” or Homeric simile. Given a writer who studiously avoided tropes as ornaments of bad taste, their frequency in this novel should surprise us. When Robert Jordan and Maria walk hand in hand through the heather, Hemingway writes that her touch was “as fresh as the first light air that moving toward you over the sea barely wrinkles the glassy surface of a calm, as light as a feather moved across one’s lip, or a leaf falling when there is no breeze” (158). In chapter 27 (Sordo’s hilltop fight) El Sordo considers that the hill is a chancre, of which he and his men are the very pus (310). Thinking of his inevitable death, he then rhapsodizes on living in a sequence of metaphors, likening it to a “field of grain blowing in the wind on the side of a hill,” to a “hawk in the sky,” to an “earthen jar of water in the dust of the threshing with the grain flailed out and the chaff blowing,” and to a “horse between your legs and a carbine under one leg and a hill and a valley and a stream with trees along it and the far side of the valley and the hills beyond” (312–13). After Pablo first rejoins the guerilla band, Jordan considers the entire series of events as a merry-go-round (225). But the novel’s most forceful and truly Homeric simile is Pilar’s harshly criticized description of the smell of death (254–56). Certainly her enumeration of the four smells that one must mix together to experience its smell is a tour de force that calls excessive attention to itself. But such verbal embellishments are obligatory to an author composing an epic.
The four ingredients of the smell of death also show a second epic convention, the catalogue. Jordan’s thoughts on pleasant smells (260, 200 words), on snowstorms (182, 144 words), on what he has learned in war (236, 108 words), and on the odors of the cave (59, 175 words) are all epic catalogues. So, too, is Pilar’s reminiscence of Valencia and the food she and Finito ate there, Pilar reciting a salivating menu that detracts from the novel only if we overlook it too as catalogue:

“We ate in pavilions on the sand. Pastries made of cooked and shredded fish and red and green peppers and small nuts like grains of rice. Pastries delicate and flaky and the fish of a richness that was incredible. Prawns fresh from the sea sprinkled with lime juice. They were pink and sweet and there were four bites to a prawn. Of those we ate many. Then we ate paella with fresh sea food, clams in their shells, mussels, crayfish, and small eels. Then we ate even smaller eels alone cooked in oil and as tiny as bean sprouts and curled in all directions and so tender they disappeared in the mouth without chewing. All the time drinking a white wine, cold, light and good at thirty centimos the bottle. And for an end; melon. That is the home of the melon.” [85, 142 words]"5

The catalogue of truly epic size is Pilar’s story (twenty-five pages) of the ceremonial execution of the six Fascists in Pablo’s town. Often deplored as excrescent, it too adds to the novel an episode whose proper enjoyment requires that we be attuned to the novel’s epic orchestration.6

Other epic features described by the ancients are also visible. For one thing, Hemingway “rushes his hearer” in medias res, as Horace maintains a proper epic ought. That is, Hemingway opens the novel with Robert Jordan already reconnoitering the road at the mountain pass. But that moment chronologically follows the beginning event, Golz and Jordan’s discussion of the mission two nights before, recorded in a flashback. And that event has been preceded by many more events, we learn. For another thing, by focusing upon the three days it takes Jordan to accomplish his mission, Hemingway obeys Aristotle’s dictum that the epic should center “around a single action which is whole and complete and has beginning, middle and end, so that like a single whole creature it may produce its proper pleasure.” 7 Third, Hemingway’s economical treatment of “The Spanish Civil War ‘Story’ ” is as deserving of Aristotle’s applause as Homer’s treatment of “the Troy Story.” Not only does Hemingway avoid the pitfall of writing a biography or a chronicle, but he too “has picked out one portion of the story and used many of the others as epi-
sodes, with which he intersperses his composition” (581). The episodes of Sordo’s death, of Andrés’s trek to Golz, of Pilar’s experiences with Finito, of Gaylord’s on the eve of the offensive are but a few of the diversifying episodes that, fourth, enlarge the scope of the novel and provide its special quality of megaloprepeia, or “elegance.” Readers who fault Hemingway for subordinating larger political issues to a single guerrilla skirmish or to a single character’s actions would, fifth, disregard a similar subordination in Homer’s Iliad, whose subject is “the wrath of Peleus’ son Achilles / and its devastation,” not the Trojan War.

Hemingway’s formal transliteration of Spanish into archaic English also complies with conventions of the epic. The “thees” and “thous,” that is, add the diversity, solemnity, and strangeness excepted of epics, and they elevate language to a heroic meter. Such a meter, notes Aristotle, is “most proper” to the epic, which “is particularly receptive of ‘glosses’ [i.e., archaic or dialectal words] and metaphors” (614, 619).

Another of Aristotle’s observations tempts my epic hunting. Among improbabilities in the novel, the most objectionable is the character of Maria, her love-at-first-sight romance with Jordan, and their ability to share in the near-mystical experience of making the earth move.8 But one of Aristotle’s distinctions between tragedy and epic may be worth noting. Although the marvelous should be incorporated in a tragedy, he says, “the epic has more room for the irrational (which is the chief source of astonishment)” (622). Hemingway more than likely expected Jordan and Maria’s relationship—as well as the late-May snow—to be acceptably realistic. But if its impulsiveness seems irrational and astonishes us, that may have been Hemingway’s intent, a sought-after effect of another convention of the epic. At the very least we might allow that Hemingway has chosen “impossibilities that are (made) plausible in preference to possibilities that are (left) implausible” and so has not made his basic plot depend on “irrational incidents” (623).

Finally, Hemingway’s choice of the kind of epic he wrote might also show that he had studied Aristotle’s Poetics. Of the two kinds, the novel resembles the kind that Aristotle says characterizes the Iliad, the simple and disastrous, as opposed to the complex and moral, found in the Odyssey. The novel is simple because its straightforward narrative emphasizes inevitability rather than peripety and discovery and because it pivots around a unified action rather than the episodic adventures characteristic of
The lack of factual proof that sometime between March of 1939 and August of 1940 Hemingway carefully read the *Poetics*’ sections on the epic certainly hobbles my attempt to be scholarly. I can only point at strong correlations between Aristotle’s observations and the novel. And, once again, records of Hemingway’s reading and library turn up little more than evidence that he owned and took with him to Finca Vigia—among the forty-five crates of books—a copy of Homer’s *Iliad* and several books of literary criticism. But these same records fail to show that he read Herodotus’s *History of the Persian Wars*, which he did. And traits enumerated in nearly any handbook of literary terms urge the conclusion that Hemingway intended to create a “literary” or “secondary” epic. He has Jordan consider, for instance, that the “bridge can be the point on which the future of the human race can turn” (43). With this single thought Hemingway makes the setting for Jordan’s mission “important to the history of a nation or race,” “vast in its scope.” And the novel’s double actions—war and love—generate themes of “universal concern” that contribute to the didactic element so characteristic of an epic. For example, Jordan repeatedly states his beliefs, as when he tells himself that he is no Marxist, that he believes in liberty, equality, and fraternity, in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (305). While his credo indicates personal motives for being involved in the Spanish Civil War, it also inserts a recurrent theme of “universal concern”: man’s obligation to be his brother’s keeper. This is, I trust, one reason the epigraph from Donne so strongly appealed to Hemingway when he was searching for a title. The brother’s-keeper theme also accounts for Jordan’s thoughts on the eve of the attack. He feels that he has spent his entire life in the Guadarrama hills, that his oldest friend is Anselmo, that Agustín is his brother, and that Maria is his “true love,” his wife, his sister, and his daughter (381). Jordan’s obedience to duty and his patriotic sacrifice for Republican Spain also testify to his brotherly impulses, fighting in the war because he loves Spain and believes in the republic (163). When Maria, Pilar, and Jordan meet Joaquín, who tells them of his slain family, Hemingway again insists upon the brother’s-keeper theme, for Maria sympathetically kisses him and tells him that she is his sister, that she loves him, and that they are all his family. Jordan confirms the sentiment by insisting that all of them are brothers (139).
To undercut this heady selflessness and its deference to noble principles and the future of the race, Hemingway adds the complementary theme of another "universal concern," man's duty to respond individually to each day's sensory realities. Jordan's romance with Maria, which provides him the erotic gratifications of the present moment, acknowledges that duty. And so he considers himself lucky to trade a life of seventy years for one of seventy hours, declaring that "now is the thing to praise and I am very happy with it. Now, ahora, maintenant, heute. Now, it has a funny sound to be a whole world and your life" (166). Not antithetical, the two themes merge. Hemingway insists upon this when Jordan professes his love to Maria, telling her that he loves her as "I love all that we have fought for," "loves her "as I love liberty and dignity and the rights of all men to work and not be hungry," "loves her "as I love Madrid that we have defended and as I love all my comrades that have died" (348). In sharp contrast to the subtleties of Hemingway's earlier fiction, the frequency of overt, thematic expressions here should not cause us to regard them as evidence of artistic propaganda, of technical ineptness, or of failing imagination in Hemingway. Rather we should regard them as hallmark of an epic: statement of theme.

A writer whose allegiance seems to have been with fiction's realistic mode would presumably balk at concocting the required hero of an epic, someone "of heroic stature, of national or international importance and of great historical or legendary significance." Yet Hemingway makes an epic hero of Robert Jordan. On no parochial mission, Jordan's belief that the "bridge can be the point on which the future of the human race can turn" (43) partly vouches for his potential "national or international importance," even though his efforts ultimately have no impact upon the outcome of the war. By yoking the complementary values in the themes of "universal concern," and by having internationalist associations with Spaniards and Russians, he also shows his stature. But is he of "great historical or legendary significance"? Well, the specific mission Golz-Hemingway assigns him has such potential, even though the job of detonating a bridge near a mountain pass seems common enough in a modern wartime situation. Hemingway gives it epic overtones by the specific allusions he allows Jordan when he contemplates his task: "He would abandon a hero's or a martyr's end gladly. He did not want to make a Thermopylae, nor be Horatius at any bridge, nor be the Dutch boy with his finger in the dyke" (164). Although Jordan rejects such heroics, his mission weds Spartan Leonidas's defense of the
mountain pass at Thermopylae against Persians to Roman Horatio’s defense of the bridge over the Tiber against Etruscans. And Jordan’s final act, waiting at the pass to deter Lt. Berrendo’s cavalry, emphasizes again the importance in an epic’s “heroic plot” of defending a mountain pass or a bridge. Surely that rearguard action evokes the Song of Rolanod, with which Hemingway was familiar.\footnote{16}

Perhaps Hemingway’s efforts to ensure Jordan’s heroic stature account for some of his superhuman traits: his ability to ignite Maria’s instant love and the guerrilla band’s (excepting Pablo) quick approval of him, his Olympian range of experience and knowledge, and his being entrusted with such an important mission despite his brief activity in the war. Most superhuman is perhaps his erotic power. While loving Maria he can—within seventy-two hours—make the earth move twice out of the three times possible in one lifetime. Jordan’s ancestry also recommends his stature. He descended from a Chiron-like grandfather whom a Civil War general described as “a finer leader of irregular cavalry than John Mosby”; and Jordan’s grandfather in turn had praised Mosby as “the finest cavalry leader that ever lived” (339). Among Jordan’s possessions back in Missoula, Montana, is his “Grandfather’s saber, bright and well oiled in its dented scabbard” (336), conjuring the legendary arms that heroes of epic mold usually have. Indeed, a suicidal father mars Jordan’s noble lineage. But I read Jordan’s reminiscences of that father as a psychological “descent to the underworld,” for such journeys traditionally feature conversations with the dead.

Because it accepts Jordan’s mission as its own, the guerrilla band acquires the elevated position also expected of an epic cast. And unlike the realistic characters of Hemingway’s earlier fictions, who have no easily schematizable function, the band, a spectrum of classic types, does.\footnote{17} One pair in that spectrum is naive youth (Andrés) and sententious senex (Fernando). Another pair is the obscene soldier (miles gloriosus–like Agustín) and the wise humanist (Anselmo). There is also the gypsy-hedonist (Rafael), the ingénue (Maria), the man of feeling (Primitivo), the cynically intelligent journalist (Karkov), the paranoid chief commissar of the International Brigade (Comrade Marty), and the realist (Golz). I grant that such labels may oversimplify Hemingway’s dramatization of his characters. But I do not ignore the artistry in his more complex creations of Pilar and Pablo. And I see his use of single-faceted characters serving his design, for it is the only way
he can get the number of characters epic magnitude requires. And it contributes to epic elegance, achieved, as it must be, by breadth and variety rather than economy and intensity. By making most of his characters simple types, Hemingway avoids subplots that would blur the plot's unified action. Think of Milton deftly stereotyping the military attitudes of Moloch, Belial, Mammon, and Beelzebub in book 2 of *Paradise Lost*. Hemingway also stereotypes the military attitudes Andrés encounters while trying to deliver Jordan's message to Golz: the distrustful line captain; the enthusiastic battalion commander, Gomez; the indifferent brigade officer; the concerned Lt. Col. Miranda; the paranoid Comrade Marty; and the contemptuous Karkov.

The formidable problem for a realist writing in the epic mode would be how to present credibly those gods and supernatural forces who "interest themselves in the action and intervene from time to time." Hemingway denies them the limelight that epic writers traditionally give them. But he does hint that they may be just offstage. On a military level, for example, Jordan and the guerrillas are subordinate to superiors whose larger views and petty rivalries determine events in much the way Homer's canopied gods do. On a symbolic level, Jordan and Maria's discovery of a true love that enables them to feel the earth move, the "miracle" (392) of Pablo's return with men and horses on the eve of the bridge blowing, Jordan's sense of luck at having his leg nerve crushed, the unexpected late-May snow, Andrés's thwarted odyssey to Golz, and even Jordan's inevitable death—all these might be construed as tokens of some supernatural intervention. But Pillar better shows supernatural forces at work in the novel. Her superstitions (the smell of death), palm-reading (Jordan's imminent death), and intuition (Maria's *gloria*) suggest a preternatural force that dallies with the supernatural. The agents of the air that literally intervene in the action are not gods, of course, but Fascist airplanes. And they are as partisan as Homer's Olympians, Milton's angels, Vergil's Fate, or the Beowulf-poet's *wyrd*.

Ancillary epic traits are also in the novel. Trying to portray his hero objectively, Hemingway gives Jordan frequent internal debates that bear comparison with those of Odysseus (e.g., *Iliad*, 11:404-10), Satan, or Adam. He also lets Jordan get angry at his mission of trying to organize two "chicken-crut bands" to help him "blow a bridge under impossible conditions" so as "to abort a counter-offensive" that has probably already begun (167). As this quote suggests, Jordan succumbs to several rages—against the
snow (178-81), against Pablo for stealing the detonator (369-70), and against the death of Anselmo (447). Perhaps these are meant to vie with the outsized anger and wrath typical of Achaians, Trojans, and devils. Hemingway also has several “extended formal speeches by the main characters”: Pilar’s accounts of the slaying of the Fascists and of Finito’s conduct at the banquet in his honor, Jordan’s and Anselmo’s discussion of killing (chap. 3), and Jordan’s alba, persuading Maria to leave him at the pass. Stories of other heroes’ valorous deeds take their appropriate place in an epic: Finito’s bullfighting, Sordo’s combat, Pablo’s raid of Otero (chap. 15), Jordan’s grandfather’s Civil War experiences, mention of Custer, Rafael’s account of the train-blowing and rescue of Maria, even Jordan’s trainblowing with Kashkin (149) and delivery of a tank for Montero’s attack at Carabanchel (239-42). The narrative point of view is, as an epic requires, duly omniscient and focuses mainly upon the hero. But the narrator, alas, fails to invoke the muse. Mindful of Milton’s diffident invocation two dozen lines into book 7 of Paradise Lost, I wonder if it is to reflect similar authorial diffidence and to acknowledge some superior power that prompts Jordan’s several writing references. He mentions other writers, his desire to write about his present experience, and his envy of Pilar’s bardic narrative of the slaying of the Fascists. And he remarks on Karkov’s belief in his writing abilities, despite an unsuccessful, earlier book on Spain.

Parallels between For Whom the Bell Tolls and the Iliad are the last way I infer Hemingway’s intention to compose an epic. Similar to the emotional wrangling in book 1 of the Iliad, discord dominates the early chapters of the novel. And so Pablo’s disapproval of Jordan’s mission and of Pilar’s wresting control from him gives rise to Iliad-like angers, recriminations, vaunting, insults, and public embarrassment. Even the usually mild Anselmo berates Pablo, calling him a brute and a beast, brainless, even thising and thating in the this and that of Pablo’s father (11). Pablo’s refusal to assist in the bridge-blowing and his defection create the same anxiety for Jordan and the guerrilla band as Achilles’ withdrawal creates for the Achaians; without the two men, each effort is doomed. And the skulking, crafty Pablo jealously resents Jordan’s taking of Maria, much as Achilles resents Agamemnon’s taking of his “prize,” Briseis. Even Pablo’s return, caused by his realization that he found himself lonely (390), parallels Achilles’ return to battle, caused, among other things, by loneliness due to Patroclus’s death. Also included are Iliad-like accounts of the
slaying of suppliants (the six Fascists) and of kin (both Maria’s and Joaquin’s). Finally, I hear in the novel’s heroic futility an echo of the suffering and doom in the *Iliad*.

My catalogue of epic traits should crowd out any belief that it was beneath Hemingway’s literary dignity and ability to use an ancient literary mode. If anything, such an imitation enhances his stature. It shows that his impulse for experimentation did not collapse with the stock market in 1929. And it compels respect for the very considerable effort that had to go into composing an epic. Surely it took a good bit of reading and research before he launched into it.

Yet some readers may be morally offended by Hemingway’s deviousness, hiding as he does an epic beneath the skirts of a “realistic” war novel. And others will be esthetically offended by the amount of creative energy Hemingway must have spent to soundproof the epic machinery. Still others, if they give credence to my reading, will rush to his defense with the idea that all great art conceals itself. But for me the knowledge that Hemingway fashioned *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as an epic invites evaluating his novel as he must secretly have wished it to be evaluated, as rival to the great epics. And in this competition his novel fares poorly.

One defect in Hemingway’s novel is owing to his partial commitment to epic machinery. I grant that hearing its machinery requires a heavy gloss. But once heard, it should dominate everything Hemingway attempts in the novel. Yet his commitment to writing in a realistic mode interferes. The epic stamp, for example, seems ubiquitous. It seems to compel Hemingway to rely heavily, say, upon the internal debates so common to the epic. But because Hemingway will not engage that convention completely, his internal debates lack the intensity, complexity, and psychological depth—in a word, the *brio*—of those wrought by Homer, Vergil, and Milton. And consider Jordan. The epic tradition seems to dictate many of his features, values, and actions. Yet in Hemingway’s hands he becomes, ultimately, a schematized character, a genetic cross of duty-ridden Aeneas and will-forging Odysseus. Hanging back from a full commitment to the epic, Hemingway ignores Aristotle’s advice, that an epic hero not be “eminently virtuous.” Yet regardless of Jordan’s several “rages” and his lovemaking, he is. Even his capacity to make love and to be aware, without distress, of the approaching hour of his mission (378) shows an emotional shallowness and lack of moral dilemma that
he needs to rival the dimensions of Achilles, old Beowulf, or Adam. A martyr, Jordan is a fit figure for hagiography, not epic.

A more serious defect is the novel's structure. Because the authors of great epics do not try to conceal its conventions, accepting them without embarrassment or apology as a minor aspect of a larger design, they can apply themselves to the significant creative problems of invention and construction. And most evaluations of the construction of epics will find the *Iliad* and *Paradise Lost, Beowulf* and the *Odyssey* massive and delicate, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* mechanical and reductive. Its own structure, not the suprastructure of the epic, makes it so. For Hemingway overuses the single metaphor of civil war to construct his novel. He writes of Spain's civil war and, in turn, of the civil war between the ideologies of opposing political extremes, fascism and communism. And he writes of the civil war within the guerrilla band and even within Jordan, as seen in Jordan's numerous internal debates and in the civil war between his values: love, pleasure, self, cynicism, and the present on the one hand; war, duty, others, idealism, and the future on the other.

But Hemingway overworks the metaphor of civil war in the novel's sequence. Almost predictably the novel moves back and forth across that symbolic bridge from plot to flashback, as nearly every chapter reveals. Chapter 1 shifts from Jordan's arrival at the pass to the scene with Golz two nights earlier, and then back to his meeting with Pablo. Andrés's journey to Golz later keeps the narrative deliberately double. Hemingway also develops many chapters by contrasting character types: chapter 1, Golz and Pablo; 2, Rafael and Pilar; 3, Anselmo and Agustín; 11, Joaquín and El Sordo. Or else chapters contrast ideas: Pablo's attitudes contrast with Pilar's about the bridgeblowing mission in chapter 4; the views at Gaylord's contrast with those at Velasquez's in chapter 18. Sometimes chapters contrast emotions. In chapter 14 Finito appears festive while secretly spitting blood, is horrified while the banquet honors his courage. In chapter 15 Anselmo wants to leave his post in the snow and return to the comfort of the cave, but he stays, obedient to Jordan's request. In chapter 27, Joaquín shifts from Communist cliché and Pasionara to Catholic ritual and the Virgin Mary. Or in chapter 34 Andrés feels both pride and shame for his annual act of biting the bull's ear during the bull-baiting. Hemingway's use of Spanish even gives the novel two styles that maintain the metaphor of civil war. And certainly the conventions of a realistic novel and those of a stylized epic seesaw on the metaphor.
The novel’s various features, then, show Hemingway turning continuously to civil war as subject and metaphor for the novel’s structure. By so doing he achieves a sustained focus upon the dilemmas, the ambivalencies, the internal and external civil wars characteristic of all human experience, an apt focus for an epic. And the novel gives flesh to Hemingway’s belief that “civil wars are the best wars for writers.” But his ambitiousness to bridge symbolically all experience results in a novel without an organic pulse. Or at least the rigorously superimposed grids of epic conventions and of civil war structure subdue the novel’s pulse. For as soon as I found these grids, there was little left of “The Undiscovered Country”—the novel’s provisional title—that did not conform to one or the other of them. To tidy the sprawl of his concealed epic and to enforce the novel’s unity, Hemingway reduced the novel to a pattern that he repeats and repeats. He forgot to allow for the residual unexplainables, the intransigent materials, the trace elements or just-heard rhythms that a living work of art, one with an organic pulse, has.

In George Plimpton’s *Paris Review* interview Hemingway makes a distinction that has always struck me as more defensive than descriptive: “Though there is one part of writing that is solid and you do no harm by talking about it, the other is fragile, and if you talk about it, the structure cracks and you have nothing.” Hemingway makes this statement, let me note, while discussing the craft of writing rather than the craft of a finished piece. But except for matters of authorial intention and interpretation, I find it hard to imagine anything so fragile or private that an author would harm it by discussing it. Besides, to talk about a structure that can crack refers more to an object than to a process, to a written, finished work, rather than to the craft of writing. In any event, I can not see how a good piece of writing, however paradoxical, can be preciously schizophrenic and yet simultaneously integrated, as Hemingway’s division of writing into solid and fragile parts implies. Nor can I see how any author who asks to be considered major can also ask to have his works only partly talked about. That is like asking that they be left on the bookshelf, that they not be tested for their durability. Much less can I see how a writer who prides himself on his outdoorsman’s image can be so anxious about fragile things—unless his writings conceal delicate structures whose discovery he feared would cause them to shatter. Clearly Hemingway’s hidden epic in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* confirms his statement about the two parts of writing. And detecting
that hidden, fragile epic may crack the novel's solid structure, whether *structure* refers loosely to the plausibility of the novel as a realistic story or refers literally to the novel's all-too-conscious construction and architecture. Still, the detection leaves more than nothing. It leaves a modern experiment in an ancient mode. And that experiment will surely survive, if only as a rarity, a fascinating museum piece.