

Richard North

8 Death ere the Afternoon: *Jómsvíkinga saga* and a Scene in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

It is sometimes thought that the Icelandic sagas inspired the hard-boiled prose of Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961). Although there is nothing to show that he read translations of these, I shall argue that a motif in the tale told by Pilar about her husband's role in a series of executions in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, chapter 10, is ultimately derived from the climax of *Jómsvíkinga saga*.¹ Let us see the comparison, then the suggested link.

Pilar's Tale and *Jómsvíkinga saga*: A Comparison

The motif in question is a heroic topos in which each warrior of an elite facing serial execution must put his courage to the ultimate test. The motif appears as a relatively small part of the action in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, a novel which is set in May 1937 in the middle of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939).² Hemingway's hero, Robert Jordan, is at once an American Hispanist professor, Republican sympathizer, and expert in explosives. The last skill puts him into a mission behind Nationalist lines to blow up a bridge in a pass in the Guadarrama mountains between Segovia and the north of Madrid. Having scouted the site and made his rendezvous with a band of guerrillas, Jordan settles down to wait, knowing that the bridge may not be blown until his commander, General Golz of the International Brigades, has launched a long-planned offensive. During this interval the resolve of the group's leader, Pablo, begins to waver and in chapter 10, while Jordan waits in the guerrillas' cave, he hears a tale about Pablo from the man's wife, the formidable Gypsy Pilar. As aware as others are of Pablo's unsuitability for the mission, Pilar aims to tell Jordan what a fine leader her husband was when he liberated a town at the beginning of the war. The night before the attack, according to Pilar, Pablo's men arrested all the fascists in the town. At dawn, having imprisoned them in the town hall, Pablo deals with the local Civil Guard. Having surrounded the barracks and killed all policemen inside and outside, Pablo

Richard North, University College London

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501513886-009>

organizes two lines from the courthouse door to the edge of a cliff, between which the town's mayor, landowners, and finally priest are made to pass under the blows of flails, each till he stumbles or is carried to the edge to be thrown to his death in the gorge. Motive for these murders is shown to be mostly drink, financial envy, or personal dislike; what starts as an orderly ritual descends into anarchy.

It is in the Civil Guard prelude that our parallel lies. Pilar says that the *guardias civiles* (Civil Guard) surrender soon after Pablo blows a hole in their building. There is a shout from the defenders to cease fire and four of them emerge with their hands in the air. Pablo tells his men to guard them: "The four *civiles* stood against the wall, dirty, dusty, smoke-grimed, with the four who were guarding them pointing their guns at them and Pablo and the others went in to finish the wounded."³ Pablo shoots the wounded and reappears with a Mauser pistol with which he says the officer has shot himself. He asks one of the four *civiles*, all tall men who have been standing sweating and saying nothing during this shooting, to tell him how the Mauser works. The man instructs him twice in a voice which "was grayer than a morning without sunrise." For the *civiles* the next conversation is their last:

"What are you going to do with us?" one asked him.
 "Shoot thee," Pablo said.
 "When?" the man asked in the same gray voice.
 "Now," said Pablo.
 "Where?" asked the man.
 "Here," said Pablo. "Here. Now. Here and now. Have you anything to say?"
 "*Nada*," said the *civil*. "Nothing. But it is an ugly thing."
 "And you are an ugly thing," Pablo said. "You murderer of peasants. You who would shoot your own mother."
 "I have never killed any one," the *civil* said. "And do not speak of my mother."
 "Show us how to die. You, who have always done the killing."
 "There is no necessity to insult us," another *civil* said. "And we know how to die."

Pablo orders them to kneel. One asks the other, the *civil* who helped Pablo with the pistol, what he thinks of this, and this man, a corporal, says that "It is as well to kneel," for "It is of no importance." There is an attempt at irony: "It is closer to the earth," the first one who had spoken said, trying to make a joke, but they were all too grave for a joke and no one smiled."

Then the corporal instructs the others to kneel facing the wall, they all do so and Pablo shoots each one in the back of the head. Although each bears up differently, all die with dignity, "and the four bodies were slumped against the wall when Pablo turned away from them and came towards us with the pistol still in his hand." This cold-blooded execution is the prelude to the more

notorious scene in which Pablo orchestrates the murder of the town's fascists at the hands of farm laborers who have hated them all their lives. In comparison, the *civiles* are strangers. In their deaths too they appear to be different, an elite attempting a joke before dying.

In these elements the scene may be compared with the narrative climax of *Jómsvíkinga saga*, which is a story of tenth-century Vikings first written in Iceland in the early thirteenth century. The saga survives separately in five versions, as well as in distilled form within two Histories of Norwegian kings: in *Fagrskinna*, of the early thirteenth century; and in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* of ca. 1235.⁴ As for the separate extant versions of *Jómsvíkinga saga*, the oldest consists of a partly incomplete and interpolated text in AM 291 4to, a manuscript from the first half of the thirteenth century. An Icelandic edition mostly of this text in *Fornmanna Sögur* (XI) served for an English novelization in 1875, on which more below.⁵ The next oldest text, also the shortest, was copied into Codex Holmianus 7 4to, of the Royal Library of Stockholm, in the first third of the fourteenth century; this serves as the text for Norman Blake's edition and translation of 1962. The third version is the longest, in AM 510 4to, inscribed before the end of the fifteenth century. Fourth is a text which, though interpolated in two parts within the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* (the greatest Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason), in five manuscripts, including Flateyjarbók in ca. 1390 (chaps. 70–87 and 123–63), is held to represent yet another version of *Jómsvíkinga saga*. The fifth and last version survives in a Latin adaptation which was made in the Copenhagen Royal Library by the Icelandic antiquarian Arngrímur Jónsson in 1592–1593.

However complex the transmission of their legend, historically the titular “Vikings of Jumne” seem to have been a nest of pirates with a fortress by Wolin at the mouth of the Oder on what is now the western Polish border.⁶ In a stirring mixture of fact and fantasy, the saga portrays them as an elite cadre facing death with indifference. It says that Prince, soon to be King, Sveinn Haraldsson of Denmark, in revenge for their kidnapping him earlier and forcing him into a marriage, invites the Jómsborg leader Sigvaldi and his captains to a feast in which he tricks them all into swearing to attack his father's rebel vassal, Earl Hákon of Trøndelag. The next morning the Jómsvikings wake up to the knowledge that they must honor their oath. Despite misgivings they ready sixty ships for what will probably be their last expedition.

Sailing north, the Jómsvikings meet their fate in Hjørungavágr, a bay in north-western Norway, in a sea-battle which took place roughly in 985. For a while things seem to go their way, but when the hard-pressed Hákon takes a moment to sacrifice his young son to his tutelary goddess, Þorgerðr, the tide turns against the Danes and Jómsvikings, and Sigvaldi and his brother Þorkell

the Tall sail off after the Danes, leaving their fellow Jómsvikings to be killed or captured. The episode of interest here comes after the battle and climactically on the morning of the following day, when the captives are bound to a log.

What follows tests the elite's ideology of courage in a sequence. Earl Hákon tours the scene with his sons Eiríkr and Sveinn, who have also fought in the battle. With them is Þorkell Leira, their headsman who is incidentally looking for Vagn Ákason, author of a vow which has preceded him to Norway. Seeing the seventy Jómsvikings tied up in a line on the log, Earl Hákon orders Þorkell to behead them all. First come the wounded:

Three gravely wounded men were freed from the rope, and thralls were appointed to guard them and twist sticks in their hair. Þorkell leira now proceeded to cut off their heads.
(chap. 36)⁷

As he warms to his task, Þorkell asks each man what he thinks about dying. According to the version in AM 291, it seems to be Hákon's idea to test the Jómsvikings' courage:

And now Jarl Hákon and Þorkell intend to ask each of them before they are beheaded what they thought about death, and so to test the company, whether it was as tough as was said, and think it will be proved if none of them speaks a word of fear when they see death waiting for them.
(chap. 37)⁸

Some Jómsvikings memorialize the scene with jokes which include mockery of Þorkell their executioner. When, according to the text in Holmianus 7, a fourth wounded man is wrenched forward with sticks twisted in his hair:

Þorkell said: "What do you think about dying?"
"I am well content to die: I shall suffer the same fate as my father," Þorkell asked what that was.
He said: "Strike; he died."
Then Þorkell cut off his head.
(chap. 36)

The jokes come thick and fast, one in the name of scientific experiment, others again at Þorkell's expense:

Then the seventh one was led forward and Þorkell asked him as usual. "I'm very content to die. But deal me out a speedy blow. I have here a dagger. We Vikings have often discussed whether a man knew anything after he had lost his head if it was cut off speedily. Let us make the following arrangement that I shall hold the dagger up if I know anything, otherwise it will fall down." Þorkell struck him and his head flew off, but the dagger fell down.

Then the eighth man was brought up and Þorkell put the usual question to him. He said he was content to die. When he thought the blow was almost on him he said "Ram." Þorkell checked his hand and asked him why he said that.
(chap. 36)

The next joke depends on a barely translatable pun on Old Norse *á* “ewe” but also “ah!,” as in the need for a *hrútr* “ram”: *Þó mun eigi ofskipat til á-nna þeira er þér nefnduð í gær jarlsmenn, þá er þér fenguð á-verka* “They can’t be too well provided for, those ewes [/ah’s] whose name you earl’s men were calling out yesterday whenever you took a hit.”⁹ “Wretched fellow,” says Þorkell, letting the blow crash down on him.

Hereupon the scene in the saga ends differently to that in Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. One of the Vikings, having asked for his locks to be held so that they are not bloodied, pulls forwards so that the sword cuts off the hands of the Norwegian holding his hair. Against his father Hákon’s wishes, Earl Eiríkr pardons the insolent perpetrator, one Sveinn, son of Búi the Stout who was a leader of Jónsborg. The executions are set to continue, but for Vagn, the next victim. When Þorkell asks him what he thinks about dying, Vagn says that death will be fine as long as he has time to complete his vow, to sleep with Þorkell’s daughter after killing her father. Þorkell makes for Vagn and then Björn *inn brezki* “the Welshman,” Vagn’s foster-father, trips up Vagn so that the blow goes over him and Þorkell, who falls over Vagn, accidentally cuts the rope. Vagn steps free, picks up the sword and lops off Þorkell’s head. Despite another entreaty from his father, Eiríkr pardons Vagn and invites him to join his company. Vagn’s condition, that the remaining Jónsvikings go free, is accepted and the executions stop. Despite this happy ending, Hemingway’s scene and this one have three things in common: one is the morning setting, another a show of indifference, and the third, the illustration of an ideology with a joke before dying.

Hemingway and the Adaptations of *Jónsvikinga saga*

We now turn to the question of literary influence and how, if there was any, Hemingway might have made this startling vindication of Viking values into a model for the courage of *guardias civiles*. First, as noted, there is no evidence that he read the sagas of Iceland. It is true that Hemingway’s library in Key West, Florida, before his initial move to Havana, Cuba, in 1939, contained a copy of *Kristin Lavransdatter*, a novel about medieval Norway by Sigrid Undset (1922), translated by Charles Archer and J. S. Scott (1930).¹⁰ But Hemingway seems to have acquired most of his books relating to Iceland years after *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was published (on October 20, 1940).¹¹ First there is *Independent People*, J. A. Thompson’s translation in 1945 of the novel *Sjálfstætt fólk* (published in

two volumes in 1934 and 1935), partly for which Halldór Laxness won the Nobel Prize in 1955.¹² Thompson's translation sold 450,000 copies in the USA through *The Book of the Month Club*, the subscription service which, starting with *The Sun Also Rises* in 1926, had also launched Hemingway. Laxness, like Hemingway an admirer of Stalin's Soviet Union, had already translated *A Farewell to Arms* in 1941 (*Vopnin kvödd*). Then there is *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution* by A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Shetelig, which was published in 1951, as well as a book on Vineland the Good by Frederick Julius Pohl, *The Lost Discovery: Uncovering the Track of the Vikings in America*, which was published in 1952.¹³ In the 1950s, along with hundreds of other books, these three were sent to La Finca Vigía near Havana, Hemingway's main home from 1940 to 1959.¹⁴

A fourth item, which Hemingway brought or had sent to Key West in or after 1954, is of greater interest. This is *The Long Ships: A Saga of the Viking Age*, Michael Meyer's translation of *Röde Orm*, a Swedish novel by Frans G. Bengtsson about a Viking from Skåne published in two parts, in 1941 and 1945.¹⁵ As every fan of *The Long Ships* will know, Bengtsson puts the striking climax of *Jómsvíkinga saga* into the words of a survivor, one Sigurd Buesson – i.e., son of Búi the Stout – who tells his story in a yuletide feast at the court of King Harald Bluetooth in Denmark. Sigurd says that the morning after their defeat in the battle of “Jörundfjord,” he and the other Jómsvíkings were tied to a log along with Vagn Ákesson. News of the capture is sent to Jarl Haakon who orders them all beheaded at once. According to Sigurd:

Jarl Erik, his son, and many of his followers, came to watch our end; for the Norwegians were curious to see how the Jomsvíkings would conduct themselves in the face of death.
(Part I, chap. 9)

Thorkell Leira swings with a will, working down the log towards our narrator, and never needing to strike twice. Bengtsson preserves the saga's humor in Sigurd's understated account:

I think that those who were watching the scene had to admit that Vagn's and Bue's men knew how to conduct themselves in the face of death. Two who were seated not far from me began a discussion as to what it would feel like once one's head was off, and they agreed that it was one of those things that are difficult to foretell.

One of them said, 'I have a brooch here in my hand. If my brain is still working after I have lost my head, I shall stick it into the ground.' Thorkell arrived at him, but as soon as the blow fell on his neck, the brooch dropped from his hand.
(Part I, chap. 9)

For his own part Sigurd asks Thorkell's brother-in-law to hold his silky hair to keep it clean. As the axe falls he pulls forward so that it cuts off the man's

hands, allowing Thorkell to be tripped and beheaded by Vagn with the same axe. Erik Haakon's son, admiring the courage of Sigurd and the others, pardons them all on the spot, whereupon *The Long Ships* continues with more stories of adventure.

Meyer's translation probably arrived in Key West in or just after 1954, when Hemingway limped back from his second safari in Kenya,¹⁶ so we know that he did read the Jómsvíking story at least after he wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. But there had been an English version of this story long before Hemingway started on his novel (in Havana in February 1939). Before and during his childhood, the Jómsvíkingings were widely known in the English-speaking world through *The Vikings of the Baltic: A Tale of the North in the Tenth Century*, by George Webbe Dasent, which appeared in three volumes in 1875.¹⁷ Dasent had made popular translations of *Njáls saga* and *Gísla saga* respectively in *The Story of Burnt Njal* in 1861 and *Gisli the Outlaw* in 1866. By writing an English version of *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Dasent hoped to save a more exemplary saga for literature. "Jomsburg," he says in the preface, "was an asylum for all the bold spirits and dashing blades of the time"; he hopes "that something may be found of the strength and spirit with which the wonderful adventures of that famous company are narrated in the original."¹⁸ His novel is a loose translation of AM 291 4to, packed with many additions of his own. When the battle of "the Voe" or the "Grange of Hjoring" in this episode is at last over, Earl Hacon has the Vikings bound to a log.¹⁹ When Beorn the Welshman mocks the Norwegians, Hacon asks:

"Is it not said, Sigmund, that these Jomsvikings are men of such hardihood, that no fear even makes them flinch?"²⁰

Sigmund, a Faroese henchman whom Dasent has added in from elsewhere, in Flateyjarbók, assents and Earl Hacon turns his wit on the Jomsburg prisoners, reminding them of their rules:

"No doubt such mighty champions as ye all are, the very flower of the Vikings of Jomsburg, will set the North an everlasting example how to die with hardihood."

Thorkel works his way through four captives, asking each one of them, on Hacon's instruction, whether he is afraid to die. One gives the scientific answer:

"I think it very good to die," said the man, "and mind you behead me clean off at once. And now look here at this little knife, which I hold in my hand. We Jomsvikings have often wondered in our talk whether a man knows aught, or feels aught, when his head flies off, if he is beheaded in a trice, at one clean stroke. And now this shall be a sign to you – that I will make a point with this knife if I know anything. If I do not, it will fall down at once."

When the knife drops, another Jómsviking, when his name is called, calls out “Ram!” He is asked why:

“Oh,” said the Viking, “I thought a ram would not be out of place among the *Ohs* and *Ewes* and *Baas*, which ye warriors of the Earl uttered in your pain all yesterday whenever ye got a wound.”

The man loses his head while his friends laugh at the joke, before the story of reprieve takes over, first with Sweyn son of Bui the Stout of Bornholm, then with Vagn (whose name is not rendered “Wayne”). After Thorkel’s mishap with Vagn and the axe, Earl Eric recruits Vagn and the other survivors in defiance of his father Hacon. Dasent’s story ends not too long after.

While there is no record of Hemingway reading it, there is no doubt that this novel – an edification for Victorians of empire, whether British or American – is the kind of book that he read as a teen. As Mrs Nina Grace, a retired teacher from the period after Hemingway in Oak Park High School, described the curriculum, “For years before I came, there had been in the senior year much organized collateral reading in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English novels.”²¹

Even so, it is more likely that Hemingway read a pastiche of the climax of *The Vikings of the Baltic* two decades after his childhood, within a novel which he appears to have bought in 1933 from Sylvia Beach’s *Shakespeare & Company* bookshop in Paris.²²

Hemingway and *The Men of Ness*

The Men of Ness: The Saga of Thorlief Coal-Biter’s Sons is a novel which was written by Eric Linklater and published in London within a year of Hemingway’s personal guide to bull-fights, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932).²³ Linklater was, like Hemingway, a successful novelist and travel writer with a distinguished record in the Great War. In recognition of his family’s origins in Orkney, he set his novel in the early Viking Age, when Ivar the Boneless, son of Ragnar Hairy-Breeks, having killed two kings of England, leads his brothers up to Orkney to make a new base in the islands. Ivar murders a crofter there named Bui of Ness, rapes his widow Signy, and makes her his wife (chap. 2). Not long after, Ivar sails back to Northumbria with his brothers Halfdan and Ubbi, leaving behind Thorlief Coal-Biter, a fourth brother and pacifist whom Signy takes as her third husband.

One generation later, Signy eggs on the warlike Skallagrim and Kol, her sons by Thorlief, to avenge Bui and herself on their bad uncle Ivar in England (chap. 28). Skallagrim and Kol steer south while they watch their second ship

go down with all hands in a storm in the Pentland Firth (chap. 29). Here Linklater's vivid detail doubtless caught the imagination of the sailor Hemingway, whom Beach, in the early 1930s, saw reading a book by Captain Marryat.²⁴ Having drifted under cloud for a while, Skallagrim's ship runs into a sandbar off Yorkshire. Making land, he and his crew learn of Ivar's whereabouts in a hall twenty miles away (chap. 39), where Skallagrim finds Ivar's son Ragnar at the head of thirty men. In the fight that follows the sons of Signy kill all but their cousin Ragnar (chap. 40), whom they spare with instructions to bring back Ivar. Ragnar, however, having lied about Ivar's distance from them, brings back his father plus Asbiorn, a local earl, later the same night, sooner than expected (chap. 43). Skallagrim's men are surprised in their house and all of them made prisoner but for his brother Kol, his dog, and an Orcadian joker by the name of Gauk, who have gone to see some women in another house (chap. 44). The next morning, Kol and Gauk witness Ivar and Asbiorn lead their friends and kinsmen to execution on the far side of a wood:

The Orkneymen had been tied both at wrists and ankles till morning came, but then their ankles were loosed. Ivar made them sit together on the trunk of a tree that had been felled.
(chap. 45)

Ivar mentions Signy to Skallagrim, his nephew and her son, saying that he thinks it was by her bidding that he came here; "Women's counsel is ever cruel," adds Asbiorn. With thuggish good humor, Ivar invites his prisoners to drink a toast before they die, which all but Skallagrim do. Then Ivar kills the man at the end of the log, after giving him the chance to run. The man had refused, saying he was too stiff to move, and the game continues:

Then it came to Fridlief. Ivar said, "You are young and strong. Will you not run?"
But Fridlief said, "I am at home out on Birsay, and that is too far for me to run to-day."
So he also died without moving from where he sat. (chap. 45)²⁵

Some rather more labored jokes follow. Ivar asks Thorgrim, who is sitting next to Skallagrim, if he will run:

But Thorgrim said, "I never go from my bench while there is still ale in my cup." And he held the ale-horn in his hands.

"Then you will lose your head," said Ivar. Skallagrim said, "strike off his hands rather than his head, for they will be the greater loss to him."

Thorgrim said, "I do not think you are right in that, Skallagrim. For though there is much wisdom in my hands there is more in my head. And now I will prove it. For if my hands are as wise as my head they will still hold this horn when my head falls off. But if they are not so wise they will let it drop."

Then Thorgrim's head was struck off, and the ale-horn fell out of his hands. (chap. 45)

Finally Kol shows himself, spears Asbiorn through and is captured and made to sit on the log next to Skallagrim, who grumbles that he might have come sooner. When Kol gives his uncle Ivar some invective concerning the killing of Bui of Ness, Ivar says that he speaks like Signy, “and now I am willing to believe that you are her son.” Considering the nature of Thorlief, his father, Ivar tells Kol “it seems more likely that Signy got you on him.” Here we might think of the way Pablo insults one *civil* victim by alluding to his mother, albeit he does so differently.

Kol asks Ivar to hold his hair. Ivar thinks this funny enough to grant the request, and so he holds Kol’s hair:

Then Kol said he was ready. The man with the axe stood in front of him. He swung his axe and hewed strongly at Kol’s neck. But Kol lowered his head and thrust himself forward with a great jerk, and pulled Ivar after him. For Ivar’s hand was caught in his hair. And the axe went higher than Kol’s head, and fell on Ivar’s forearm, and cut off his hand.

(chap. 45)

Kol and Skallagrim throttle Ivar to death while his men cut both of them down. We see Gauk lying flat and watching this scene until the killing is over and Ragnar and his men ride away. Although he feels bad for not dying with his friends, Gauk survives to be witness, sailing back to Orkney and informing Signy and the other widows.

In all, these scenes by Linklater and Hemingway have more things in common than Hemingway’s episode and the saga itself. There are five correspondences: the morning setting, an attack on a house, a joke in the face of death, the killer’s reference to a prisoner’s mother, and the lack of reprieve. Did Hemingway use a memory of Linklater’s scene? It seems that each author read the other from 1929, when the new Penguin Books series in England published both Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* as its second book and an earlier novel by Linklater, *Poet’s Pub*, as its third.²⁶ Hereafter Hemingway’s library contained at least five of Linklater’s novels: *The Men of Ness* (1933), *Magnus Merriman* (1934), *Juan in China* (1937), *Private Angelo* (1946), and *The Dark of Summer* (1956). Of the three that were in Key West before Hemingway moved from there to Cuba in 1939, only *The Men of Ness* was packed in 1940 for removal to La Finca Vigía after him.²⁷ The crates were carpentered by Toby Bruce, Hemingway’s devoted driver, who typed the inventory. Bruce, under angry instruction from Hemingway’s imminent ex-wife Pauline Pfeiffer, packed twenty-four crates with Papa’s best books, twenty more with other effects, and a further two crates half-full with more books. These forty-six crates he kept locally (at Sloppy Joe’s, a bar) until he was able to ship them to Cuba in 1941. *Kristin Lavransdatter* went in crate no. 7; *The Men of Ness*, Linklater’s

novel on the Vikings of Orkney, in no. 22, *inter alia* with books on fishing and medicine, a Spanish bullfighting annual, *The Voyage Out* by Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.²⁸

Conversely, Linklater reviewed in 1953 the first reprint of *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). Perhaps it was by his recommendation that Hemingway, probably in 1954, bought Meyer's translation of Bengtsson, who had put some of Linklater's novels into Swedish, including *The Men of Ness* (*Männen från Ness*, 1933). In his review, Linklater claims to have read all of Hemingway's novels: "nowhere, I think, has his vision of the heroic scars of life been so surely realized."²⁹ Such "heroic scars" as are writ large here and in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* have figured less prominently in discussion of the latter, however, than the author's interest in medieval chivalry. That young Hemingway read books about chivalry is evident in the Oak Park High School curriculum and in later records in and after the first decade of the twentieth century.³⁰ At this time his reading included: *A Source Book of Mediæval History* by Francis Austin Ogg (1908, with a dense chapter on King Alfred and the Danes);³¹ Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820), given to Ernest by his uncle Leicester Hemingway over Christmas 1909;³² Chaucer's *General Prologue* and *The Knight's Tale*, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (vols. 1 and 2, of 1590), and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859–1873). Also, according to a contemporary biographer, Hemingway read translations of *Beowulf* and "Deor's Lament,"³³ Hemingway's letters show that he continued to read about medieval warfare as an adult, books which included translations of *La Chanson de Roland*, the *Chronicles of the Crusades* by Jean de Joinville and Geoffroy de Villehardouin, and Jean Froissart's *Chronicles*.³⁴ A letter by F. Scott Fitzgerald even refers to a plan by Hemingway for a story about crusaders.³⁵ Thus it appears likely that Hemingway, in writing *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, drew upon an ideal of knighthood with which to motivate the crusade of "Robert [i.e., King Robert of the river] Jordan" and his love for Maria. Confirming the professor's chivalry is a medievalized diction, almost ubiquitous to Hemingway's long passages of direct speech, which results from his literal rendering of Spanish:³⁶ "thou hast" for *tú has* and so on, or even the *civil's* "There is no necessity to insult us" for *No hay necesidad de insultarnos*. However, the heroic note is stronger where the Civil Guard are concerned. Pilar's grim tale of execution owes nothing to chivalry, any more than Linklater's in *The Men of Ness*. It is the latter which Pilar's story resembles, chiefly in its morning setting, observation of a victim's humor, and lack of reprieve. For Linklater there, as perhaps for Hemingway, a man's courage before dying, however compromised, is truer to modern realism because it emulates not chivalry but the bleaker Jónsborg code.

Hemingway and the Massacre in Ronda

In the light of this comparison let us consider what real incidents might have given Hemingway the basis for Pilar's tale. Because Hemingway appears to have written it as a commentary on the failure of Socialist revolution at the start of the Spanish Civil War, Pilar's story is not only grim but controversial too.³⁷ Hemingway himself, in a letter to a friend in 1954, claimed to have made it up:

We are old enough to try to talk truly and I tell you this only as a curiosity. A few other things which I invented completely such as the story in "For Whom the Bell Tolls" of Pablo and Pilar and their doing away with the Fascists in the village, I read, when by chance I have to do it, with complete astonishment that I could have invented as I did.³⁸

Since Pilar and her husband are given as Castilians, it has been supposed that the town is located in their northern province, or even Cuenca, which overlooks its own drop far to the east of Madrid. Also after the Second World War, however, when one of Hemingway's admirers asked him "how much of the novel had come from actual events," he named a place, saying that "When Pilar remembers back to what happened in their village when the fascists came, that's Ronda, and the details of the town are exact."³⁹

Ronda, dear to Hemingway for its bullfighting tradition, overlooks the most famous gorge in Spain, although the town lies far to the south of Castile in the province of Málaga. It has been noted that Hemingway's report on the disposal of dead horses there, in his *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), seems to pre-empt the way all the fascists are murdered in Pilar's story:⁴⁰

The bull ring at Ronda was built at the end of the eighteenth century and is of wood. It stands at the edge of the cliff and after the bullfight when the bulls have been skinned and dressed and their meat sent out for sale on carts they drag the dead horses over the edge of the cliff and the buzzards that have circled over the edge of the town and high in the air over the ring all day, drop to feed on the rocks below the town. (chap. 4)⁴¹

The handling of Pablo's Civil Guard victims is separate, like that of the bulls. Perhaps it is worth noting Hemingway's remark that Pablo was "really Rafael el Gallo," a self-preserving matador of the late 1920s, whom he also celebrates in *Death in the Afternoon* (chs. 2, 13, 15, 17–19).⁴²

Records show that when the Nationalist uprising began in Morocco, on July 19, 1936, the commander of Ronda's garrison took a platoon to the town hall and ordered the mayor, a member of the ruling Popular Front, to declare martial law. The mayor disarmed the soldiers with the help of peasants outside who had gathered in greater numbers. These were anarchists, members of the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajo* (CNT) whose committees were busy taking

over Andalusia. The CNT held Ronda nominally for the Republican government until September 18. In practice, however, they declared a revolution which had been long in the making. This started to get out of hand on July 24, when 200 peasants removed Ronda's college of priests to the prison whence they took them out of town to be shot. Out of the total number of victims of this terror, which is put at between 200 and 600, one person is thought to have killed himself by jumping into the gorge. Other Andalusian towns have terror stories closer to Hemingway's, but in Ronda it seems that most victims were shot.⁴³

Less than a month later, however, the Nationalists put out an even more dramatic story. On August 18, General Queipo de Llano, who had taken Seville for the rebels, gave a radio broadcast in which he claimed that 400 *personas de orden* ("people of standing") of Ronda had been massacred by order of the local committee:

Those they haven't thrown into the gorge, they have dragged through the streets, tied to the tail of a horse to the edge of town, where a pile of some three hundred unburied corpses lies openly decomposing.⁴⁴

In the last analysis, it seems likely that a version of the Radio General's fiction lies somewhere behind the story in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,⁴⁵ in which Pilar, recalling an anarchist massacre of landowners from the beginning of the war, lets us infer that the town is in Castile and under Nationalist rule and that Pablo's guerrillas are taking, not retaking, this town for the Republic. By the same token Pablo's men appear not to be Republican loyalists, but anarchist insurgents; his Civil Guard victims not Nationalist rebels, but policemen doing their job.

Hemingway and the Vikings: A Reflection on Their Refraction

To sum up, the well-known tale told by Pilar, of the anarchist liberation of a town in Castile in chapter 10 of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, may seem shocking to us not only in its brutality but also in its apparent admiration for the courage of *civiles* who are fighting for General Franco. Yet more surprising is the possibility argued here that Hemingway modeled this courage on that of Viking avengers from Orkney who are themselves modeled on an elite in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. In this way it seems that Hemingway has used the Vikings, or rather Linklater's pastiche of Dasent's eclectic novelization of *Jómsvíkinga* in the saga tradition of thirteenth-century Iceland, as the heroic template for an enemy he admired.

How could the Vikings have served him here but as the model of a manly indifference to death? Henceforth perhaps we may need to credit them with influence of a wider kind. The force of their refraction in this novel, if this particular influence is accepted, is a matter not of style but of stylization, for in Hemingway's case it seems that the Vikings, appearing as his prelude to a bitter recrimination against anarchists in a war only lately lost, have been used to stylize modern history.

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Notes

1. Peter Hallberg, *The Icelandic Saga*, trans. with notes and introduction by Paul Schach (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 78. For skepticism, Julia Zernack, "Artistic Reception," trans. Matthias Ammon, in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 327–21, esp. p. 336.
2. Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (London: Arrow Books, 1994).
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 107 ff.
4. *Jómsvíkinga saga: The Saga of the Jomsvikings*, ed. and trans. N. F. Blake (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), pp. xv–xix. Blake's translation will be used in this essay.
5. The modern edition is *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson (Reykjavík: Prentsmiðja Jóns Helgasonar, 1969).
6. *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. and trans. Blake, pp. vii–ix. For discussion of attempts by archaeologists to find evidence linking Wolin with the Jómsvikings, see Gardeta's chapter in this volume, and particularly pp. 65–66, 70, and 75.
7. *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. and trans. Blake, pp. 40 ff.
8. Translated in Alison Finlay, "Jómsvíkinga Saga and Genre," *Scripta Islandica: Isländska sällskapets årsbok* 65 (2014): 63–79, esp. 75.
9. *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. and trans. Blake, p. 41. My translation, based on Blake.
10. James D. Brasch and Joseph Sigman, *Hemingway's Library: A Composite Record*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 29 (Boston: John F. Kennedy Library e-publications, 1981), pp. 44 (key to abbreviations) and 355, n. 6681.
11. On the dates of writing, see James M. Hutchisson, *Ernest Hemingway: A New Life* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), pp. 161–65.
12. Brasch and Sigman, *Hemingway's Library*, p. 221, n. 3763.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 83, n. 834 and 287, n. 5251.

14. Michael S. Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading, 1910–1940: An Inventory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 28–29.
15. Frans G. Bengtsson, *The Long Ships: A Saga of the Viking Age*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Collins, 1954), pp. 136–37.
16. Brasch and Sigman, *Hemingway's Library*, pp. 24 and 69, n. 526.
17. George W. Dasent, *The Vikings of the Baltic*, 3 vols. (London, 1875). Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 175–82.
18. Dasent, *Vikings of the Baltic*, vol. 1, pp. v–vi.
19. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 23, chap. 2.
20. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 205 ff.
21. Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading*, p. 13.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 150, n. 1330.
23. Eric Linklater, *The Men of Ness: The Saga of Thorlief Coal-Biter's Sons* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933).
24. Brasch and Sigman, *Hemingway's Library*, p. 21; cf. p. 243, ns. 4275–79.
25. Linklater, *The Men of Ness*, pp. 239 ff.
26. Richard Davies, “The Birth of Penguin Books,” <https://www.google.co.uk/search?tbm=bks&hl=en&q=richard+davies+the+birth+of+penguin+books&=#q=richard+davies+the+birth+of+penguin+books&hl=en&spf=1500205193604>.
27. Brasch and Sigman, *Hemingway's Library*, p. 227, respectively ns. 3915, 3914, 3913, 3916, 3912.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–25. Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading*, pp. 50 and 67.
29. Eric Linklater, “‘My Marks and Scars I Carry with Me:’ Announcing as Our October ‘Extra’ – a Special Illustrated World Books Edition of *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway,” *World Books Broadsheet: Bulletin of World Books*, August 1953.
30. Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading*, pp. 12, 26–27 and 41–42.
31. Francis A. Ogg, *A Source Book of Mediæval History: Documents Illustrative of European Life and Institutions from the German Invasions to the Renaissance* (New York, Cincinnati and Chicago: American Book Company, 1908), pp. 181–95.
32. Kim Moreland, *The Medievalist Impulse in American Literature: Twain, Adams, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), pp. 161–200.
33. Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading*, p. 75, ns. 287 and 288; citing Charles A. Fenton.
34. Moreland, *The Medievalist Impulse*, p. 176.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 163–71; Hutchisson, *Hemingway: A New Life*, pp. 168–69.
37. Ramon Buckley, “Revolution in Ronda: The Facts in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,” *The Hemingway Review* 17 (1997): 49–57.
38. *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917–1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (St. Albans and London: Granada Publishing, 1981), pp. 837–38, esp. p. 837 (September 24, 1954, to Bernard Berenson).
39. A. E. Hotchner, *Papa Hemingway: A Personal Memoir* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), p. 129 (at Cervecería Alemana, Pla. St. Ana, Madrid).
40. Note from Edward Stanton, in Buckley, “Revolution in Ronda,” p. 54.
41. Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (London: Grafton Books, 1977), p. 44.

42. *Hemingway: Selected Letters*, ed. Baker, pp. 507–10, esp. 508 (August 15, 1940, to Charles Scribner).
43. Buckley, “Revolution in Ronda,” 49–54.
44. Ian Gibson, *Queipo de Llano: Sevilla, verano de 1936 (con las charlas radiofónicas completas)* (Barcelona: Ediciones Grijalba, 1986), p. 370: “A los que no despeñaron por el tajo, los arrastraron por las calles, atados a la cola de un caballo, hasta la salida del pueblo, donde se hacían unos trescientos cadáveres insepultos, en plena putrefacción.” My translation.
45. Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: Harper Press, 2012), p. 171.