

“FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS”

Howard Baskerville

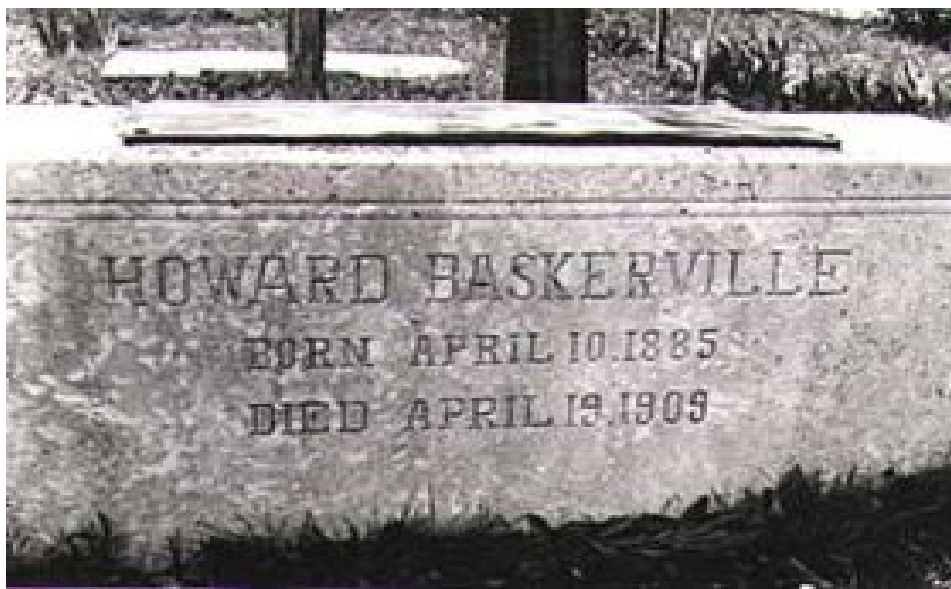


1885 - 1909

He arrived in 1907 fresh out of Princeton Theological Seminary, and was teaching in American Memorial School in Tabriz. The city was the center of resistance to royalist forces backed by Tsarist Russian's arms, money, troops and canons. The constitution was ratified in 1906 but the revolutionary war did not subside until 1911.

The last thing the Tsarist regime wanted in Iran the neighboring country was a constitutional government with a parliament. When Tabriz fell in siege of 1908, Howard Baskerville decided to part with his teaching position and joined the constitutional forces. He fought in trenches and became the leader of a contingent of 150 nationalist fighters. That number had diminished into 9, so dedicated and unyielding the school teacher remained.

On April 19, 1909 a single bullet tore through his heart killing him instantly eight days after his 24th birthday.



The story must have made the front page news in America definitely in Nebraska, the home state of Baskerville, and no doubt in the hometown of a ten year old grade-schooler named Ernest Hemingway. The grandeur of a life so short, laden with meaning and greatness, not product of age, all must have made an

indelible impression on the young, inquisitive mind of the future writer.

The majesty of the school teacher's courage, the sense of time and destiny, the unabashed transparency: "The only difference between me and these people", Howard Baskerville had said "is my place of birth, and that is not a big difference".

All indications are in this direction; Howard Baskerville became a pivotal point of reference for Ernest Hemingway. He ever sought adventure in life, barely 18 he was wounded in Italy at the end of World War I. Being in the throes of the Spain's civil war he wrote a novel titled FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS. The hero of the novel is an American school teacher, named Robert Jordan. The people around him are Spaniards, the scene of the conflict is Spain in civil war. Robert Jordan parts with his love and chooses to meet similar fate in battle against tyranny.

The novel with its theme and its elegant title, in any manner of thinking, enhances Howard Baskerville immortality. In the beleaguered city of Tabriz the widow of the school teacher busied herself writing a book titled " I AM PERSIA'S. "

Time confined by convention went and it came to pass that by some celestial arrangement, Iran in more than one dimension paid its debt back to Howard Baskerville. In an 8-year war with Iraq the longest open war in 20th century Iran de-fused the Iraqi army.

In the Gulf War, the same generation Iraqi army occupied Kuwait. The coalition forces, mostly Americans, came to the scene and started a war all set to push the aggressors out. What was prophesied to be “ The Mother of All Wars ” turned out to be the mother of Iraqi soldiers retreating in disarray with tanks, armored vehicles, and arms left behind. Agile feet saved lives. Months later the combat ready soldiers of America went home and became fathers.

In the 2nd round in an all out war between Iraq and America, the Iraqi soldiers were not eager anymore going into grave or wheelchair for the sake of a despot who occupied at random 75 palaces in order to save his own skin from the knives and bullets of assassins. An army of 130 thousand American soldiers are still in Iraq a number of them were killed not by Iraqi counterparts but by killers, with no identity.

Howard Baskerville the school teacher, came to the land of Ferdowsi, Hafez, Saadi and Rumi. In a world drifting toward darkness he lit a candle. Many times the candle flickered by cruel winds but the flame regained steadiness. Tsar Nickolas and his family were murdered in a revolution that shook the world in 1917. An ideology was implanted and tested in Russia. The world watched in fascination- the day Berlin Wall was demolished.

Fascism faded fast after World War II and what remains to this day is by sham balloting. Dictatorship is on decline, the remaining dictators in the world are old, nearing burial day. The classical music and literature were created during the eras of dictatorship, but the world's oldest political order have had its day.

And the candle burned brightly in other spheres. The century's greatest writer kept writing novels and short stories to unprecedented world acclaim. A towering figure in life and literature his achievements include The Nobel Prize.

As Rumi said, "each of us touches one place and the whole world understands you ". Howard Baskerville came to TOUCH Tabriz. His tombstone seeming to have risen out of the earth is there since 1909, a few months short of a hundred years. AND NOW THE WHOLE WORLD UNDERESTANDS him.

May the bell toll in towers or ring in the hand of any child in early spring of every year on April 19, and may Howard Baskerville hear the earthly chimes for the first time a century after his departure from earth – wherever he is in heaven.