One of the most commonly prescribed books for students of English literature has been George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. Educational authorities and others present this book, not only as literature, but as the authority on the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. Is this choice justified? And if not, why is it promoted in this way?

George Orwell served altogether about four months on the Aragon and Teruel fronts in Catalonia. On arrival in Barcelona, he enlisted in a unit dominated by Anarchists and POUMists, had a brief excursion into the Aragon hills, fired a few shots, returned to Barcelona and, after a short stay there, returned to London. Because of the stalemate that had been reached in the Aragon, he saw little fighting. By a mischance he was nearly killed in May 1937 when a bullet went through his throat.

In Central Spain, on the Madrid front, in Andalusia, in the Asturias, in the Basque country, large armies were locked in combat. The insurgent generals, in addition to their regular troops, recruited over 100,000 Moorish mercenaries in North Africa, and also received men and massive military aid from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. The troops marshalled by the government on the various fronts numbered over 600,000.

The main countries all played some part in the conflict; either openly, as in the case of Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union, or indirectly, or in an underhand way, as in the case of the USA, Great Britain and France.

Yet our students get as a definite statement of this Armageddon, a picture of a futile guerrilla skirmish.

In the minds of the troops and the people of the war zones in Central and Southern Spain, Barcelona represented an oasis of recuperation and recreation where the rigors and austerities of war could be forgotten for a time at least.

The well-being was, of course, relative. Compared with Paris, Barcelona was austere; in comparison with Madrid, it was the fleshpots.

Madrid was very nearly isolated. It was
WHY THE HOMAGE TO ORWELL?

linked by only one route with the rest of Spain. As its food was all brought in on this one road - the Valencia road - the diet of the Madrileno was meagre and unvarying: salted cod, lentils, Mexican chick peas, and ersatz coffee - that was it.

For nearly three years the living conditions of the Madrileno were like that. They suffered food shortage, actual danger and physical restriction to a limited city area.

Barcelona was heavily bombed several times, but apart from that it survived the war intact without becoming a battleground. Barcelona had hundreds of square kilometres of farmland surrounding it - all of Catalonia. From it came a constant flow of fresh food. The many textile and clothing factories of Barcelona operated throughout the war. Many of these, particularly the self-managing enterprises, had their own purchasing and selling agents in France. Through these channels were brought food, clothing and cigarettes, mainly for the employees of the factories, but some trickled out to the general population.

And of course there was the port. Despite the blockade, some ships were generally in the harbor and consumer goods dribbled through.

The two cities felt the impact of the war, but in one case it was extreme and in the other, relatively mild.

Madrid never capitulated. It was betrayed in March 1939 by a clique of officers headed by Colonel Casado.

Franco's troops marched into Barcelona early in February 1939 and the city was surrendered without a shot being fired.

If the two cities are compared for their war records, their devotion to democratic ideals and constancy to the Republican government, then Madrid deserves the honor and the glory. Truly heroic Madrid! Yet Orwell pays his homage to Catalonia.

There is no lack of material on the Spanish Civil War. On the contrary, a veritable spate of novels, poems, anthologies, histories, pamphlets and films deal directly with the war. Writers of the eminence of Andre Malraux in France, Jose Maria Gironella in Spain and Ernest Hemingway - to name three from different countries - have written major novels with the Spanish Civil War as the dominant motif.

And in comparison with these three, Orwell's knowledge of Spain and the war is obviously limited and deficient.

Orwell and Hemingway are two leading figures in the world of letters. Both went to Spain on the side of the Republic. Both wrote books about the war and both books deal with the exploits of a guerrilla band. However, while Hemingway's work is a novel, a piece of imaginative literature, Orwell's work is a political memoir.

Hemingway really knew Spain. Before the war he had lived in Spain and he appreciated the Spanish way of life. He held this hispanismo so deeply that, on the defeat of the Republic, he went to Cuba to live. There he witnessed another revolution. With the victory of Fidel Castro, Hemingway continued to live in Cuba, greatly to the satisfaction of the Cubans.

After May 1937, Orwell returned to England to be lionised by the literary establishment. Orwell had gone to Spain for the experience. His immediate and unremitting concern was to be a writer. He needed experiences and concerns that he could transmute into literature.

Orwell kept aloof from his fellow soldiers. He shows no particular liking or interest in the individual Spaniard or Catalan who were his comrades. The history of Catalonia, or of Spain, or the intricacies of the Spanish and Catalan political scene were not his concerns.

Hemingway, on the contrary was in Spain because he was a partisan on the side of the Spanish people. He loved their individualism, vigor and distinctiveness. His ear for their conversation and their thoughts is portrayed in his description of the members of the guerrilla band. In sharp contrast to Orwell's qualified war effort, sense of futility and self-recrimination is Hemingway's whole-hearted commitment, optimism and vigor.

Hemingway had no doubts. Every talent and asset he had, he devoted to the cause of the Republic - his writing skills and literary renown, his contacts with influential people, his personal income. He risked his life beyond the call of his journalistic duties.

He saw as clearly as did Orwell, cruelty, inefficiency and political manoeuvring. But paramount, over-riding these, was the necessity to defeat the resurgent forces of reactionary Spain.
In contrast to Orwell's desultory excursion in *Homage to Catalonia*, the band of guerrillas in Hemingway's book *For Whom the Bell Tolls* has a positive role to play in the war. They are part of an offensive by the Republican Army. They are to blow up a bridge so as to disrupt the communications of Franco's forces - an exploit integral to the strategic plan of the Republicans.

Orwell's centuria makes its excursion into the hills of the Aragon with no aim, with no purpose. Its members are apparently actuated by a consciousness of their inactivity in Barcelona and by a vague hope that what they do may be of some use. Orwell says of himself: "I was sick of the inaction on the Aragon front and chiefly conscious that I had not done my share of the fighting. I used to think of the recruiting poster in Barcelona which demanded accusingly of passers-by 'What have you done for democracy' and feel I could only answer 'I have drawn my rations' .... And, of course, I wanted to go to Madrid. Everyone in the Army whatever his political views always wanted to go to Madrid."

Why didn't they go to Madrid? There was nothing to stop them. John Cornford, a communist and a poet who also served with the POUM in Barcelona went to Madrid. He was killed there.

When staying in Madrid, Hemingway had a room at the leading hotel in the city, the Florida. The main buildings of Madrid were regularly shelled by Franco's artillery, among them the Hotel Florida. So Hemingway became a collector of shell fragments. When one of the hotel rooms was hit, he gathered shell fragments, labelled them, and made his room a museum-piece. Hemingway enjoyed showing visitors to Madrid his miniature war museum.

Hemingway's political attitude has been vindicated by events in Spain today. Continuing its policies from the Civil War period, the Spanish Communist Party is winning majority support of the Spanish workers. Further, the two political parties that were the bulwark of the Spanish Republic - the Communists and the Socialists - are the workers' parties today. The Anarchists have ceased to be an effective political force.

But today's students in Australia read Orwell - and his preference is very clear. He says "The danger was quite simple and intelligible. It was the antagonism between those who wished the revolution to go forward and those who wished to check or prevent it - ultimately between Anarchists and Communists".

The communists' policy was never in doubt. It was to win the war. This was expressed by Dolores Ibarruri (La Pasionaria) when Largo Cabellero proposed setting up a trade union government. She said "When we must concentrate all our efforts on the waging of a war so vital for Spain, experiments in trade union governments seem to be a grave error."
Should this plan materialise, it would lead to the disintegration of anti-fascist unity and accelerate the triumph of fascism.

"The trade unions are already represented in the government and have ample freedom to act. We suspect this plan is nothing but a manoeuvre to push the Republican parties out of the government and the Communist Party firmly opposes it.

"With the Popular Front we won in February and with this Popular Front government which gives proportional representation to all anti-fascist forces in the country, we shall win the war."

In fact, just as Largo Cabellero never abandoned the idea of leading a government based on his party and the UCT, so, too, the anarchists never renounced the plan to give
first priority to the establishment of libertarian communism.

Here are quotations from two historians, neither of whom are friendly to the communists, both conservative in attitude but with knowledge of the anarchists.

Dante A. Puzzo, in his work *Spain and the Great Powers,* wrote: "The Anarchists had a barricade philosophy and spoke the language of revolt in season and out. Frozen in a posture of defiance, they were boisterous, turbulent and troublesome always, effective revolutionaries never. Thus it had been under the Monarchy, thus it had been under the dictatorship and so it was under the Republic. It was only after the revolt of the generals that the Anarchists seized the opportunity created by that event to implement their notions of 'libertarian communism' and then only in Catalonia where they were strongest."

Gerald Brenen in *The Spanish Labyrinth* declares that "Ineffectual as a revolutionary force, only moderately successful in improving the conditions of the workers, it (the Anarchist movement) has dogged and hampered every government, good or bad .... By playing always for the highest stakes it has necessarily proved on many occasions, the friend of reaction."

Why was the anarchist movement in Spain so crucial to the war period? Spain was one of the strongholds of anarchism going back a hundred years. In 1873, it claimed a membership of three hundred thousand - a large number for those days. It had 270 local centres, the most important of them in Barcelona.

In October 1910, a congress of anarchist groups and certain independent federations of workers met in Seville and formed the CNT - Confederation Nacional del Trabajo. So, at the outbreak of the Spanish war, the Spanish working class was divided. The trade unions had two confederations - the UGT (Union General del Trabajadores) led by socialists of whom the best known is Largo Cabellero and the CNT dominated by the anarchists.

From the beginning the anarchists established a pattern of non-co-operation.

Salvador de Madariaga (a conservative Spanish historian), for example, writes of the 1931 elections: "The workers affiliated to the UGT voted for their men. But the Anarcho-Syndicalists voted for the middle-class liberals. There were two reasons for this. The first, the unbridgeable enmity which separates Socialists and Syndicalists, due to their rival bid for the leadership of the working classes; the second that, as the Anarchists always preached contempt for suffrage, they had no political machinery of their own; so that when it came to voting - which they did this time to help oust the Monarchy - they preferred to vote for the middle-class Republican whose liberal views were more in harmony with the anti-Marxist ideas of the Spanish syndicalists."

The Civil War was waged with a minimum of anarchist participation. When the anarchists were reproached about the immobility of the Aragon front, they replied that they had no arms.

In fact, they had more arms than did many other fronts. At the beginning of the war they had captured most of the arms in the Barcelona fortress. Until the Negrin government later established state control over them, the Barcelona factories worked for the anarchists. They also had at their disposal a complete network of international brokers who purchased arms for them in France and other countries.

What they did not have, and what they were constantly demanding, were aeroplanes and tanks - which were lacking on all fronts. The limited numbers at the disposal of the Republican government, of necessity had to go to the fronts where there were offensives.

The real reason for the immobility of the Aragon front stemmed from the policies of the anarchists. They stated that winning the war did not mean winning the revolution. They planned to keep their forces intact for the future libertarian communist Spain.

Spain had not discarded many social relics of its past. As late as the 'thirties of this century, social categories that were vestiges of earlier economic stages of Spanish history asserted themselves for survival. Along with its mule-cart agriculture, its semi-feudal land tenure, the Catholic permeation of all aspects of life, its antique political parties such as two monarchist (one Bourbon and one Carlist), and various regional clerical parties, it had for the oppressed a simplistic and unreal political philosophy.

Anarchism is an expression of the primitive economy of pre-industrial Spain. Independent
peasants, peasants ruined by debt, the large landless population of a country not yet industrialised - these social strata are predisposed to anarchism.

Arthur H. Landis in *Spain, the Unfinished Revolution* sums it up well. "Its (Anarchism's) summons to violence, its generous and mystical utopianism, its nostalgia for a golden age is readily adaptable to a country which is still essentially rural, where the proletariat is relatively weak and of immediate peasant origin, and where the Catholic faith has for a long time been the bearer of hope and consolation for humble folk."

Why was Orwell promoted so strongly in the Cold War period?

By the end of World War II, after two decades of unprecedented political and social upheavals, ordinary people, the hoi polloi, had taken part in, or seen, a major series of social collisions and governmental upsets.

During the 'thirties, while experiencing the shattering effects of the Depression, the breakdown of capitalist society, they, at the same time, witnessed the rise of counter-revolutionary forces spear-headed by Hitler and his like.

Then the war. The fascist countries, propagators of hierarchical societies dominated by a master sex, a master race, a master class. They were the enemy. Unabashed apostles of force and exploitation, who disdained to cloak their ideology with the sanction of law or the mystification of religion.

And to be fought they had to be exposed. The basic forces of society were uncovered to increasing numbers of people. Working people thus got a crash course in social education.

The antithesis of fascism was the Spanish people's struggle. The sustained effort of the Spanish people to cast off their social enemies highlighted the 'thirties. It was the alternative.

This mental attitude - a degree of lack of acceptance of the status quo, a lack of acquiescence in capitalist norms undoubtedly was a matter of concern for the theoreticians of world capitalism. It was particularly so for the financial and industrial oligarchy of the United States and Great Britain, as voiced by Churchill at Fulton in 1946.

The USA with immense economic power was poised for world hegemony. But people doubted the rightness of this cause. So started the battle for people's hearts and minds. So started the Cold War.

One of the ideals that had to be undermined was the repute earned by the Spanish Republicans in their resistance to Franco. If not obliterated at least it could be perverted.

Hence the welcome of the authorities for Orwell. He became the cultural hero. As well as a distortion of Spanish history, this introduction to Orwell leads on to later works where collectivism is depicted as nightmarish horror.

Troops of literary authorities and educational pundits, whose general bias is to oppose change, welcome a revolutionary Orwell - but an Orwell urging anarchy in opposition to marxist parties who are denounced as conservative.

The same attitude pervades most histories of the Spanish Civil War. It is accepted practice to describe the main defenders of the Republic, the socialists as well as the communists, as intriguers, opportunists and power-hungry. Now and then a footnote qualifies these assertions. Hugh Thomas, the historian of the Spanish Civil War who is generally regarded as the most sound, and extensively quoted by the liberal educational and literary establishment, warns in a footnote against acceptance of Orwell's analysis and facts.

Despite this, in a recent two-hour program on the Spanish Civil War by ABC radio, the arranger, J.D. Pringle (one-time editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*), eulogised *Homage to Catalonia* both for its literary merit and "the best account of the Spanish war". Thus art is put at the service of politics.

The anti-marxist intellectual, George Orwell, serves current political ends, to discredit communists and to pervert the history of the Spanish Civil War.

Lloyd Edmonds served in the Spanish Civil War in the International Brigade from 1937 until January 1939. During that time, he was in many parts of the country, but particularly the Madrid front and Catalonia. He knew Hemingway rather well, on first-name terms, seeing him both in Madrid and on the fronts. As a result of his experiences, Lloyd Edmonds joined the Communist Party of Spain.