Preface

Spanish contemporary poetry is currently enjoying exceptional dynamism and vitality. The large number of poetry books, periodicals, magazines, online sources and critical works on the genre, as well as the innovative reworkings of poetic traditions in practice, and an enthusiastic public that enjoys this widely available literature in all its forms, all signal a great moment in Spanish poetry.

The study of this poetry, however, has proven somewhat difficult for the foreign reader, who faces poetry books, anthologies and critical works mainly written for native speakers who are very much aware of the social, historical and cultural context. Even though some critical studies on contemporary Spanish poetry have been published in English recently (Mayhew 2009; Mudrovic 2008), there is very little provision of primary sources for such an audience. For example, in spite of a proliferation of anthologies of contemporary Spanish poetry in Spain during the last two decades, mainly organised around trends or poetic groups (Cano Ballesta 2001; García Martín 1999; García-Posada 1996; Garrido Moraga 2000; Mainer 1999; Martínez 1997; Milán et al. 2002; Ortega 1994; Rodríguez Cañada 1999; Sanz Pastor 2007; Villena 1992a, 1997), around gender (Andrés and García Rayego 2005; Benegas and Munárriz 1998; Buenaventura 1986; Keefe Ugalde 1991; Reina 2002), or interested in portraying the effects of the turn of the new millennium on new poetic voices (Elguero 2004; García et al. 2006; Krawietz and León 2003; Moga 2004; Morales Barba 2006; Sánchez-Mesa Martínez 2007a; Villena 2003), none of them consider a non-native Spanish audience that might require more nuanced guidance, or one that might have to tackle linguistic and contextual challenges. The present volume intends to address this issue and become a vital tool for the study of Spanish literature for English-speaking undergraduate students as well as a point of entry for keen readers of Spanish poetry.

The anthology presents a selection of Spanish peninsular poetry from the 1970s – taking the period of the transition to democracy, following the death of Francisco Franco in 1975, as the starting point – to the present day, with an introductory study of the most relevant poetic trends and poetic groups of the period, followed by guided and close readings of each composition. The work, therefore, has a patent pedagogical and informative aim. The poetic selection is divided into two main sections and five subsections in order to aid its pedagogical intent, and it includes a total of 22 authors selected according to their literary rigour and with attention to the relevance and influence of their work. Of course

1 It is worth highlighting that the present volume includes authors who only write in
there are many important poets missing from this selection, but the scope of the anthology inevitably imposed limits on how many authors could be included. Furthermore, the selection of compositions – which can be equally problematic – was guided by my knowledge and understanding of what students engage with the most and the potential of the poems to illustrate relevant trends in Spanish contemporary poetry. The first part deals with the poetry written in the twenty years or so that followed the transition to democracy in Spain, which although considered contemporary may be viewed by the young reader as firmly grounded in the past. In contrast, the second part considers the poetry that has been written and published in Spain during the new millennium. More emphasis has been placed on this section in order to clearly represent what Spanish contemporary poetry means at present and to demonstrate in detail its potential and the trends or aesthetics it may follow in the years to come. The subsections respond to aesthetic trends and poetic groups; they intend to orientate the reader and illustrate general tendencies rather than build rigid categories in Spanish poetry. In this sense, some of the poems included in the various sections may not strictly adhere in terms of exact dates, but they incontestably stem from them. The first section contains three subsections: the first deals with the poetry written during the transition to democracy, also a cultural transition in itself; the second presents the emergence of poetry written by women in the 1980s – once democracy was fully established – and the impact this production had on the poetic field of the time as well as on future generations; the final subsection in this part intends to portray the Spanish poetic field of the 1990s, a time of general economic stability with the socialist party at the helm (for most of it) that created one of the most important poetic trends and groups in Spanish contemporary literature and established a dominating – and therefore controversial – aesthetic whose influence would be felt for years to come. The second section contains two subsections: the first intends to illustrate the poetry written at the turn of the new millennium, what appeared to be a new era with the launch of the euro and the air of general change at the end of the twentieth century; the very final subsection presents some of the youngest voices in Spanish poetry, those that have emerged in the last few years and are still evolving, signalling new forms of expression and great potential for a fruitful poetic field.

The guided and close readings that follow the poems are meant to steer the reader into possible interpretations of the composition. Nonetheless, the fact that poetry is a highly subjective art, and open to endless interpretations, needs to be acknowledged and stressed. The readings provided are just one of many possible variations. Readers should always be encouraged to put forward their own views and interpretations that, supported with plausible arguments, would be equally valid. Since most of the poetry selected for the anthology relies quite heavily on Spanish, and not in any of the other official languages of Spain. The other languages of the Iberian Peninsula are also very active and productive in the poetic field, but given their particular cultural, linguistic and social context they unquestionably require an anthology of their own.

viii
free verse and tends to disregard traditional poetic forms, the guided readings focus on the content rather than the form.

I must emphasise that the current map of Spanish poetry is a very diverse one in which many aesthetics and authors converge. Older poets who started writing during the transition to democracy – all the authors included in the anthology are alive except for two, Aníbal Núñez and Leopoldo Alas – are still active, and their works regularly appear alongside that of new poets. Closely linked to this, it is important to acknowledge that authors continuously evolve and they can cross over different aesthetics and poetic groups throughout their careers, thus blurring arbitrarily set boundaries – including those of the groups in this anthology that obey a pedagogical and aesthetic aim. The poetic field, with all its trends and its poetic groups, is not so clearly divided as one would like to imagine. It also points at the difficulty and danger of pigeonholing authors and trends into rigid and static categories, and reminds the reader of the need to keep an open mind and view the divisions in the anthology as merely sketches or outlines that aim to guide the reader through a complex and constantly changing field.

Spanish contemporary poetry is a bold demonstration of the strength of Spanish contemporary culture. It is also a very useful tool for students to strengthen and deepen their knowledge of Spanish language, society and culture, and familiarise themselves in the context from which it emerges. The pedagogical aim of the anthology is therefore twofold: to illustrate the main tendencies and trends of the genre in Spain at the present time – and hopefully nurture and foster a love of poetry in the reader – and also to strengthen the reader’s linguistic skills and understanding of Spanish studies.

Significantly, the majority of the poetry studied here forms part of a chapter in Spanish literature that is still very much open to interpretation. This poetry has great potential and its future is still being forged: as such, its limits cannot really be predicted. Therefore, this anthology aims to be the first step for readers in a long-standing relationship with Spanish contemporary poetry. It is hoped that readers will continue following and studying the work of some of the authors presented here.