Hostile notices—however maliciously lopsided and carefully wounding—are normally not worth the bother of a reply. Fair-minded readers can be left to arbitrate between the text and the reviewer for themselves. But in the case of John Saville’s curiously crude mishandling and venomously wilful misjudging in the last number of the Socialist Register 1981, of my 1980 Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse some riposte is called for. The more personal insults that Saville feels licensed liberally to sprinkle around—about my so-called paranoia, gormlessness, nasty schoolboyishness, bumbling, ignorance of life, and the rest—I ignore because they are as much beyond rational debate as they are beneath contempt. But Saville does also make serious allegations about careless and/or deliberate distortions of historical fact: and enough of them as to make any standing on dignity in these matters look like an acknowledgement by me that he’s proved his points. What’s more, the sorts of point about facts and interpretations of fact that Saville raises are also more generally interesting because of what they reveal about the way Thirties’ issues are still alive and continuing and about the way ideological assumptions, prejudices, preferences and prescriptions penetrate deeply into all reading and writing of history—even such sturdily confident data-wielding and prejudice rebutting reading as Saville purports to go in for on this occasion.
Spanish poetry is astonishing in its richness and variety. This anthology covers the two great flowerings of Spanish verse: the first, which lasted to the end of the seventeenth century, and second, from the mid-nineteenth century through the Spanish Civil War, to the present. This third edition has been revised to represent more fully the poetry of resistance that emerged during the Franco years, giving more space to older poets such as Jorge Guillén and the great survivor of the Lorca generation and Nobel Prize winner Vicente Aleixandre, as well as a number of more contemporary poets who hav