The idea for this book originated in response to a void that was evident in our commercial Spanish classes. Although it is widely believed that literature is a critical tool in the foreign language classroom, the literary anthologies used in most Spanish programs at intermediate and advanced levels are geared primarily toward students majoring in literature and therefore are based on a traditional approach to the texts. Such textbooks do not take into consideration that the field of foreign language instruction has gone through some significant and challenging changes in recent years. At least in the languages most frequently studied—German, French, and Spanish—and therefore among the largest number of students, interest has increasingly shifted away from the traditional study of literature toward more practical uses of language. Today a growing number of universities in the United States offer a concentration that combines language and international business.

Unfortunately, the trend toward a more practical or professional emphasis in the study of languages has created a gap between the various concentrations offered in departments of foreign languages across the nation. The literary and commercial tracks have diverged, and the relation between literature and business is far from clear. The breach between these two aspects of the study of foreign languages has resulted in a deep divide in the profession. Nevertheless, literature is a valuable factor in learning a language. Students with wide interests can use the literary text as a way to explore social, political, and economic issues and thereby gain critical insights into the culture of the target language. This, of course, calls for a new approach to the literary text: An approach that leaves aside traditional literary analysis and focuses on the social aspects and the context of the particular author and work.

The literary anthology we have compiled meets precisely the objectives mentioned above. It can be used in a variety of contexts: as a cultural com-
plement in Spanish for international business, in literature classes specifically geared for students of Spanish for business, in culture classes, and in international studies. The texts, the introductory essays, and the questions and discussion themes suggested are aimed at providing the student with a better understanding of the cultural and social context of the Hispanic countries. We are convinced that this new approach will render the study of literature a much more useful and immediate activity for those students who are not necessarily in a traditional literature field. At the same time, our anthology allows instructors to return to their field of specialization—literature—and discuss in a novel way texts and authors with whom they are already familiar.

**Structure and organization**

**Parts**

The book is divided into ten numbered parts, each built around a central theme. We have chosen a range of topics so as to give as broad a view as possible of the social and cultural factors that determine the current situation in Hispanic countries. The student, therefore, will have a chance to read about and discuss such issues as immigration, the impact of the bureaucracy on the economy, the status of women, the effects of rapid modernization, and the consumer society. Each part contains three to four literary excerpts that present the central theme from different angles as well as different geographical and historical contexts. The student will benefit from such diversity in perspective and also will be able to appreciate the wealth of Hispanic literary production.

**Author and context**

The literary texts are preceded by an essay that generally consists of two sections. First, biographical information gives the student a better understanding of central facts in the author’s life as well as a general idea of his or her interests and perspective. Included here is a list of the author’s major works to guide the student to further readings and thus to a broader view of the writer’s overall literary production.

The second part of the essay discusses the general theme of the particular part in the context of the author’s native country at the time the work was
written or at the time the narrative takes place. In the part that deals with the status of women, for example, the essay that introduces Esmeralda Santiago’s *Cuando era puertorriqueña* describes the state of Puerto Rican women during the sixties, at the time of the massive migration to the U.S. mainland. This information situates the topic of discussion within a wider framework and serves as a way to anticipate the main ideas that will appear in the literary fragment that follows.

**The texts**

The process of selecting the literary texts was slow and careful. Although not every work of literature should be approached from a social—much less an economic or business—perspective, the material we chose is appropriate for achieving the pedagogical objectives of the book. Even though our approach to the texts imposed certain limitations, the selection is representative of the body of literature from Spanish-speaking countries.

We included selections from many genres—essay, drama, poetry, short story, and novel—as a way of underscoring the richness of the Hispanic literary tradition as well as to motivate the student to appreciate all forms of literature. Such a varied selection adds flexibility to the book because it allows the instructor to choose what is most apt for a particular class.

The texts also have several levels of difficulty owing to variations in content, style, vocabulary, and other factors. They are, nevertheless, works frequently used in traditional literature courses for third- and fourth-year students. As in other anthologies for this level of students, the texts are supplemented with ample notes geared to help the student navigate the most difficult passages.

**Comprehension questions and discussion themes**

Each of the sections previously mentioned—the general introduction to the chapter, information about author and context, and the literary text itself—is accompanied by a set of questions. Additionally, the texts have a set of discussion themes and a vocabulary exercise. The questions have two objectives: to ensure comprehension of the readings and to expand the discussion and motivate the student to explore issues related to the topic presented in that part of the book. The *Temas de discusión* afford the instructor the opportunity
to draw on the students’ own life experience and knowledge of a range of subjects, for example, history, politics, economics, business, culture, and personal experience, so that the topic is approached from a variety of perspectives. Equally important, as a way to dispel cultural stereotypes, is the drawing of comparisons between Hispanic countries and the United States on a specific subject or matter. Sometimes the differences are not as wide as one is led to believe; and if there are indeed significant disparities, the class has the opportunity to explore their causes and consequences.

We have included a list of videos and films related to the issues and topics presented in the book as well as a list of websites of Hispanic countries. Students should be encouraged to visit the websites in search of material and information for further classroom discussion.

This anthology is a way of introducing the study of literature not only into the commercial Spanish curriculum but also into other concentrations. Our approach to the literary text, that is, our emphasis on social and economic perspectives rather than on the esthetic and structural considerations of a traditional approach, opens up these works by well-known authors to a wider range of interpretation. And it allows a greater number of students and instructors to explore one of the most enduring features of Hispanic culture: Its vast and rich literary heritage.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to all the people at Yale University Press who worked on our book, including Lawrence Kenney, Emily Saglimbeni, our reviewers, Ann Hilberry, University of Michigan; Maria Cooks, Purdue University; Michael Scott Doyle, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Alberto Acereda, Arizona State University; Teresa Smotherman, University of Georgia; and especially our editor, Mary Jane Peluso. We would like to thank Carmen Chavez, Wendy Caldwell, and Fernando Reati for their suggestions and all our students for their early comments on the manuscript. Carlos is grateful to Karyn, Alberto, and Pablo for their support and patience.