

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41
Texts

Key messages

The best answers combined a clear response to the question, detailed knowledge of the text and a well-constructed argument.

Candidates showed better organisation in their answers, and focused more closely on the question set. The formula of 'point, example, explain, link' was successfully employed by many.

Candidates must answer 3 questions in total in order to attain a satisfactory grade in this Paper. A significant number of scripts had fewer than 3 answers.

Centres are encouraged to remind candidates that the answers must be legible, as examiners can only assess what they are able to read.

General comments

The entry this Session showed positive improvement in examination technique in approaching questions. Most answers showed understanding and application of essay writing skills as well as knowledge of the texts. There were fewer examples of rubric infringement where both **(a)** and **(b)** options of a question were answered. Unusually, a significant number of scripts did not include 3 full answers.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Benito Pérez Galdós: *Misericordia*

- (a)** Candidates identified Juliana as the speaker and explained that she turned to Benina for help as Benina had always shown kindness and understanding to Paca and her family.

The 'tema central', as seen in the final pages of the novel, centred on Benina. Some identified this as 'misericordia', showing how she had worked selflessly all her life to serve others, with examples of her acts of charity. Many compared Benina's attitude to life with that of other main characters, to very good effect. Benina was the moral compass, the confessor who at the end of the novel tells Juliana to go home and sin no more. The parallel with Jesus was often discussed, as was Benina's virtually saint-like status.

- (b)** This question was generally well answered. Money has a pivotal role to play in the novel both in terms of physical survival and as an indicator of social standing. The best essays considered Galdós' intentions in writing the novel and discussed the plight of the impoverished majority of characters in the text, from several strata of society. This then led to analysis of the nature of society depicted by Galdós, in particular its values.

Question 2

Lope de Vega: *El caballero de Olmedo*

- (a) Most candidates responded correctly to (i) and (ii), identifying Alonso advising Rodrigo and showing kindness towards him. Rodrigo suffered physical injury in his fall, but was most distressed by the public humiliation he felt.

Alonso's key failing was not always identified clearly, leading to over use of narrative and generalised comments. As could be seen in the printed extract, Alonso reacts in a humane and generous way towards Rodrigo, unaware that this action could be construed negatively. This inability to assess the effect of his actions on others, together with a generous nature and possibly arrogant self-belief meant that he would not heed warnings and could not imagine that another noble would be a threat to him. Good answers analysed his recklessness, acknowledging his sincere feelings for Inés and his parents as well as respect for Rodrigo. His relationship with Fabia was also seen as a weakness.

- (b) The best answers to this question analysed Tello's role without narrating his involvement in the plot. As the 'gracioso' to be expected in a Golden Age play, Lope de Vega made Tello more interesting and unusual than the norm. He plays the traditional role of supporting his master, but seems to highlight Alonso's lack of common sense and is more instrumental in encouraging and guiding him. Tello moralises by warning Fabia that using magic could end badly, warns Alonso to behave with more decorum but at the same time recommends and engineers schemes whereby Alonso and Inés deceive Pedro. Tello plays the stereotypical role as the witty servant who boasts, is materialistic and cowardly at heart. Tello acts as the link between different groups of characters, which keeps the plot moving. His loyalty to Alonso is clear in the final scenes where again Tello's pragmatism contrasts with Alonso's more unwordly approach to life.

Question 3

Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

- (a) This was a popular text. Virtually all candidates commented correctly on (i) and (ii), although some answers to (ii) were over-long. This part of the question only requires a brief response using material from the printed extract.

In (iii), some candidates analysed all the characters without focusing on the precise wording of the question '... Esquivel presenta a los personajes para que, aunque tengan aspectos poco simpáticos, podamos comprenderlos.' Those individuals who lend themselves more appropriately to this response would be Rosaura, Pedro and Mamá Elena. There were some very good analyses of these characters showing how the author presented their actions in light of social conventions and past experiences in such a way that although the reader may still not be sympathetic to them, he or she understands why they behaved in a particular manner.

- (b) A number of candidates interpreted this question too literally and described the family's house and how the rooms were used. The essence of the question was to see the home as a microcosm, reflecting a wider social setting and presenting a range of contemporary issues. The basic conflict could be defined as tradition versus progress. This can be analysed in terms of the Mexican Revolution, the background of the text; the role of women – challenged specifically by Gertrudis; traditional/family expectations as defined in the Manual de Carreño and imposed by Mamá Elena; the rich heritage of Mexico as shown in the influence of the native skills in cooking and medicine; the USA, to mention some.

Question 4

Rodolfo Usigli: *El gesticulador*

- (a) This text attracted many answers. Most candidates answered (i) and (ii) briefly and correctly. Estrella represents the political party and César Rubio takes on the persona of his historical namesake.

The theme of myth in the text was sometimes discussed only as lies or deception. The best answers showed that myth is more than that. Mythical status represents ideals. César Rubio

certainly lied but he responded to what the Mexican people needed – to personify the ideals of the Revolution rather than the failure and corruption it had come to be. César had experience in creating an illusion in his previous life as a university teacher; the family borrowed furniture when entertaining to hide their relative poverty. Bolton was his closest collaborator; man is susceptible to believe in fiction when it suits his own ends. The mythification of César was seen in his presence in the placards after his death, symbolising his immortality. These essays showed understanding of Usigli's intention to show how the people need a hero figure and how myths can be created or at least kept alive.

- (b) Answers to this question were generally more focused on the question than those on option (a). Candidates showed understanding of the political setting and the message of the play. The consensus was that Usigli found the Mexican Revolution to have failed. The people had been deceived by politicians like Navarro, who were corrupt liars, and therefore had no voice. The most blatant example of this manipulation was perhaps Navarro himself, who had killed the real César Rubio, then colluded in the deception of the resurrected hero but then orders the murder of the false César Rubio, again, for his own political gains. Historical truth is hidden.

Section 2

Question 5

Ramón J. Sender: *Réquiem por un campesino español*

- (a) This was a popular text and question. The best answers considered the effect of both titles in terms of the themes and the author's intentions. The second title was supported as more apt because it emphasised the role of Paco as a representative of the Spanish people in the period before the Civil War. Mosén Millán was still a key character, and provided continuity. The Church, in the person of Mosén Millán, and the nobility were criticised through their behaviour towards Paco, and by extension, the villagers as a whole and the majority of the population without privilege. The scene was set for the future conflict.
- (b) Effective answers to this question tended to focus on Paco and his developing awareness of the inequalities in the society in which he lives. Mosén Millán appears to be a benign influence but gradually the reader, alongside Paco, discovers that Christian charity only goes so far. Paco has to challenge the person who has been a second father to him and to stand up to the forces of tradition in the absent landowners. The tragic outcome, a result of betrayal, underlines how entrenched the old ideas are and that it took considerable courage to stand up to them. Paco's requiem was not attended by any of his friends or supporters a year after his death, showing solidarity with his views against the establishment.

Question 6

Isabel Allende: *Eva Luna*

- (a) Many candidates chose to study this text and both question options were popular.

It was important to approach this question with an analytical rather than narrative focus. Good answers examined the range of Eva's experiences and relationships throughout the novel, with the parallel account of Rolf's life. The lessons Eva learned on the way seemed to lead to a successful relationship with someone else who had had to become self-reliant. Both individuals reached a position where they understood themselves as a result of the challenges they had faced and had a clear vision of their future aims.

- (b) Answers to this question were most successful when candidates gave detailed analyses of several characters, showing to what extent the individuals succeeded through strength of character and/or selfishness. The majority decided that strength was required and some degree of self-protection for survival was common. This did not mean that the character was egotistical by nature, but sometimes had to behave in this way in order to survive a difficult situation. Most main characters had a social conscience. Many essays made thoughtful assessments of the depiction of the socio-political setting of the novel, to good effect.

Question 7

Federico García Lorca: *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

- (a) Virtually all candidates answered on this text and both options were popular.

The question asked candidates to analyse Martirio's role in the play. Although most knew the narrative, a number were unclear about Martirio's actions in the final scene. The majority of answers concentrated on the relationship between Martirio and Adela throughout the play. This was helpful but tended to omit a number of aspects of her character. The most successful essays found a way of structuring the response to cover her role both dramatically and thematically. The significance of her name was often discussed – she suffered in many ways, both physically and psychologically. She is closest in age to Adela, but not as beautiful; she had been let down by a prospective suitor at Bernarda's insistence due to the difference in social rank; she has directly suffered because of Bernarda's pride; she resents Angustias' engagement and Adela's illicit affair with Pepe as she is jealous of them both; she voices the plight of women in that society who are subject to the whims of men; she supports Bernarda's condemnation of women who sin. Martirio is a complex character and links all aspects of the play dramatically, and is the instigator of Adela's suicide by implying that Bernarda has killed Pepe.

- (b) This question was probably the most widely answered of the whole Paper. Candidates understood the concept and identified it as a central theme in the play. The best essays included a wider range of aspects, supported by references to the text. All referred to the plight of the daughters and the triangle of Angustias/Adela/Pepe. Interestingly, few commented on Pepe's acceptance of the arrangement or of the way he was prepared to take advantage of Adela. La Poncia also contributed to the analysis of 'esta crítica'; she counselled Adela to wait until Angustias died in childbirth to have her chance to marry Pepe and gave the impression that this was common practice. La Poncia depended on Bernarda for her income, as did her sons, so her first instinct was for self-preservation, maintaining the reputation of her employer. At the same time she was aware of an impending tragedy within the household and attempted to avert it. Both Bernarda and La Poncia behaved hypocritically. Amelia and Magdalena offer insights into the suffering of the daughters, and are rarely included. Amelia has no confidence and is afraid of everything, especially the world outside, seen when she talks about the stars. Magdalena is direct and clear-thinking; she is under no illusions about the prospects of marrying, rather pragmatically would prefer to work like the men rather than waste her life away in the prison of the house. Interestingly she was the one who mourned her father most and presents a contrast to the other sisters in her down-to-earth attitude. It is important to show the effect of society's hold on the way of life as depicted in exchanges with Prudencia and the tragic incident of 'la hija de la Librada'. The figure of Bernarda has to be central to the essay and her statements in the final scene emphasise how entrenched her views are.

Candidates generally know this text well. One of the main factors in producing a good essay is to structure the answer carefully to cover a range of aspects without repetition. As mentioned above, it is also helpful to consider the impact of all characters in the play rather than concentrate on the central few; this includes the role of María Josefa who offers valuable insights.

Question 8

Varios, ed Gordon Brotherston: *Spanish American Modernista Poets*

- (a), (b) There was a small number of answers on this text.

As is always the case in poetry, Examiners are keen to reward individual interpretation of the work, provided this is supported by reference to specific examples and understanding of the particular poet's work. Essays tend to be very individual, and are marked as such.

SPANISH

Paper 8673/42
Texts

Key messages

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Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Benito Pérez Galdós: *Misericordia*

There were few answers on this text, therefore comments are brief.

- (a)** Having completed the brief response to **(i)** and **(ii)**, the majority of the answer was in part **(iii)**. This could be tackled in a number of ways. Fantasy and reality appear in several contexts in the novel. Almudena has his own beliefs which could be interpreted as fantasy. Many individuals live in a world of fantasy in that they do not acknowledge their real situations. Benina, perhaps the most pragmatic character in the novel, creates a fantasy of an imagined benefactor to conceal the fact that she begs in the street for money, only to find the fantasy made reality.
- (b)** This question focused on Galdós' intention in writing the novel. He wished to show the depth of problems suffered by the poor, the inequalities in society, lack of Christian charity and the perceived importance of social status and lack of a moral centre. The omniscient narrator is able to paint an objective picture to allow the reader to experience the lives of the characters without prejudice.

Question 2

Lope de Vega: *El caballero de Olmedo*

Candidates generally showed understanding of the text and the main themes.

- (a) In (i) and (ii), candidates were able to explain that the King saw his main role as that of supreme judge, and that the traitors denounced by Tello are Rodrigo and Fernando. Responses to part (iii) outlined the structure of society, with the King at the top of the pyramid, followed by the nobility, with the peasants, in the largest numbers, at the bottom. The King had complete control; the nobles were bound by a code of behaviour but those at the bottom of the scale had no status. However all citizens were able to appeal to the King for justice, as seen here by Tello. Alonso generally behaved honourably 'imaginando bodas' when he first saw Inés. He lived by the code of honour for knights, whereas Rodrigo did not. Alonso was not entirely blameless in his actions but any shortcomings were overwhelmed by Rodrigo's shameful betrayal of the code in ambushing Alonso, alone, at night, with no hope of defending himself. Such actions threatened the harmony of society, challenging the status quo. The King therefore punished Rodrigo and Fernando severely and immediately, thus re-establishing a harmonious society.
- (b) Rural life versus city/court life was a frequent theme in Lope de Vega's plays. Here, the characters are not members of the peasantry and the setting is used to both dramatic and thematic effect. Tradition is represented in the ballad and customs in the fiestas and bullfight. The nobles bring confusion and disruption to the lives of Inés and her family and introduce deception and lies to the stable home. The setting of Alonso's death is deep in the countryside and the author creates an atmospheric and frightening scene where the wildness of the landscape is reflected in the violence played out.

Question 3

Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

This was a popular text with many answers to both options.

- (a) Most candidates explained that Pedro had married Rosaura in order to be near Tita. Her response to this information was one of anger as this admission came too late, having ruined her life. Part (iii) focused on the way the author depicted Pedro and the reader's impression of him. The consensus was that of sympathy for his situation as Mamá Elena's decision to forbid Tita marrying Pedro was final. His true feelings were expressed to his father after the interview with Mamá Elena. However his decision was condemned, as unfair to both Tita and Rosaura. The sisters faced a sad future due to Pedro's selfishness as he did not love Rosaura and could not love Tita. He was a moral coward. Perhaps one of the worst examples was his failure to challenge the decision to take Roberto to Texas as Tita was too close to the baby, in Mamá Elena's opinion, resulting in the baby's death. It was only when Tita was engaged to be married to John Brown that Pedro finally finds the courage to speak his mind – but possibly prompted by jealousy, so still a selfish act.
- (b) This question tempted some candidates to recount many recipes without analysing their function in the novel. Tita is placed in the kitchen as the person who provides food, but more importantly, nurture to the family. This is particularly important for the children as Rosaura is unable to do this herself. Tragically Roberto dies when he is removed from Tita's care. The recipes serve another function as they represent Mexican culture and tradition, a sense of continuity in a time of unrest. The division of the novel into months, though not a precise time scale, gives a sense of structure to the text, which could be said to lack a defined plot. Perhaps the most original aspect to the recipes is the way Tita is able to express her feelings through her cooking. Most essays referred to the wedding cake prepared for Rosaura and Pedro which is imbued with Tita's tears and upsets all the guests. The contrast to this was the dish prepared with rose petals from flowers given to Tita by Pedro. In this case her passion was communicated to those who ate it and Gertrudis, overwhelmed by desire, escaped from the ranch to live her own life and express herself freely. The recipes were seen to have an intrinsic role both structurally and thematically within the novel.

Question 4

Rodolfo Usigli: *El gesticulador*

The comments here are brief as there were few answers on this text.

- (a) Parts (i) and (ii) focus on the false reality created by César Rubio and the politicians. The role of the people is key in the play. César Rubio the historical figure was a hero of the Revolution, held in high esteem. The idealism and hope of the armed struggle has now given way to corruption and

deception. The new political elite manipulate the people to their own advantage. César Rubio takes on the persona of the hero to give new hope to the people. Usigli criticises the failure of the Revolution and the deliberate creation of new false myths as a means of controlling the Mexican people who have no voice.

- (b) This phrase encompasses the essence of the whole play – where is the truth? Candidates could explore the issue of identity; the influence of the US on Mexico; individuals' acceptance of lies or deception to promote their own personal or political interests; using lies and deception to control others.

Section 2

Question 5

Ramón J. Sender: *Réquiem por un campesino español*

The comments here are brief as there were few answers on this text.

- (a) Answers to this question are centred on the figure of Mosén Millán. At first he seems to be a positive influence in the life of Paco and the Church is central to life in the village. However Paco begins to understand that Christian charity is limited and the priest is keen to leave the poorest inhabitants in the caves, showing little concern for their plight. The Church is aligned with the landowners and those with vested interests in avoiding change to the status quo. Paco's subsequent involvement in politics on behalf of the people, and his betrayal at the hands of the priest are a consequence of his relationship with the Church. Notably no one attends the requiem mass – Paco's friends and family have turned away from the institution.
- (b) The novel is set in the period before the Civil War. Candidates correctly quoted references to the departure of the King and the establishment of the Republic. Although the conflict has yet to break out, the author sets out the divisions in society and the inequalities which will fuel the war. Paco learns about the wider society from his experience with Mosén Millán, the priest. Ironically this turns him from the Church, which has no interest in active involvement in the community and he begins a political career to defend the rights of the people. The opposing groups – Church, landowners, versus the villagers are clear.

Question 6

Isabel Allende: *Eva Luna*

- (a) Candidates approached this question in a number of ways. The best answers analysed how different characters developed as a result of their own experiences to find the confidence to make the right choices for their own happiness. For some, this meant a considerable struggle against tradition (Mimí), for others escape from cruelty (Rolf). Humberto chose political struggle over personal fulfilment, and of course Eva herself struggled in many ways but found kindness and guidance from many individuals in her life. Essays which included comment on the presentation of society as a whole tended to express the view that happiness was elusive for many due to the forces of repression.
- (b) This question does not state that the novel is feminist, rather that Allende has created powerful male, as well as female, characters. Both Eva and Rolf had to defeat many obstacles which were not of their own making in order to be successful personally and professionally. Candidates analysed the presentation of Mimí and Humberto also, with good understanding, as well as the main male influences on Eva's early life, both positive and negative.

Question 7

Federico García Lorca: *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

Virtually all candidates chose to write on this text.

- (a) The quotation from the text refers of course to Pepe el Romano. La Poncia has recognised the tumult caused in the house by his presence, even though he never appears physically in the play. The best essays analysed the nature of the problem – five daughters, four of whom have little

chance of ever leaving their home because they do not have sufficient dowries to attract a husband of high enough social standing to satisfy their tyrannical mother. The imposition of eight years of mourning with sewing their trousseaux as the only distraction feels like a prison sentence. Angustias is engaged to Pepe, for her money. Adela is conducting an illicit affair with him and Martirio is jealous as her prospective suitor did not come to see her as planned, because Bernarda did not approve of his family's status. Martirio did not know this. La Poncia knows that the situation needs to be defused to avoid disaster. This does not mean that Pepe should be sent away, rather that a solution could be found. Candidates analysed the relationship between La Poncia and Bernarda, showing how recalcitrant Bernarda is, refusing to accept reality and ultimately facing tragedy. Many pointed out the irony in that Bernarda declares herself to be perfectly sane whereas her mother is mad. María Josefa only describes what could be said to be normal desires for a happy family life.

- (b) Some candidates were able to combine two interpretations of the question most effectively. They analysed the atmosphere of fear created by Bernarda, in which nothing could be done unless approved by her, and any transgression was punished violently. This applied to all the residents of the house, including the servants, as they depended on their work for their livelihood. The other aspect was the fear Bernarda felt of being humiliated – she had to maintain a façade of status and wealth to preserve her reputation and that of her family. This question was generally well answered with a good range of references and a sense of understanding.

Question 8

Varios, ed. Gordon Brotherston: *Spanish American Modernista Poets*

- (a), (b) There was a small number of answers on this text.

As is always the case in poetry, Examiners are keen to reward individual interpretation of the work, provide this is supported by reference to specific examples and understanding of the particular poet's approach. Each essay tends to be individual and is assessed as such.