

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41
Texts

Key messages

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It is important for candidates to show that there is an understanding of how to present an argument, with a relevant introduction, development and conclusion. Many candidates were familiar with the PEEL format – Point, Example, Explain, Link (to next section of essay). This was used successfully when repeated throughout the response with frequent links to the text and relevant observations or analysis.

Candidates are advised to plan essays to show depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding and avoid repetition, and to plan time carefully to avoid submitting unfinished answers.

General comments

The majority of candidates were well-prepared for this Paper, having good understanding of the texts chosen of the requirements of the examination. If candidates follow the advice given above, they should have the necessary skills to achieve their potential.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1 Benito Pérez Galdós: *Misericordia*

- (a) Candidates identified the way Galdós used locations in Madrid to show social divisions, wealth and poverty. The correct topography and references to specific places and buildings gave a sense of reality and immediacy, Madrid was brought alive by the wide range of characters from all walks of

life. Galdós depicted the social and political reality of Madrid, which represented the whole of Spain. Two references in particular were used effectively – Chapter V, describing where Almudena lived and Chapter XXVII, set in the cemetery and on the river bank, a good example of irony.

- (b) Candidates were able to give much information in their responses. The best essays had a clear structure, comparing and contrasting both characters' attitudes to differing situations. Some referred to Chapters III and X, which give detailed descriptions of the two women. Most candidates understood the characters well but many omitted the events at the end of the novel, where Doña Francisca behaved cruelly to Benina.

Question 2 Lope de Vega: *Peribáñez y el Comendador de Ocaña*

- (a) Answers to (i) only needed to mention the Comendador's fall during the bullfight and in (ii) to summarise the roles of husband and wife, in two or three sentences at most. The most successful responses showed that the outcome of the play was determined by the choices made by the Comendador, not fate.
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Question 3 Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

Many candidates chose to answer on this text. Both options were popular.

- (a) Parts (i) and (ii) were usually well answered although some narrated the departure of Gertrudis in too much detail and did not focus directly on why she wrote to Tita. In (iii), there tended to be a lack of detail. The key scene when Gertrudis returned to the ranch, encouraged Tita's relationship with Pedro and showed kindness and understanding to her sister was important. This was when Tita also helped Gertrudis save her relationship, explaining why she had given birth to a mixed race child.
- (b) This question attracted many answers. The best essays analysed the quest for personal freedom in a range of characters and also considered the wider issue of political freedom within the context of the Mexican Revolution. Some characters sacrificed freedom at the expense of tradition or moral cowardice. Dr Brown recognised the ridiculous attitude of Mamá Elena and Gertrudis bravely went her own way.

Question 4 Fernando Fernán-Gómez: *Las bicicletas son para el verano*

Many candidates answered on this text

- (a) Candidates answered (i) and (ii) accurately and briefly. In (iii), some answers lost the focus of the question quickly by concentrating only on the family's lack of food and describing the lentils scene. The comparison between María and Basilio and the family was both physical and psychological. María and Basilio looked well fed and healthy and this was because Basilio worked for the Nationalists and had access to food. The family were on the other side politically and suffered as the siege of Madrid on the part of the Nationalists was an act of war on the city, to break those resisting the advance, and the inevitable defeat.
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Section 2

5 Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*

This was another very popular text. Candidates responded well to the novel but needed to pay close attention to the wording of the question and use references judiciously with analysis, not description.

- (a) The best answers began with a clear introduction, indicating which characters would be discussed and how those individuals contributed to the presentation of specific themes. It was of course acceptable to refer to the colonel and his wife, showing how they interacted with other characters, but the question clearly states that the couple could not be central to the answer. An effective approach was to take a theme, such as corruption, and analyse the roles of Sabas and the doctor as figures with contrasting moral and political attitudes, and their relationship with the colonel. Many candidates chose Agustín as an important character. Although he had died before the novel began, he is present in the minds of his parents but also of his friends, and through his only remaining possession, the cockerel. This led to analysis of the political situation and the resistance movement. There were also positive themes – many saw hope represented by the doctor and those supporting, and believing in, the cockerel.
- (b) This question focused on the colonel's futile search for true values. The best answers began by showing how the colonel lived by an admirable moral code, believing in honesty and integrity and remaining true to his beliefs. He expected others to be the same. His search could be said to be futile as other people did not treat him with respect – there are many examples of this, both showing systemic corruption and betrayal on the part of the state, and personal disrespect from Sabas, for example. There were some examples of good experiences also. Successful responses saw how the colonel's belief that there was a moral centre to society was challenged.

Question 6 Isabel Allende: *Eva Luna*

- (a) This question was the less popular option. Candidates needed to plan their answer carefully to avoid repetition and to ensure the argument progressed through a series of points. The best responses first identified where the first person narrative was used. The illusion of an autobiography was intensified by the colloquial register and sense of immediacy. The reader was drawn in to the narrative by this and empathised easily with Eva through her eventful and often challenging life. The fact that these sections of the novel were presented from Eva's point of view and could be said to be biased as the reality was controlled by Eva herself gave rise to some good analysis. The use of third person narrative gave variety to the narrative and a sense of perspective, so it was valid to comment on this also. Candidates used the text to illustrate the points made but did not narrate.
- (b) This question attracted some good essays analysing how a number of characters in the novel had interesting and valuable experiences which were largely unplanned or unexpected. Most candidates focused on Eva and Rolf, although Mimi and Naranjo were also analysed. As is always the case, it is good practice to define your terms in the introductory paragraph. This should help to keep focus throughout the essay as candidates kept referring back to ensure the argument was progressing logically. The essential points mentioned in most responses were that Eva's life was a mystery in that her path was never predictable. Events and coincidences happened which changed her life irrevocably and most were out of her control. The lessons developed as Eva gradually learned how to survive in a number of challenging situations. These skills were then applied later in life. The interaction with other characters gave variety and in some ways echoed or contrasted with Eva's experiences. The main characters developed and changed throughout the novel. It was also possible to argue that Eva taught others how to adapt and survive through her own life, and in the soap opera she wrote. The sense of mystery continues to the conclusion of the novel as the ending was left open to interpretation.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

Virtually every candidate answered one of the questions on this text. The play had been studied thoroughly and many candidates responded with confidence and enthusiasm.

- (a) There were some thoughtful answers to this question. Candidates were asked to analyse the roles of la Poncia and la Criada, showing how these characters help the audience to understand the themes of the play. It was more productive to identify which themes to analyse rather than to delve into a character study as this would not leave sufficient time to deal with the core of the question. When considering the theme of morality and *'el que dirán'*, it was important to point out that la Poncia was closer to both Bernarda and the daughters than anyone else, she could help the audience understand both and also lived in the village, so could bring this perspective too. La Poncia advised the daughters, particularly Adela, but this was not entirely objective. Her own reputation depended on that of Bernarda's family, so scandal would affect her directly. However, she tempered some idealised views of marriage by describing the reality of it. La Poncia displayed hypocrisy in her attitude to women also in condemning Paca la Roseta but paying for her own son to visit a prostitute. Despite this, she offered the daughters care and consideration which their own mother did not provide. La Criada brought another perspective in that she had an affair with Antonio, Bernarda's late husband. The way la Criada treated the beggar woman showed how she had absorbed Bernarda's views; there was no sense of charity or kindness in her rejection of the poorer woman's plea for help.
- (b) Very many candidates chose to answer this question. The best answers analysed the differing views presented and drew these together to a conclusion. The overall understanding was that marriage was a social tool used to protect the social standing of both families concerned, and gave a role for women. Marriage for love was not part of the equation, it was a matter arranged by the parents. This was depicted in the play by the arranged marriage of Angustias, which was dependent entirely on her fortune. The prospective husband seemed to accept this, but hypocritically could enjoy another relationship alongside this. Any problems here would affect the woman, not the man. This imbalance in the relationship was shown clearly in la Poncia's relationship, although she seemed to put her husband in his place, in the fact that la Criada had an affair with her employer's husband, and the attitude of the villagers to loose women such as Paca la Roseta and la Hija de la Librada. Men were given more sexual freedom. María Josefa offered an idealised view of marriage which was seen as an impossible dream, but also expressed the aspirations of all to be happy. In that society happiness was unlikely. Lives and marriages were defined by rules with individuals trapped and suppressed by them.

Question 8 Rosalía de Castro: *En las orillas del Sar*

- (a) This option requires experience in critical analysis and awareness of the various aspects of poetic technique. Candidates were asked to comment on the main theme, which was the poet's sense of loss and unhappiness on her return to Galicia from Madrid, focussing on her journey through life and sense of time and waste. Examiners welcome an individual response provided this is substantiated with reference to the poem.
- (b) This question allowed candidates a degree of flexibility in interpretation of the poems, either as expressing aspects of Rosalía de Castro's life, or presenting a universal message. Those who saw a wider message chose themes such as the traveller, the importance of nature and religion. Provided all arguments are supported by reference to at least three poems, examiners welcome individual responses.

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/42
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General comments

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Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1 Benito Pérez Galdós: *Misericordia*

- (a) The characters Frasquito Ponte and Obdulia, daughter of Doña Paca were recognised. A brief answer to (ii), indicating that Ponte represented the past, was sufficient. His role in the novel was generally interpreted as a social parasite. The best answers considered how he interacted with

other characters, particularly Doña Paca and Benina, and explained how Galdós used Ponte as a symbol of the decadent society of the time.

- (b) Most decided that the novel was pessimistic and referred to the images of poverty suffered by the lower classes and the hypocrisy of the clergy and middle classes. Some recognised positive messages, presented through Benina. She displayed a different morality, based on unselfishness, charity and indifference to material wealth. The title of the novel also points to an optimistic interpretation when contrasting Benina with many of the other characters. The Church promoted less Christian charity than Benina.

Question 2 Lope de Vega: *Peribáñez y el Comendador de Ocaña*

- (a) The confusión referred to in (i) relates to the death of the Comendador. Candidates tended to answer (ii) more effectively by showing Casilda's loyalty to her husband, particularly in light of the fact that Inés was her relative. Good responses to (iii) recognised that the scene was close to the end of the play and that Peribáñez showed his loyalty and respect for the King in going to Toledo to confess his actions, trusting in the monarch's wisdom and judgement. In this way the King restored the harmony of society, which had been disrupted by the actions of the Comendador. Those who had betrayed the code of behaviour were punished and Peribáñez and Casilda were rewarded.
- (b) There were some very good responses to this question where candidates recognised how Lope de Vega used all dramatic elements to advance the plot, to show divisions in society and to entertain the audience. It is important to see the text as a play, performed live before an audience, rather than as a text to be read. For example, the use of costume where the Comendador disguised himself as a reaper underlined his loss of honour as he demeaned his position. The visual impact of the play was understood by the best candidates.

Question 3 Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

Many candidates chose to answer on this text. Both options were popular.

- (a) The information needed for (i) and (ii) was generally well known. However a significant number of answers were too long, leaving little time for part (iii). Candidates must give the key points, here the fact that the death of Roberto had plunged Tita into deep depression. It is important to avoid telling the whole story; narrative as such is not rewarded. In (iii), the majority of essays focused on Dr Brown's kindness to Tita at this point in the novel, without considering the wider aspect of how their relationship had developed over many years. His role was more than that of a rival for Pedro.
- (b) This question attracted many answers, but many essays were not clearly focused. In preparing the text, candidates had studied *'la cocina'* as 'cooking'. In this question *'la cocina'* is *'el lugar'*, so required analysis of how the kitchen became the centre of action in the novel. We remind candidates that questions must be read very carefully. One candidate expressed the importance of the kitchen in this way *'es el lugar que hace que las cosas ocurran'*, which was most pertinent. Some reference could be made to food preparation but this was not the key element in the question.

Question 4 Fernando Fernán-Gómez: *Las bicicletas son para el verano*

Many candidates answered on this text.

- (a) In (i), candidates needed to explain that once the Nationalist troops had won the Civil War, those civil marriages and divorces conducted under the Second Republic were annulled. In (ii), María was talking about Basilio: the best answers expressed how he had abused María's affection by refusing to marry her again under the new regime as it would hinder his career. This should then have led in to (iii) – María was an example of an innocent person who was made to suffer. The argument could then be widened to analyse other examples of this, without recounting the whole narrative.
- (b) The best essays here recognised the symbolic importance of both the bicycle and summer. These were analysed, representing freedom (to travel, to escape) and a sense of relaxation, release and enjoyment. Virtually all used the prologue and epilogue to contrast the sense of optimism when Luis wanted a bicycle to go out with friends and the need of a bicycle to help with his job as delivery boy in a time of uncertainty and fear. These references alone were not sufficient for an

essay of high calibre, which included greater analysis of the situation, in particular the nature of 'paz/victoria' according to Don Luis, and the sense of pessimism '*Sabe Dios cuando habrá otro verano.*'

Sección 2

5 Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escribe*

This was another very popular text. Candidates responded well to the novel but needed to pay close attention to the wording of the question, understand the political setting and use references judiciously.

- (a) The best answers began with a clear introduction showing that the candidate had read the question carefully, outlining how the political situation and the prevalence of poverty and hunger constitute **an** important aspect of the novel – not the most important. Candidates then analysed this in detail. The criticism of the corruption endemic in all branches of power – judicial, military, legal and even religious was central to the argument. This, in effect, caused poverty, hunger and a sense of powerlessness. The figure of Sabas was crucial in many good essays as he betrayed his political party, made money at the expense of others and seemed to have no scruples, as seen in his treatment of the Coronel, a supposed friend. His illness, caused by excess, reflected the rotten nature of politics and contrasted with the illness of the coronel and his wife, caused partly by malnutrition. The question did not invite candidates to offer alternative interpretations of a main focus, and those who chose to do this found that there was insufficient time to complete the essay.
- (b) This question focused on the theme of violence, requiring candidates to analyse what violence represented in the novel and how it was used to present specific ideas. This meant that acts of violence had to be integrated into an argument rather than simply described as examples. The most successful essays showed how the townspeople were subject to oppression, a state of curfew and extreme authoritarian control. An illustration of this was the funeral of the musician. The population had little access to the truth as the press was censored. Resistance was dangerous, as seen in the murder of Agustín for distributing '*información clandestina*', but was not extinguished. Violence appears in many guises.

Question 6 Isabel Allende: *Eva Luna*

- (a) This question was the less popular option.

Many essays focused too much on magic realism. The best responses showed how Eva used the world of imagination as an escape or defence mechanism to enable her to survive some very challenging situations throughout her life. Analysis of the first person narrative and powers of expression also served to illustrate how the reader was drawn in to empathise with the main characters. The blurring of fiction and real life as seen in the soap opera was also relevant.

- (b) This question attracted some good essays analysing how individuals were able to make decisions which altered the course of their lives, after living lives which were largely controlled or date influenced by others. Most concentrated on Eva, Huberto, Rolf and Mimi, not necessarily all of them. Successful arguments had to be more than descriptions of how a character suffered difficult situations and survived. The essence of the question was that an individual took control of his or her life and the consequences of this.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

Virtually every candidate answered one of the questions on this text. The play had been studied thoroughly and many candidates responded with confidence and enthusiasm.

- (a) There was a wide range of approaches to this question with a number of interpretations. Those who saw death as a plot device, stating that the death of the father set everything else in motion tended to lead to narration. More successful and interesting essays saw death as an intrinsic element of Lorca's bleak view of human existence. It was therefore central to the play and linked with other themes. Society controlled behaviour; individuals were desperate to escape; there was no freedom of action – and death was the consequence for those who challenged the status quo and attempted an escape. Death was part of the structure of the play – the father at the beginning, Adela at the end and the illegitimate child in the middle. The process of death moved from natural causes to infanticide to suicide. Analysis of death in terms of symbols, such as the moon, colours, water and pearls was acceptable as part of a wider argument.

- (b) The best answers to this question used the quotation as a starting point, defining who was part of the '*pueblo*' and who was not. Many good references were made to the contribution of Prudencia, Paca la Roseta and hija de la Librada as well as the '*segadores*'. The '*pueblo*' was not simply the village, but society, the arbiter of morality, the judge and jury, a social force. There was an interesting paradox in that Bernarda ruled her daughters with a rod of iron and also accepted the rules imposed by the '*pueblo*'. The daughters saw the outside world as freedom but the rules dictating life in the '*pueblo*' were as restrictive as those in Bernarda's house. One candidate offered the view '*El pueblo es una mentalidad*', which was most perceptive.

Question 8 Rosalía de Castro: *En las orillas del Sar*

- (a) This option requires experience in critical analysis and awareness of the various aspects of poetic technique. Candidates were given two aspects to analyse, the traveller and the theme of travel. Examiners welcome an individual response provided this is substantiated with reference to the poem.
- (b) This question allowed candidates a degree of flexibility in interpretation of the theme of love. Rosalía de Castro wrote much about her love for her homeland and this was a valid starting point. However the focus is on how the poet struggled with writing about love and there needed to be a wider analysis of the theme.

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- (b) This question focused on the colonel's futile search for true values. The best answers began by showing how the colonel lived by an admirable moral code, believing in honesty and integrity and remaining true to his beliefs. He expected others to be the same. His search could be said to be futile as other people did not treat him with respect – there are many examples of this, both showing systemic corruption and betrayal on the part of the state, and personal disrespect from Sabas, for example. There were some examples of good experiences also. Successful responses saw how the colonel's belief that there was a moral centre to society was challenged.

Question 6 Isabel Allende: *Eva Luna*

- (a) This question was the less popular option. Candidates needed to plan their answer carefully to avoid repetition and to ensure the argument progressed through a series of points. The best responses first identified where the first person narrative was used. The illusion of an autobiography was intensified by the colloquial register and sense of immediacy. The reader was drawn in to the narrative by this and empathised easily with Eva through her eventful and often challenging life. The fact that these sections of the novel were presented from Eva's point of view and could be said to be biased as the reality was controlled by Eva herself gave rise to some good analysis. The use of third person narrative gave variety to the narrative and a sense of perspective, so it was valid to comment on this also. Candidates used the text to illustrate the points made but did not narrate.
- (b) This question attracted some good essays analysing how a number of characters in the novel had interesting and valuable experiences which were largely unplanned or unexpected. Most candidates focused on Eva and Rolf, although Mimi and Naranjo were also analysed. As is always the case, it is good practice to define your terms in the introductory paragraph. This should help to keep focus throughout the essay as candidates kept referring back to ensure the argument was progressing logically. The essential points mentioned in most responses were that Eva's life was a mystery in that her path was never predictable. Events and coincidences happened which changed her life irrevocably and most were out of her control. The lessons developed as Eva gradually learned how to survive in a number of challenging situations. These skills were then applied later in life. The interaction with other characters gave variety and in some ways echoed or contrasted with Eva's experiences. The main characters developed and changed throughout the novel. It was also possible to argue that Eva taught others how to adapt and survive through her own life, and in the soap opera she wrote. The sense of mystery continues to the conclusion of the novel as the ending was left open to interpretation.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

Virtually every candidate answered one of the questions on this text. The play had been studied thoroughly and many candidates responded with confidence and enthusiasm.

- (a) There were some thoughtful answers to this question. Candidates were asked to analyse the roles of la Poncia and la Criada, showing how these characters help the audience to understand the themes of the play. It was more productive to identify which themes to analyse rather than to delve into a character study as this would not leave sufficient time to deal with the core of the question. When considering the theme of morality and *'el que dirán'*, it was important to point out that la Poncia was closer to both Bernarda and the daughters than anyone else, she could help the audience understand both and also lived in the village, so could bring this perspective too. La Poncia advised the daughters, particularly Adela, but this was not entirely objective. Her own reputation depended on that of Bernarda's family, so scandal would affect her directly. However, she tempered some idealised views of marriage by describing the reality of it. La Poncia displayed hypocrisy in her attitude to women also in condemning Paca la Roseta but paying for her own son to visit a prostitute. Despite this, she offered the daughters care and consideration which their own mother did not provide. La Criada brought another perspective in that she had an affair with Antonio, Bernarda's late husband. The way la Criada treated the beggar woman showed how she had absorbed Bernarda's views; there was no sense of charity or kindness in her rejection of the poorer woman's plea for help.
- (b) Very many candidates chose to answer this question. The best answers analysed the differing views presented and drew these together to a conclusion. The overall understanding was that marriage was a social tool used to protect the social standing of both families concerned, and gave a role for women. Marriage for love was not part of the equation, it was a matter arranged by the parents. This was depicted in the play by the arranged marriage of Angustias, which was dependent entirely on her fortune. The prospective husband seemed to accept this, but hypocritically could enjoy another relationship alongside this. Any problems here would affect the woman, not the man. This imbalance in the relationship was shown clearly in la Poncia's relationship, although she seemed to put her husband in his place, in the fact that la Criada had an affair with her employer's husband, and the attitude of the villagers to loose women such as Paca la Roseta and la Hija de la Librada. Men were given more sexual freedom. María Josefa offered an idealised view of marriage which was seen as an impossible dream, but also expressed the aspirations of all to be happy. In that society happiness was unlikely. Lives and marriages were defined by rules with individuals trapped and suppressed by them.

Question 8 Rosalía de Castro: *En las orillas del Sar*

- (a) This option requires experience in critical analysis and awareness of the various aspects of poetic technique. Candidates were asked to comment on the main theme, which was the poet's sense of loss and unhappiness on her return to Galicia from Madrid, focussing on her journey through life and sense of time and waste. Examiners welcome an individual response provided this is substantiated with reference to the poem.
- (b) This question allowed candidates a degree of flexibility in interpretation of the poems, either as expressing aspects of Rosalía de Castro's life, or presenting a universal message. Those who saw a wider message chose themes such as the traveller, the importance of nature and religion. Provided all arguments are supported by reference to at least three poems, examiners welcome individual responses.