

# SPANISH LITERATURE

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Paper 8673/41  
Texts

## Key messages

Candidates should be aware of the historical and cultural context of the texts being studied. This means, for example, knowledge of when the text is set and where, and any specific historical events mentioned, such as the Mexican Revolution or the Spanish Civil War. There were essays where the geographical location was wrongly attributed and examples where literary approaches, such as Magical Realism, were applied inappropriately. This affected the assessment of the response.

However, the majority of scripts showed detailed study and knowledge of the texts and used references appropriately to substantiate answers.

We encourage examiners to continue reminding candidates that they must write legibly in examination conditions. If work cannot be read, it cannot be marked.

In the first section of the examination paper, candidates are reminded that answers to **option (a)** sub-questions **(i)** and **(ii)** should be as brief as possible but that a full essay is expected in response to **(iii)**.

## General comments

Most candidates followed rubrics correctly. Answers concentrated on a limited selection of texts and comments on specific questions will reflect this.

## Comments on specific questions

These comments are not intended to be 'model' answers, rather bring together some ideas used by candidates in approaching the questions or point to interesting aspects for analysis. Examiners do not mark answers against a list of defined content for each question. Every essay is assessed on its own merits in terms of evidence of knowledge and understanding of the text and a full response to the question set, in accordance with the published mark scheme.

The questions which attracted the most answers were **3, 4, 5, 6** and **8**.

### **Sección 1**

#### **Question 1**

##### **Emilia Pardo Bazán: *Los Pazos de Ulloa***

Answers to both options generally showed overall understanding of the novel and awareness of the issues discussed. However more detailed analysis was required for a good response to the questions.

- (a)** **(i)** and **(ii)** were well answered with few over-long responses. The theme of *deterioro* tended to focus on aspects of the lives of individual characters, such as the decline in the physical health of Nucha and the moral descent of Don Pedro rather than broader, deeper themes. The novel is permeated by the sense of decline and decay in the nobility, the Church and society in general. Some answers referred to the author's use of 'Naturalismo' which highlighted the themes presented.

- (b) This question asked candidates to consider how the author presented the Church, with reference to the theme of morality. Again, as with the first option on this text, essays largely gave fairly superficial comparisons between the characters of Julián and the abbot rather than examining the author's intention in expressing her view of the Catholic Church at the time. One approach could be to question why there should be any need to challenge the Church's morality as it should surely be setting a Christian example. This could lead in to a discussion of its collusion with the declining nobility with no sense of attempting to change the violent, debased way of life. Julián tried to bring a Christian influence into the Pazos and to make changes but he was defeated.

## Question 2

### Lope de Vega: *El caballero de Olmedo*

Answers to this question covered both options.

- (a) Most responses to (i) and (ii) were correct and brief, although some did not interpret *esposo* as Jesus/God – Inés was allegedly preparing to become a nun. Candidates then went on to give examples of deceit in the text involving most of the main characters and tended to indicate that it was important as the driver of the plot. The best answers then showed how those decisions were linked to the tragedy itself as an inevitable consequence of such behaviour.
- (b) The most successful responses to this question considered how flaws and dishonesty in the main characters, both male and female, on both sides, brought about the tragic outcome of multiple deaths and also how the elements of nobility and courtly love made Alonso's death a particular tragedy. Discussion of the irony that Alonso and Inés' scheming was largely unnecessary as Pedro would have permitted their marriage anyway was the more common theme in complicating the sense of tragedy. This was a valid argument but on its own lacked the depth required to give a full response.

## Question 3

### Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

This text was chosen by a large percentage of candidates. The main comments from Examiners were that candidates seemed to enjoy the novel and were able to give detailed references. The best answers went beyond this to give a more in-depth analysis, making links and drawing threads of the argument together.

- (a) **Parts (i) and (ii)** were answered correctly although many were too long. The briefest response possible is required here to give as much time as possible for **part (iii)**.

Answers to **part (iii)** tended to begin with a list of examples of the *elementos sobrenaturales / realismo mágico*, mostly focused on Tita. The most successful essays then went on to show how the novel benefited from the technique in giving an intense insight into Tita's emotions as well as introducing humour and moving the plot along. An interesting interpretation linked the apparitions of Mamá Elena and Nacha to the indigenous beliefs related to death, such as the day of the dead.

- (b) Most candidates answering this option named Mamá Elena and Tita as the characters most prone to psychological problems. The common cause for this was given as oppression and curtailing of liberty on the part of parents. Symptoms were seen as self-imposed silence in Tita's case and general acts of brutality and controlling behaviour in the case of Mamá Elena. Some also referred to Rosaura whose obedience to her mother revealed a different kind of problem and led her to complicity in the death of her son and increasing unhappiness which manifested itself in physical illness. A common misconception was that Gertrudis suffered psychological damage as a result of Tita's cooking – her sexual abandon was more an expression of liberty than suffering.

#### Question 4

##### Rodolfo Usigli: *El gesticulador*

This was another popular text. Some candidates showed sophisticated analysis of the play, especially with reference to **option (a)** and the nature of truth. Although it was inevitable that the Mexican Revolution was mentioned in most essays, more could have been made of its importance, especially in terms of national identity, heroes and post-revolutionary history.

- (a) Some of the general points made above apply to **(ii)** – Mexico needed to find a sense of purpose and revolutionary heroes made appealing leaders. In answering **(iii)** the approach most frequently seen was to consider how a number of the main characters defined truth, as exemplified in the way they behaved and why. The general consensus was that there is no single definition of truth in the play as all manipulate it for personal gain or convenience. There were some impressive essays which made a connection between the creation of heroes and the nature of truth, facts and indeed history. These were philosophically complex arguments but still firmly focused on the text.
- (b) This question gave candidates a wide scope for answers. All made the point that the whole plot depends on the fortuitous encounter between Bolton and César Rubio. The second major device was the presence of Navarro – the only person who knew the truth about the revolutionary leader, as he had killed him. Certainly, candidates knew the plot well. The most interesting essays moved from the mechanical effects of chance to consider how personality and motive influenced individuals' reaction to events.

#### Sección 2

#### Question 5

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

Candidates knew the text well, however the complexity of ideas and concepts was not always recognised in a deceptively simple and brief narrative.

- (a) Answers to this question tended to equate vulnerability to lack of financial and political power, and divided characters in the novel to rich and poor. This was a valid approach and linked in to the pre-Civil War situation and allegiances. The most interesting essays went on to analyse facets of personality, for example Paco's somewhat naïve sense of justice and increasing understanding of society and morality, or particularly nuanced social positions, such as that held by Mosén Millán, as causes of vulnerability in the characters concerned. All were vulnerable to some extent – even the apparently untouchable rich characters revealed this in organising Paco's mass and in the degree of violence they were prepared to use to protect their interests.
- (b) Most candidates answering this question agreed that characters in the novel were not simple stock figures and that there was a degree of development in response to events. Mosén Millán was a particular case for study as his role as narrator gave a unique opportunity for readers to make up their minds as to his personality and beliefs. The author allowed characters to speak for themselves and showed them interacting with a range of individuals in a number of situations. The novel presented a wide picture of society in a rural village at the time, despite its brevity and this added to its impact in presenting a political message.

## Question 6

### Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

Most candidates answered on this text. Good answers were characterised by clear focus on the question set and careful organisation of material.

- (a) This question asked candidates to analyse the symbolism in the play, looking specifically at the positive and negative aspects of the natural world. The most common details mentioned centred on flowing, life-giving water and stagnant, fetid water or drought conditions. Images of flowers, some vibrant, others with harmful spines. All of these were successful in reinforcing the depth of emotion in the play, as well as highlighting themes and issues. Contrast was an effective means of highlighting elements such as fertility – Juan was always described as pale and dried out whilst Víctor was sunburned and full of life.
- (b) Candidates correctly identified the context of the quotation. Juan's words were the final straw for Yerma who snapped and killed her husband. It was good to note that discussion of Yerma's behaviour went beyond the simplistic assessment of madness to consider how she was driven to despair and chose to give herself closure by removing any uncertainty as to her future. Yerma had been under pressure from her own expectations and from those of society at large and there was no solution which also maintained the honour and reputation of the family and individuals. Some essays considered the deeper implications of the play in Lorca's intentions in presenting the conflict between the needs and aspirations of the individual as opposed to those of society.

## Question 7

### Brotherston (ed): *Spanish American Modernist Poets: A Critical Anthology*

This was a less popular text. Centres which choose to study poetry usually prepare candidates well in terms of the process of critical analysis.

Answers to both options are very individual. **Option (a)** asked for a focus on the presentation of the landscape and countryside, so candidates trained in critical appreciation would know how to analyse the use and choice of vocabulary, poetic techniques and indications of the author's intentions. In **(b)**, candidates were given a wide scope to identify those themes which they identified as most important and to choose poets and poems to substantiate this.

## Question 8

### Horacio Quiroga: *Cuentos escogidos*

There was a relatively small number of responses to this text. Candidates responded well to the stories and understood the themes.

Both options gave candidates the opportunity to choose the stories they felt best exemplified the focus of the question.

- (a) Most responses looked at the theme of death of vulnerable man at the hand of all-powerful nature. A few differentiated between the circumstances of the deaths as accidental, inevitable, foreseen or predicted.
- (b) It was straightforward for candidates to find examples of nature as *una fuerza bella*, but they were less convinced that it was intrinsically cruel. Most felt that characters suffered at the hand of nature because of their own ignorance, lack of preparedness and simple arrogance, believing that humans were superior.

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### *Sección 1*

#### Question 1

#### **Emilia Pardo Bazán: *Los Pazos de Ulloa***

This text was chosen by a small number of candidates, evenly spread across the two options.

- (a)** Candidates understood the issues. The essays at the top of the mark scheme kept responses to **(i)** and **(ii)** very brief, with detailed examples and analysis in **part (iii)**.
- (i)** only required a comment to the effect that nothing has changed or improved.
- (ii)** examples could be the 'círculo de instrucción' and the shops

- (iii) this question asked candidates to analyse the theme of tradition and progress – so both elements must be present in the answer. Life at Los Pazos was frequently cited as representing tradition, maintaining the status quo to the benefit of those who lived there. Progress/civilisation existed in the town and both Julián and Nucha came into the estate to bring change but were defeated by the violent, corrupt and impenetrable way of life. Julián's visit at the end of the novel illustrated this.
- (b) This question focussed on whether it would have been appropriate to entitle the novel 'Julián Álvarez'. It is possible to support either the current or suggested alternative title and produce a good answer. Those who felt that 'Julián Álvarez' was a better title argued that he was the objective observer and commentator who attempted to influence actions, such as Pedro's marriage. He was central to the plot, and failed in his ambition because of the hostile, primitive nature of Galician society which was resistant to change. 'Los Pazos de Ulloa' was seen as the best title in essays which argued that the specific environment was central and that Julián was an outsider or intruder who neither understood nor fitted in (the hunting scene illustrated this). The house was a protagonist and would exist long after Julián.

### Question 2

#### Lope de Vega: *El caballero de Olmedo*

This text was chosen by a fair number of candidates, with more selecting **option (b)**.

- (a) Some answers to (i) and (ii) were too long, going beyond the requirements of the question. The rubric states that the response should be as short as possible and a few words or one sentence are acceptable. Provided the candidate has shown understanding and knowledge in answering these elements, this is sufficient. Candidates then have as much time as possible to devote to **part (iii)**. Analysis of the relationship between Inés and her father, Pedro required detailed study of their interactions throughout the play. Most noted that Inés loved and respected her father and was aware of the social expectations of her position. Pedro was also a loving father. Perhaps the key element in a good essay was the analysis of irony within their relationship. Pedro agreed to Inés's proposed marriage to Rodrigo; Inés mistakenly assumed that he would be unhappy with her changing her mind after meeting Alonso and this brought about the series of deceptions which inflamed Rodrigo's jealousy. Ironically, as could be seen at the end of the play, Pedro was quite happy to agree to Inés' wishes, but this conversation was too late.
- (b) Essays in response to this question were more successful, with some very good ones. The task focused on whether Alonso was too honourable for his own good. Most candidates referred to his sense of responsibility to the King, to his parents and to Inés – he stated very quickly that his intention was to marry her. He had a fatal flaw however – he did not heed advice and made the error of returning to Inés and believing that Rodrigo lived by the same code of honour as himself.

### Question 3

#### Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

This was one of the most popular texts, chosen by the majority of candidates. Both options were equally popular but the average mark for **option (b)** was slightly higher.

- (a) (i) Tita usually did not treat the problem at all
- (ii) They had guests that evening
- (iii) The characters who showed the importance of tradition were generally Mamá Elena, Rosaura, and in some cases, Pedro and Tita. The most successful essays did not simply give examples of decisions made which reflected a traditional mindset, but also analysed how the resulting situation affected the individual. Both Mamá Elena and Rosaura made themselves unhappy by accepting the traditional/acceptable way of life. Both also planned to continue the traditions they lived by to the next generation, thus continuing the misery. Pedro did not dare to challenge Mamá Elena. Importantly the Mexican Revolution formed the backdrop to the novel, challenging tradition also. Candidates knew the text well but sometimes found it difficult to select and organise effective references and maintain analysis rather than narrative.



- (b) There were some interesting responses to this essay, both arguing that it is an optimistic novel or not. Perhaps the best answers in favour of optimism analysed material from the end of the novel, referring to the cleansing effect of the fire and that new life arose from the ashes, epitomised in Alba's daughter's life. Tita's influence continued in the miraculous survival of the cookery book and in freedom for the young female members of the family. Gertrudis was often seen as a positive role model and brought an optimistic tone for the future also.

#### Question 4

##### Rodolfo Usigli: *El gesticulador*

This text was chosen by a small number of candidates.

- (a) (i) Bolton was American. Money could buy anything, even history or truth
- (ii) César wanted money and recognition
- (iii) The essential point here was probably César's need for acceptance and preparedness to disregard the truth, or at least manipulate the observer's perception of it. It was important to explain César's career prior to the events in the play as he was seen to crave more recognition than he had, which caused resentment and led him to conceal his relative poverty. This was continued in the enforced move, leading to César's apparent lifeline in the person of Bolton. The interesting aspect then was to analyse to what extent César actively behaved in an immoral way and whether he had a conscience.
- (b) Navarro was an interesting character as he was the only person to challenge César – because he knew the truth, having killed the real César Rubio himself. His role therefore formed a central part in the analysis of the nature of truth and morality. Who was the greater impostor – César or Navarro? How was Miguel affected by his involvement with Navarro? The wider picture of the legacy of the Revolution was also formed in the presentation of Navarro and his values.

#### Sección 2

#### Question 5

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

This was a popular choice, with most candidates answering **option (b)**.

- (a) The role of La Jerónima is interesting in that Sender used this character to represent the authentic voice of the people, popular culture and gossip. She lived outside the sphere of the Church and was often seen in the Carasol practising traditional customs and superstitions. Her regional dialect also defined her as different to Mosén Millán. Through her the reader learnt more about the village and its way of life. An effective answer could be to contrast La Jerónima and Mosén Millán in terms of their influence and understanding of the local people.
- (b) Many answers were submitted to this question. All of them agreed that Sender presented stereotypes of Spanish society and most essays gave a clear account of the different attitudes or societal groups the individuals typified. The best responses then took a wider view and analysed why those groups were chosen and what the author hoped to achieve. This tended to lead to an analysis of the political situation in Spain as Sender showed the tensions and divisions in society which led to the Civil War, and possibly indicated the outcome, which was beyond the scope of the novel, but hinted at in the strength of the establishment. There were some thoughtful and perceptive essays.

## Question 6

### Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

Virtually every candidate answered on this text. There were some good answers but many responses focused on narrative or description rather than analysis. Candidates knew the text well and responded to the issues. The best essays addressed the questions directly and fully.

- (a) This was the less popular option. The most successful answers considered why characters were given proper names or not and what those names represented. María was described as the typical mother figure with religious symbolism. The image of the perfect woman who Yerma measured herself against. Was Yerma her actual name? No one referred to her as such. It can be argued that this was her fate, in the circumstances of her life, not her name. Juan could be seen as the typical male – a common name – a man who is content to fulfil the traditional role as provider, husband and upholder of his family's honour. However he failed in his role as a father and it was made clear that this was his problem, not Yerma's. If Lorca's intention was to examine the nature of society and attitudes to those who do not fit in to the normal patterns, then by not using proper names, the themes were more apparent. Víctor was not what his name implied.
- (b) This question asked candidates to identify the tragic figures as defined and analyse. Both Yerma and Juan were identified. Those who identified Yerma's fatal flaw as the murder of Juan found it difficult to sustain the argument. A more successful approach was to see her determination to be a mother as the problem but was this a flaw? Another argument was to consider whether the fatal flaw was in the attitude of society which expected all members of the group to fit in, with no allowance for individuality. This created tragic figures, who, through no fault of their own, were seen as failures. Candidates are always advised to plan their response before beginning and to refer back to the question as they progress to maintain the focus and achieve a satisfactory conclusion. Examiners welcome an individual interpretation provided it is supported by the text.

## Question 7

### Brotherston, ed: *Spanish American Modernista Poets*

This option generally attracts the smallest number of essays. It is difficult to suggest likely answers as there are so many varied approaches and an individual response is particularly valuable with reference to poetry. With both (a) and (b), Examiners reward knowledge of the poems and the poets' intention, with considerable attention to detail and awareness of the themes and issues. Arguments must be substantiated with references to specific poems.

## Question 8

### Horacio Quiroga: *Cuentos escogidos*

- (a) This question asked candidates to analyse the presentation of death in two named stories. The essential points were the nature of Quiroga's approach to death as observational, to some extent detached and certainly not voyeuristic or sensational. It could be described as part of the continuum of life/death but the circumstances of the event led to discussion of man's understanding of nature.
- (b) The discussion of the importance of dramatic tension in Quiroga's stories gave candidates a wide choice of stories to analyse. Any combination was acceptable provided the argument was supported by detailed reference.



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This option generally attracts the smallest number of essays. It is difficult to suggest likely answers as there are so many varied approaches and an individual response is particularly valuable with reference to poetry. With both (a) and (b), Examiners reward knowledge of the poems and the poets' intention, with considerable attention to detail and awareness of the themes and issues. Arguments must be substantiated with references to specific poems.

## Question 8

### Horacio Quiroga: *Cuentos escogidos*

- (a) This question asked candidates to analyse the presentation of death in two named stories. The essential points were the nature of Quiroga's approach to death as observational, to some extent detached and certainly not voyeuristic or sensational. It could be described as part of the continuum of life/death but the circumstances of the event led to discussion of man's understanding of nature.
- (b) The discussion of the importance of dramatic tension in Quiroga's stories gave candidates a wide choice of stories to analyse. Any combination was acceptable provided the argument was supported by detailed reference.