

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41
Texts

Key messages

The essential preparation to succeed in this Paper is thorough study of the texts and close reading of the examination paper to ensure that the material presented is focused directly on the questions chosen.

General comments

It is pleasing to note that candidates are increasingly well-prepared for the examination. The vast majority of scripts conform to the rubrics.

Candidates may benefit from defining the terms they are discussing in the introduction to their essay and be sure to refer back to this as they develop the argument to ensure that they maintain the focus of the discussion.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Emilia Pardo Bazán: *Los Pazos de Ulloa*

- (a) This question focused on Julián's discomfort on seeing how Pedro was physically abusing his wife, Nucha and the sense that he was being watched. This led on to **part (iii)** – deception. Julián was possibly guilty of self-deception in hoping that Nucha would be a civilising influence on Pedro. Primitivo wanted to preserve his position by protecting Pedro whilst deceiving him in the running of the estate and in his machinations to influence the elections and undermine Pedro's legacy, as seen in the way Pedro's daughter's position was usurped by Perucho, Primitivo's grandson at the end of the novel. This approach resulted in a more effective argument, looking at the whole political situation whilst still mentioning Pedro's relationship with Sabel as an example of his lack of self-control and deception of his wife, as well as the fact that his title was dubious.
- (b) This task focused on the tense relationship between city and country society. The best answers gave details of Pedro's visit to the city and his sense of discomfort as well as a comparison between the values shown in the behaviour of Julián and Nucha (as examples of city, educated, refined characters) and that of Pedro, Sabel and Primitivo (violent, selfish, uneducated country people). Also important was the disappointment experienced by Julián at the end of the novel – he found a lack of progress or modernisation at Ulloa and that the tension between the two ways of life was sadly expressed in the plight of Nucha's daughter in comparison with the well-dressed Perucho.

Question 2

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: *Sab*

- (a) Candidates dealt with (i) and (ii) well. In (iii), the tendency was to describe the main characteristics of Sab and Enrique, without analysing in depth their individual motivations. Sab was extremely unusual as a slave in being highly educated and his strong sense of morality determined the choices he made. This led even to saving the life of the man he despised most. Enrique was

motivated solely by selfish interests. The best answers examined how the actions of the two men reflected their values as the novel progressed.

- (b) It is always helpful to define terms in such a question – what is meant by ‘romantic’? It is not just a love story, but rather has elements of idealisation of the characters, sensibility, melodrama, and is somewhat removed from real life. What motivated the love expressed by Carlota for Enrique/Enrique for Carlota/Sab for Carlota/Teresa for Enrique? The romanticism present could be said to be a way of introducing underlying themes such as morality, justice and oppression of slaves and women.

Question 3

Gabriel García Márquez: *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*

- (a) This option was answered by fewer candidates than (b). Most responses dealt reasonably with (i) and (ii), but few answered **part (iii)** fully. The issue of ‘deterioro’ in the novel is a wider issue than the physical ageing of Florentino and Fermina. The extract offers a contrast between Florentino’s early voyages and the later one, which gave candidates an introduction to the destruction of the environment and the presence of bodies, which pointed to deterioration in the political situation. The most successful answers considered this.
- (b) This was a popular choice. All stated the importance of Florentino’s love letters to Fermina when they first began their relationship and then after the death of Juvenal, so they clearly acted as a plot-driver. There were other points to add, however, in showing how Florentino’s life revolved around written communication in his role in the post and telegraph office to writing love letters for other people. His personality evolved and shone through his writing, so it was an essential part of his being. Letters also served important functions in the note which had Fermina expelled from school and the letter left to be found after his death by Jeremiah De Saint-Amour.

Question 4

Anónimo: *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*

- (a) Answers to questions (i) and (ii) were generally well rounded. Responses to (iii) tended to lack in detail in analysing the effect of first-person narrative. Most emphasised the immediacy and authenticity of the text. Essays scoring on higher bands pointed out that the autobiographical approach meant that there was no objective overview of events. In addition, Lazarillo’s account engendered empathy in readers as they were drawn into his life story and saw him develop from a vulnerable child to a comparatively prosperous adult.
- (b) Some candidates found challenges in defining ‘tragedia’. Many listed all the bad experiences suffered by Lazarillo over the course of his young life, particularly in connection with the circumstances which led him to work for a series of masters. These episodes were certainly sad. The best responses considered Lazarillo’s position at the end of the novel, showing how he had used those harsh lessons to create a comfortable life for himself, and analysed whether the degree of self-deception apparent could be seen as optimistic or tragic, in assessing whether Lazarillo had been morally corrupted by those around him. Did Lazarillo eventually behave in the same way as those he had satirised?

Section 2

Question 5

Carmen Martín Gaité: *Las ataduras*

- (a) This was the more popular choice on this text. Most were able to give a detailed examination of the relationships Alina enjoyed with both her father and grandfather. The lessons learned from her grandfather seemed to be the most memorable, in encouraging her to be courageous and to be herself. Her father’s attitude was seen as negative, with candidates suggesting that this was the essence of what was being criticised in the story. There was a hint of optimism at the end of the novel as the father said that he was becoming more like Santiago. Some candidates also analysed Alina’s attachment to Philippe, and considered to what extent he mirrored the attitude of her father or grandfather.

- (b) This question asked candidates to analyse the impact of references to Galicia. The author created a strong sense of place and belonging as Alina's childhood experiences seemed to be embedded in her memory. The importance of the landscape and the river are obvious examples. Alina continued to find solace in places which reminded her of her childhood home. There was a less positive side to the setting of the story as the closed, rural society was limiting for young people, as Eloy, as well as Alina, wished to escape.

Question 6

Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

Virtually every candidate answered on this text.

- (a) This was the more popular question. All responses dealt with the central issue of Yerma's desire for a child and the reality of her not being able to have one. The more perceptive essays examined the factors leading to the strength of desire in Yerma and the changing reality of why she could not conceive becoming apparent to the protagonist and leading to the tragic ending. Some candidates showed insight in exploring the underlying theme of the need for individual fulfilment.
- (b) All candidates agreed that Juan's sisters played a minor role physically in the play, but represent an aspect of a main theme which runs throughout – that of control. In their case, Juan had resorted to using them as agents to exert control over Yerma and monitor her behaviour when he was absent from the house. They were important in increasing the sense of tension and feeling of oppression both inside and outside the house, emphasising how unreasonable this was for Yerma. The effect of their presence served to heighten Yerma's vulnerability and built to the climax of the play. A few candidates also looked at the situation from the sisters' perspective, suggesting that they were also victims of the patriarchal society with little choice in agreeing to Juan's demands.

Question 7

Gabriela Mistral: *Tala/Lagar*

- (a) (b) It is not the practice to make generalised comments on this text. Candidates are given considerable freedom to show their understanding of the poems and to demonstrate their skill in interpreting and commenting on the themes and poetic language and techniques.

Question 8

Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) Candidates agreed that there were elements of peace and reconciliation in the novel. Some essays tended to mention this only in the introduction and conclusion, with few detailed supporting arguments in the body of the essay, or simply narrative. Those who challenged the statement supported this premise with reference to the high levels of violence and antagonism throughout. Clara's continuing reluctance to forgive Esteban was seen as an essential element in establishing this case. Responses which supported the themes of peace and reconciliation found examples throughout the novel, such as Pedro García's rescue of Esteban from Tres Marías, Esteban's rescue of Alba and aid in the escape of Blanca and Pedro to Canada. Either position led to good essays – provided Examiners found a judicious choice of references to the text to support a well-structured argument.
- (b) This question resulted in some interesting responses. The standard argument was that the multiple narrators added variety to the writing. A more analytic approach was to appraise the various personalities and styles of expression of the narrators; Clara mystical, Esteban egocentric, Alba compassionate. In addition, the change from third to first person narrator gave additional range of texture and gave a greater sense of authenticity. The use of multiple narrators also allowed the reader to know how the information was acquired, with particular reference to Clara's diaries.

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General comments

It is pleasing to note that candidates are increasingly well-prepared for the examination. The vast majority of scripts conform to the rubrics.

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Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Emilia Pardo Bazán: *Los Pazos de Ulloa*

- (a) This was the more popular option. Most candidates dealt well with the first two questions, identifying Julián and recognising the speech patterns and occupations denoting the social status of the speakers. Development of the theme of social conflict tended to be comparisons between characters, usually Pedro/Julián, Sabel/Nucha, Julián/Primitivo, Pedro/his uncle, in other words, city versus country dwellers. The most successful answers went beyond this to analyse the political struggle mentioned in the novel. A telling comment was the scene at the end of the novel where Nucha's daughter, representing the nobility, is in rags, whilst Perucho is well dressed.
- (b) The responses to this question focused on the differences in attitude between city and country and on the cruelty and violence of the hunt. A more thorough treatment considered how Julián was clearly seen to be out of place and the almost poetic language used in the episode which could be said to exemplify naturalism. Also, there was a certain admiration of the skill and wiliness of the seasoned hunters, in contrast to the more frequent descriptions of them as brutish, drunk and unfeeling.

Question 2

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: *Sab*

- (a) This was the more popular option. The first two questions were answered well overall, although a few candidates mistakenly asserted that by winning the lottery, Sab would be able to be freed from slavery. The third part of the question presented more challenges as the destination of the money was not fully understood by some and Teresa's role omitted. Some candidates dealt with this very well, showing how the lottery was a turning point in the novel, determining the outcome for all concerned.

- (b) All answers to this question showed knowledge and understanding of Sab's parentage and upbringing alongside Carlota. Sadly, Sab's education did not free him, rather his ability to see the workings of the society in which he lived with a critical eye only reinforced his sense of not belonging anywhere. He was too 'white' to be black and too 'black' to live as part of the society in which he grew up. He was a prisoner also of his socially impossible love for Carlota. An important aspect of Sab's nature was often omitted – he was bound by his exceptional moral code which prevented him from committing selfish acts.

Question 3

Gabriel García Márquez: *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*

- (a) Most responses to this question did not identify Juvenal and his mother as the passengers in the coach and did not interpret the phrase in (ii) as Juvenal's disappointment at seeing his home again. In answering (iii), there was some discussion regarding the relative social status of Juvenal, Fermina's family and Florentino. Further analysis of the unstable political situation, lack of progress and modernity and the patriarchal conservative society was needed here to answer the question fully.
- (b) This was a very popular question, with most candidates favouring Florentino. Higher scoring essays presented a detailed assessment of both men, looking at their attributes as well as their less desirable characteristics. Juvenal was the safe option but Florentino offered passion. It was essential to include Fermina's views here and give a balanced picture of her marriage to Juvenal in the context of the society in which she lived. Many dwelt in some detail on Florentino's many conquests, without considering these affairs from the women's perspective, and did not mention how hard he worked in his professional life to make himself financially and socially acceptable to Fermina, should she be single again.

Question 4

Anónimo: *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*

- (a) Candidates showed knowledge of the text and answered (i) and (ii) well. With regards to (iii), it was a pity that many did not refer to the work as a whole in their answer and limited their analysis to Lazarillo's experiences with his early master(s) only. There was much detail showing how Lazarillo had learned how to out-wit his masters in order to survive physically. The more subtle moral development was often omitted as we saw Lazarillo make decisions based on principles rather than hunger. The ending of the novel is important in the reader's assessment of his achievements. Had he become corrupted by the very people he satirised by choosing to be in such a dubious relationship?
- (b) Some responses to this question listed the many examples of deception throughout the novel, of which there are many. The more perceptive essays placed deception within the broader context of the society of the time, showing how it permeated so many institutions, in particular the Church, rendering it corrupt to the core. On a basic level, it was necessary to practise deception in order to survive. This could be seen in the hardships suffered by Lazarillo. The ending of the novel also serves as a final example of self-deception.

Section 2

Question 5

Carmen Martín Gaité: *Las ataduras*

- (a) This question focused on the theme of freedom. Essays scoring in higher bands looked at this from multiple perspectives – those of Alina, her father, her grandfather, Eloy and Philippe. It was important to concentrate on 'liberación' rather than 'ataduras', tempting though it may have been to reproduce a study on this theme. There was a difference of opinion as to whether Alina's new life in Paris represented some degree of freedom or just another sort of repression. Many included references to symbols such as the rivers to convey feelings of freedom and solace. Some candidates saw Alina's marriage, and her feelings of tedium and loneliness as a way of criticising the lives of women at the time.

- (b) Answers to this question benefited from defining terms before stating the argument – what is meant by the ‘traditional family’, and in what context? Certainly Alina suffered from the limited choices available to a young woman in Franco’s Spain, but to what extent was her family simply traditional, reflecting the values of the time, or dysfunctional? The higher scoring essays analysed the way the author presented the family dynamics as well as the characters themselves. Philippe commented on this as an outsider. Was his assessment fair? Was his an objective voice?

Question 6

Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

Virtually all candidates answered on this text.

- (a) There were some very good answers to this question where candidates analysed the restrictions placed on individuals in the society of the time as they were expected to perform specific roles according to their gender. The exceptions – the pagan woman and second girl gave a wider dimension to the discussion. Women were seen to be the most repressed but few mentioned Juan’s sisters who were brought to exert control over Yerma when Juan was out – or at least report on her behaviour. The issue of ‘honra’ was a crucial element in the choices made by individuals, or indeed available to them. Actions were measured in terms of how ‘honra’ would be affected. The best arguments looked at the wider implications for individuals as there was an invidious decision to make – be happy in yourself, according to your own values or accept personal unhappiness in order to maintain the mores and values of the society in which you live.
- (b) The many responses to this question showed good knowledge and understanding of the text. In terms of this question, some essays only considered whether Yerma was really infertile – or was Juan the problem. They included references to dryness, water, pale skin not burned by the sun and so on, as well as comments from the text by Juan himself and others talking about his family. The more interesting essays interpreted the question as asking was there more to ‘*Yerma*’ than just the story of a woman unable to have children? This gave rise to analysis of wider, underlying themes such as the oppression of women in rural, patriarchal societies, the role of honour and the rights of the individual to be happy.

Question 7

Gabriela Mistral: *Tala/Lagar*

- (a)/(b) It is not the practice to make generalised comments on this text. Candidates are given considerable freedom to show their understanding of the poems and to demonstrate their skill in interpreting and commenting on the themes and poetic language and techniques.

Question 8

Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) Some good answers to this question showed how the interpersonal relationships portrayed in the novel rang true as typical of many families. However this family was living in extraordinary times and situations, so the depiction of their lives is heightened. Allende presents bereavement, domestic violence, jealousy, love, controlling or absent parents, clash of ideals and beliefs, to mention a few of the experiences. Rather than narrate the story, the response was more successful when particular scenarios or typical characters were analysed, showing any development over the course of the novel.
- (b) This question led to few in-depth responses. Most answers gave lists of examples of magic realism without analysing what they brought to the novel beyond making it different or interesting. A detailed commentary on the role of Clara and the effect of her special powers was central to the understanding of the novel.