



FACULTY OF
**MEDIEVAL
AND
MODERN
LANGUAGES**

Information for the Preliminary (Prelim) course in

SPANISH

2025/26

This handbook gives subject-specific information for your Prelim course in Spanish.

For general information about your studies and the faculty, please consult the Faculty's [Undergraduate Course Handbook](#)

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SUB-FACULTY TEACHING STAFF

The Spanish Department, known in Oxford as the Sub-Faculty of Spanish, is part of the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, and is currently made up of the following:

- (1) Dr V. Acedo-Matellán (Oriol)
- (2) Dr G. Álvarez Morera, Lecturer in Catalan (Schwarzman Centre)
- (3) Dr R. Bercero, Lecturer in Spanish (Schwarzman Centre)
- (4) Prof. M. Blanco (Trinity and Worcester)
- (5) Prof. B. Bollig (St Catherine's and St John's)
- (6) Dr R. Bra, Career Development Fellow in Spanish (Schwarzman Centre)
- (7) Dr A. Brooke (Merton)
- (8) Dr T. Clark, College Lecturer (Pembroke, St Hilda's, New, Univ)
- (9) Dr I. Choi (Exeter and Keble)
- (10) Ms A. Crosta, Lecturer in Spanish (Schwarzman Centre)
- (11) Dr A. Castaño Arques, Senior Lecturer in Spanish (Schwarzman Centre)
- (12) Ms I. Fariña Roel, Lecturer in Galician (Schwarzman Centre and Queen's)
- (13) Prof. G. Hazbun (St Anne's)
- (14) Dr H. Lawlor (LMH and Somerville)
- (15) Dr L. Lonsdale (Queen's)
- (16) Prof. M. Maiden (Trinity)
- (17) Dr D. Moran (Christ Church)
- (18) Dr M. O'Dwyer, Stipendiary Lecturer (Queens and St Anne's)
- (19) Dr D. Omlor (Lincoln and Jesus)
- (20) Dr M. Popea, College Lecturer (Balliol and Brasenose)
- (21) Dr J. Thacker, King Alfonso XIII Professor of Spanish Studies (Schwarzman Centre; Exeter)
- (22) Dr O. Vázquez Medina (Wadham and St Hugh's)
- (23) Ms L. Viejo Fernández, Career Development Fellow in Spanish (Schwarzman Centre)
- (24) Dr R. Vidal Doval (Magdalen and St Edmund Hall)
- (25) Dr O. Noble Wood (Hertford and St Peter's)
- (26) Dr R. Norton, Senior Research Fellow (Christ Church, New, Pembroke, and St Hilda's)

THE PRELIM COURSE

The Preliminary course, as its name suggests, is intended to provide preliminary training in the sort of linguistic and literary skills you will need later on in your studies at Oxford. It is intended to form a bridge between the work you have done for A-Level or equivalent and what you will be doing in the Final Honours Course. No matter what other subject you take in combination with Spanish (other than EMEL), the Prelims examination papers (also known as the First Public Examination or FPE), which you will study for your first three terms in Oxford, will consist of the following:

LANGUAGE

PAPER I:

Translation of a passage of modern English prose into Spanish, and a set of grammatical sentences in English to be translated into Spanish.

PAPER II:

Translation into English of two passages of modern Spanish prose of similar length but different registers.

These papers are designed to cover a range of language skills, each testing an aspect of your ability to understand and use modern Spanish. You will be taught Paper I in centrally organised Faculty classes for one hour each week. These classes will concentrate on consolidating your grammatical skills and on preparing you for the exam. These grammar classes will also be complemented by centrally organised oral classes. Paper II will be taught by your College Tutors.

Oral:

In order to pass the Preliminary Examination, colleges must present, for each candidate, a certificate of attendance and active participation in oral classes. Candidates must attend and actively participate in no fewer than eight oral classes of at least one hour before the end of the fourth week of the Trinity Term of their first year. The classes may consist of reading aloud with attention to proper pronunciation and intonation, and/or discussion of passages dealing with issues in contemporary culture. The Senior Tutor of each candidate's college is required to submit to the Undergraduate Studies Administrator, Modern Languages, Examinations Office, The Schwarzman Centre, a certificate endorsed by the Senior Tutor and a Modern Languages Tutor (the latter acting on behalf of the sub-faculty) stating that they have attended, and participated in, the required number of classes. Certification is required by noon on the Friday of 5th week of Trinity Term. Candidates who fail to satisfy this requirement for the June examination shall have their mark for each of the two written language papers reduced by ten marks. Candidates for a language paper or papers in the September examination who have not previously in that academic year satisfied the attendance requirement will be examined viva voce to demonstrate at least basic competence in the spoken language.

LITERATURE

The texts chosen for the literature papers will introduce you to the rich variety of literature written in Spanish (in terms of genre, period, and country of origin). In addition to studying the texts for their intrinsic interest, knowledge of them will enable you to make more informed choices when you have to make a decision about which periods and authors you wish to study later in your course. The literature papers also enable you to become familiar with various possible ways of studying literary texts.

In the course of your first year there will be lectures on all the literary works studied for the Spanish Prelims.

PAPER III: Introduction to Hispanic Prose

This paper involves the study of four works of prose fiction written by authors from several Spanish-speaking countries, prescribed for study in relation to various possible approaches to literary texts:

1 - Miguel de Cervantes (Spain, 1547–1616), ‘Rinconete y Cortadillo’

‘Rinconete y Cortadillo’ is one of twelve short stories contained in *Novelas ejemplares* (1613), Cervantes’s most famous work after *Don Quijote*. Set in the criminal underbelly of early-modern Seville, the *novela* offers an excellent introduction to some of the hallmarks of Spain’s most celebrated writer, including irony, literary experimentation, and complex interplay between the comic and the serious. Prescribed edition: Miguel de Cervantes, ‘Rinconete y Cortadillo’, from vol. 1 of *Novelas ejemplares*, 2 vols (ed. Harry Sieber, Cátedra).

2 - Ana María Matute (Spain, 1925–2014), *Primera memoria*

Primera memoria (1959) is a richly poetic work of prose fiction, a novel of the civil war steeped in myth and biblical allusion that evokes a long history of conflict and division on the island of Mallorca. Ostensibly concerned with the narrator Matia’s coming of age and her anxieties about entering the adult world, this internal struggle is set against the much wider conflict of the Spanish Civil War as it plays out almost secretly on the island, set in turn against the historical backdrop of the Inquisition’s persecution of the Jews in the seventeenth century. Through the novel you can explore the use of the first-person narrative voice, imagery, the use of intertexts, the novel’s interweaving of the historical, contemporary and mythical dimensions of violence and conflict, and its concern with questions of gender, class, and religious and ethnic difference. The context of the novel’s publication during Franco’s

dictatorship will also be relevant to your understanding of its historical and cultural themes. Prescribed edition: Ana María Matute, *Primera memoria* (Destino), or, alternatively, the novel can be found in the trilogy *Los mercaderes* (Destino).

3 - Nellie Campobello (Mexico, 1900–1986), *Cartucho*

Campobello's *Cartucho. Relatos de la lucha en el Norte de México* (1931, 1940) is a collection of narrative vignettes that focus on the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution between 1916 and 1920 in the northern state of Chihuahua. Narrated through the eyes of a child, the text incorporates a variety of voices, perspectives, and registers. From a thematic point of view, *Cartucho* offers an original introduction to the Mexican Revolution (of particular note is the characterisation of historical figures such as Francisco 'Pancho' Villa), and to the study of the dynamics between history and fiction that lie at the core of much modern Spanish American literature. Prescribed edition: Nellie Campobello, *Cartucho* (ed. Josebe Martínez, Cátedra).

4 - Alejo Carpentier (Cuba, 1904–1980), *El reino de este mundo*

El reino de este mundo (1949) follows the life of Ti Noel, an enslaved man who witnesses the events surrounding the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). Meticulously told, Carpentier's text challenges official (European) accounts of the Revolution by offering another version of events that focalizes Black lives and culture. In this way, Carpentier situates the problem of race as fundamental to an understanding of Caribbean and Latin American narrative. Alongside the novel's thematic, linguistic, and stylistic experimentation, the prologue to *El reino de este mundo* features Carpentier's remarkable and complex proposal about America's inextricable connection to what he terms 'lo real maravilloso' (the marvellous real). Reading the prologue and the novel together, you will explore important ideas about Europe's historical, cultural, and linguistic relationship to the American hemisphere in the twentieth century and beyond. Prescribed edition: Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (Austral).

This Paper III material will be examined by a three-hour written paper in which candidates must answer three essay questions on three separate texts.

PAPER IV: Introduction to Hispanic Poetry and Drama

The prescription for this paper consists of two plays, two poetic anthologies and one collection of poems, selected to introduce you to literature from the medieval period to modern times:

1 - *Romancero viejo*

Medieval Spain had a lively and varied tradition of ballads, known as the *Romancero viejo*. These short narratives, distinguished by their octosyllabic verse form and assonantal rhyme, evoked epic heroes, battles on the Andalusian frontier, and formidable figures from history as well as recounting smaller scale dramas of love and loss. The earliest ballads may have been sung in the fourteenth century, but the earliest surviving ballad text is from 1421. Via the rich oral tradition of medieval Spain, the ballads were widely diffused, making their way to all parts of the Hispanic world, and they were continually adapted and recreated, existing as variants. Many ballads were copied down and printed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The paper allows you to study some of the most brilliant examples of this fascinating medieval tradition—a tradition that would inspire generations of poets after its time— including those which are connected to Spain's old epic tradition, Carolingian ballads, frontier ballads, and novelesque ballads. A selection of thirty ballads will be provided.

2 - Golden Age sonnets

The sonnet was one of the hallmark poetic forms of the early modern period. Its roots in Spanish lie in the Italianate Petrarchan tradition of love poems, but, over time, it expanded into an extraordinary range of other genres and themes. Reflecting the breadth and diversity of the tradition, this anthology features sonnets by eleven authors (men and women, canonical and lesser-known, from Spain and the Americas). Subjects explored include romantic love, religious devotion, political ambition, imperial expansion, and urban life, all intertwined with reflection on the nature of writing itself and the possibilities—and challenges—of poetic expression. A selection of thirty sonnets will be provided.

3 - Pedro Calderón de la Barca (Spain, 1600–1681), *El médico de su honra*

Written and first performed in the 1630s, Calderón's *El médico de su honra* is a *comedia nueva*, the style of drama that dominated the theatres of Spain and its empire for much of the Golden Age, providing gripping entertainment and plenty of food for thought. It tells of a husband, Don Gutierre, who seeks to 'cure' his dishonour by murdering his innocent wife. *El médico* is an emotionally powerful play that explores, *inter alia*, our human obsession with public image, imbalances of power between the sexes and between distinct social classes, and the

excruciating difficulty of having to make moral decisions on the basis of (inevitably) only incomplete knowledge and subject to the often overwhelming influence of our human passions. Composed in intricate polymetric verse, *El médico*'s aesthetic is typically baroque—rich, ironic, complex, and profound. Prescribed edition: Calderón de la Barca, *El médico de su honra* (ed. D. W. Cruickshank, Castalia).

4 - Federico García Lorca (Spain, 1898–1936), *Doña Rosita la soltera*

One of Lorca's last plays, *Doña Rosita la soltera o el lenguaje de las flores* takes up some of the playwright's core themes, especially the passage of time and the social restrictions placed on the lives of women. Set in the Andalusian town of Granada during three distinct time periods straddling the end of the nineteenth century, the play depicts the frustrated life and love of a woman of the provincial middle classes, who wilts like a *rosa mutabile* after she is abandoned by her lover. Linking the floral symbolism of the *carpe diem* theme with the nineteenth century's 'language of flowers' and the horticultural traditions of Granada, Lorca explores the passage of one woman's life in the context of a shift from one century to the next. Prescribed edition: Federico García Lorca, *Doña Rosita la soltera* (ed. Mario Hernández Sánchez, Alianza).

5 - César Vallejo (Peru, 1892-1938), *Los heraldos negros*

Peruvian César Vallejo is one of the most iconoclastic, intriguing and influential Spanish American poets of the twentieth century. Although most famed for his highly experimental collection *Trilce* (1922), his first book, *Los heraldos negros* (1919), is a fascinating work in its own right, revealing an apprentice poet engaging critically and creatively with a number of inherited literary traditions, forms and styles in an attempt to forge a personal voice, and eventually striking out in radical new directions, both thematic and expressive. It is also remarkably varied, with meticulously crafted poems that hark back to the Symbolism of the previous century rubbing shoulders with bracingly contemporary, sometimes comically grotesque meditations on the place and purpose of human beings in a godless universe, and intimate, often tender pieces dedicated to family life. Vallejo was of Andean origin, and *Los heraldos negros* also features the only sustained attempt to explore and celebrate indigenous, pre-Hispanic culture and customs in his poetry. Prescribed edition: César Vallejo, *Los heraldos negros* (ed. René de Costa, Cátedra).

This Paper IV material will be examined by a three-hour written paper in which you must answer three commentary questions, taking one from each of the three periods (medieval, Golden Age, and modern), with a choice of passages in each case (passages will be 'paired').

FOR STUDENTS OF SPANISH SOLE

PAPER XI: Introduction to Hispanic Film Studies

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth- and twenty-first century film directors. In your essay writing you will be able to engage with their ideas and with their particular way of realising them. The prescribed films are:

- *Cría cuervos* (dir. Carlos Saura, 1976)
- *Dolor y gloria* (dir. Pedro Almodóvar, 2019)
- *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1967)
- *Camila* (dir. María Luisa Bemberg, 1984)

This paper aims to offer students basic skills in film analysis. It is taught in two parts:

1. a methodological one, consisting of four lectures devoted to four international films, presents the basic concepts of film analysis, such as montage, story, self-reference, and spectatorship. The international films taught in this part are used simply as illustrations for the lectures and are not treated as set texts for examination purposes. A representative selection might include the following films: *Potemkin* (dir. Sergei Eisenstein, 1925); *The 39 Steps* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1935); *Blow-Up* (dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, 1967); and *Beau Travail* (dir. Claire Denis, 1999);
2. a language-specific part devoted to the study of representative films from the Hispanic cinematic tradition. This second part of the course is focused on the study of four films from Spain and Latin America, as prescribed above. This part is taught in seminars, instead of lectures. Hailing as they do from different cultural and historical contexts, the films studied will offer students a good introduction to the diversity of cinematic industries across the Hispanic world. It will also allow students to scrutinize specific political and cultural contexts in the Spanish-speaking world ranging from revolutionary Cuba in the 1960s to Spain's cultural transformation during the 1970s up to the twenty-first century. We will explore the varied narrative and formal techniques employed by each of these directors, the historical and political themes with which they engage, as well as the local and international reception of these films. Students will be encouraged to develop skills in scene analysis through discussions in the seminars. They will be expected to explore other literary and cinematic material to further contextualize each of the films under scrutiny.

This Paper will be certified.

PAPER XII: Introduction to Spanish Medieval Studies

This paper aims to introduce students to the study of Spanish medieval texts. It is taught in a combination of lectures and seminars (eight in total), focusing on cultural context, close reading and language support.

The set texts are: (i) Traditional Lyric: extracts consisting of selections from Frenk's anthologies of early Iberian lyric; (ii) *Sendebat* (*Libro de los engaños*) (1253), a Spanish translation of short exemplary tales which originate in India and reached the Arab world via Persia; (iii) Jorge Manrique, *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* (between 1476 and 1479), a much celebrated poetic examination of death, fame, and the meaning of life via imagery of warfare and insight into the warrior caste; and (iv) Diego de San Pedro, *Cárcel de amor* (1492), a sentimental romance which reflects the idea of love prevalent in fifteenth-century literature and culture as well as the elaborated and highly classicist style much in vogue in late medieval courtly literature in Spain; an important precursor to *Celestina* which was one of the first European best sellers, thanks to its Italian, English and French translations.

Details of anthologized extracts and recommended editions

Lírica española de tipo popular, ed. Margit Frenk (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001)

Parte I: all of the 'Primeros testimonios' (*Jarchas, cantigas d'amigo y otras canciones anteriores a 1450*) and Parte II: from 'Cantares de amor' numbers: 68, 73, 74, 79, 81, 82, 86, 89, 91, 99, 101, 102–107, 110, 114, 118, 119, 122, 127, 159, 182, 196, 199–202, 267, 320, 334.

Sendebat, ed. María Jesús Lacarra (Madrid: Cátedra, 2011).

Jorge Manrique, 'Coplas a la muerte de su padre', in *Poesía*, ed. María Morrás, (Madrid: Castalia, 2003).

Diego de San Pedro, *Cárcel de amor*, ed. Keith Whinnom (Madrid: Castalia, 1982).

The exam consists of a three-hour paper in which each student has to write a commentary (on a passage from *Sendebat*, *Coplas*, or *Cárcel de Amor*) and answer three questions on three of the four set texts (the ones not selected for the commentary question).

PAPER XIII: Introduction to Short Fiction in Spanish

This paper introduces students to a range of short fiction from Spain and Spanish America, covering the period from the Golden Age to the present and including works by a number of the most important practitioners of the genre. Introductory lectures will encourage students both to consider works in their specific literary-historical context and also to think more broadly about the aesthetics of short fiction across the ages. Seminars will focus on the analysis of particular texts and are intended to help students develop their close reading skills and sensitivity to matters of form, structure, narrative technique and style in the specific context of the short story. The course will be examined via a three-hour paper consisting of both commentaries and essays, a number of which will be theoretical and/or comparative in nature. Candidates will be required to answer three questions, including at least one commentary and one essay.

Details of anthologized extracts and recommended editions

Miguel de Cervantes, 'Novela del celoso extremeño', in *Novelas ejemplares*, vol. II, ed. Juan Bautista Avallé-Arce, 3 vols (Madrid: Castalia, 1987)

María de Zayas y Sotomayor, 'El prevenido engañado', in *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, ed. Julián Olivares (Madrid: Cátedra, 2000)

Benito Pérez Galdós, 'La novela en el tranvía', in *Cuentos fantásticos*, ed. Alan E. Smith (Madrid: Cátedra, 2004) [not offered in 2024–25]

José María Merino, 'Acechos cercanos', 'Otra historia navideña', 'Lejanías', 'De fauna doméstica', 'Ensoñaciones', 'La memoria confusa', 'Ecosistema', 'Terapia', 'De vacas cuerdas', 'Reunión conmemorativa', 'Cien', in *La glorieta de los fugitivos* (Madrid: Páginas de Espuma, 2007)

Julio Cortázar, 'Continuidad de los parques', 'Las babas del diablo', 'La isla a mediodía', in *Final del juego* (Madrid: Santillana, 2009) and *Siete cuentos*, ed. Peter Beardsell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999)

Juan Rulfo, 'Nos han dado la tierra', 'Es que somos muy pobres', 'El hombre', in *El Llano en llamas*, ed. Françoise Perus (Madrid: Cátedra, 2016)

When drawing up this handbook we have tried to be as accurate and clear as possible. The texts prescribed for study for individual papers are now listed in this handbook.

The Examination Conventions, detailing the structure of each examination paper, including rubrics, are also available as a separate document at:

[Examination conventions: MML UG Information \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

The revised edition of the University's Examination Decrees and Regulations lists the examination papers and their permitted combination for your degree course. (For further details, refer to the handbook and the examining conventions.) See:

[Exam Regulations - Search \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

Courses and regulations are constantly under review, so always check also with your college tutor to confirm what is written here and in the Examination Conventions.

In addition, do not hesitate to ask for clarification about the course from any member of the Sub-Faculty who is lecturing to you or tutoring you; we will always do our best to help.

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