

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/04

Texts

General comments

Examiners found that the overall performance of candidates reflected careful reading and preparation of the set texts. In addition, the majority of essays showed that candidates had experience in tackling the type of questions set. It was still challenging for candidates to produce three strong answers but few scripts were unfinished. In preparing candidates for future sessions, Centres might find it helpful to encourage students to read the questions carefully and answer only what is required of them; ensure that all sections of the question are addressed; make reference to the whole text in answering option (iii) in the (a) questions in *Sección Primera*; support points made in the essay with reference to the text and not to general knowledge.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1 Azuela: *Los de abajo*

- (a) There were many competent answers to this question. The extract gave much material to comment on in parts (i) and (ii), with many references to the skill and organisation of Demetrio's men juxtaposed with the almost flippant attitude to their enemy. In answering part (iii), the best essays were able to take these points and show how Demetrio's position changed and how the almost playful approach of his men became darker and cruel as the war progressed. The reference to *los de abajo* was also analysed – in the extract the *federales* are seen in those terms but the tables will be turned.
- (b) This question also gave rise to many good essays. Candidates tended to focus on Demetrio's men's descent into greed and cruelty and their ultimate rejection by the very people they were meant to be fighting for. There was some good analysis of the role of characters such as Cervantes and Solís but it often lacked sufficient detailed knowledge to be effective. Those answers which focused on Demetrio himself were generally well done.

Question 2 Isabel Allende: *Eva Luna*

- (a) Candidates showed understanding of the extract and answered parts (i) and (ii) well, with many including references to incidents beyond the extract. In order to attain a good mark overall, candidates then had to show detailed knowledge of the text beyond the extract, picking up the main themes of Mimi and Eva's struggle to make a life for themselves and the differences in their personalities which affected their attitude to life, in particular Eva's political views.
- (b) Answers to this question were generally full and well done. Candidates understood how Eva used her own experiences in her work and how the *telenovelas* also served an important function in informing the general population about the current political situation and the possibility of change.

Question 3 Vargas Llosa: *Los jefes y Los cachorros*

- (a) Candidates responded well to parts (i) and (ii) and gave full answers – in fact, in some cases too much detail, leaving themselves little space to deal with part (iii). The concept of nostalgia was dealt with in a number of ways, with additional reference to a range of other stories. Perhaps the most straightforward approach was to take the idea of looking back to adolescence and school days and consider how the author presents this. The idea of claustrophobia fits in with the somewhat limited world of the school or gang, but other examples are valid, such as that of old age.

- (b) The most popular examples chosen for this essay were Cuéllar and Rubén and Miguel. There was a wealth of material here, as in other stories in the collection, and candidates showed a good understanding of the issues, supported with evidence from the texts. The experience of Cuéllar was dealt with sympathetically although there was, in some cases, a weakness in the argument. The circumstances of his death were not analysed.

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

- (a) There were some very competent answers to this question but many were lacking in detail from the text. In response to parts (i) and (ii), candidates needed to explain the reasons for the characters' reactions rather than simply paraphrase the extract. In part (iii), it was not sufficient to make general remarks about the population being afraid of bombs or not having enough food – this would be true of any conflict situation. The best essays used incidents from the text to illustrate this and showed how perceptions also changed in the way the characters behaved towards one another and the decisions they made.
- (b) This question was generally tackled in a systematic way, with a good deal of supporting evidence from the text. Most found the statement to be only partly true, showing how the individuals managed to find a way of coping in terrible circumstances. The point was often made that the effects of war are as keenly felt in the non-combatants as in the fighting troops – the presentation of this aspect of the suffering was well expressed.

Question 5 Ruiz Zafón: *La sombra del viento*

- (a) Many candidates chose this option and dealt in considerable detail with the similarities between the events in the book found by Daniel and in his own life. There was also discussion of the blurring of fiction and reality.
- (b) This option was also tackled well, with good awareness of the author's ability to interweave stories and maintain suspense. Candidates seemed to have enjoyed the text and were able to refer to incidents in detail and show empathy with the characters.

Question 6 Lope de Vega: *Fuenteovejuna*

- (a) This question required a specific focus on the importance – or otherwise – of the historical scenes in the play. Many candidates showed that they had studied this aspect of the text and were able to construct an argument linking the ideas of loyalty and duty to the Comendador's role in the political struggle of the time, as well as his role in the community of Fuenteovejuna. The position of the monarch was also considered. The conclusion tended to be that these scenes underpinned the themes of justice and loyalty and put the play within a recognisable historical context.
- (b) Many candidates chose this question. The question asked whether the most effectively drawn characters in the play were the women. The best answers showed how Lope de Vega brought the women characters to life in their vociferous challenges to the outrageous behaviour of the Comendador, and their leadership of the rebellion against this. They are seen to be strong, intelligent and committed. Not all the men are poorly drawn, however, and there are complex characters amongst them.

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

- (a) There was a large response to this question, and many very good answers. Candidates analysed Poncia's role in the household in great detail, considering her as Bernarda's confidante and bringer of gossip, a mother figure to the daughters and general commentator to the audience, amongst other functions. Her importance in revealing what was really happening was crucial to our understanding of the play.
- (b) This was another hugely popular question. Many candidates were able to support the idea that destiny could not be challenged and gave detailed accounts of the portents within the play which led to an inexorable tragedy. In addition, the importance of the character of Bernarda herself and the rigid regime imposed were also crucial aspects.

Question 8 Rubén Darío: *Poemas*

- (a) Most candidates who chose this question tended to agree with the statement and gave illustrations of the erotic aspects of two or three poems of their choice. They were able to discuss the forms and language also with some confidence.
- (b) This was chosen by fewer candidates and as there is a degree of scope for individual interpretation it is not appropriate to suggest a 'good' answer. In this type of question, Examiners wish to give candidates the opportunity to show their ability to present a personal reaction to the poem, supported by reference to it and an understanding of literary analysis – form, verse, language, theme. Since candidates have the text with them, paraphrase is not sufficient and experience of critical analysis is required. There were some good examples of this.