

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41
Texts

Key messages

The key messages are, as have been stated in previous reports, that candidates must have studied the texts in detail, understood them and be able to demonstrate this with reference to the texts to support their argument. Candidates must also respond to the question directly giving a full answer and use the text to illustrate points made, with a clear and logical conclusion to their essay.

General comments

Candidates demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding of the texts. Difference in performance was generally based on a precise reading and response to the question, the quality of the argument and judicious use of references. The best essays had usually been carefully planned and examples selected to give as full an answer as possible.

Comments on specific questions

Sección 1

Comments focus on responses to **part (iii)** of each question, which requires reference to the whole text. Candidates dealt with question **parts (i)** and **(ii)** well, for the most part.

Question 1 – Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

- (a) In responding to this question, candidates needed to consider to what extent Castel was aware of his behaviour towards María. Some pointed out that the narrative is presented from Castel's point of view, thus not objective. Castel is self-obsessed and does not have insight into other people's responses to him. Few made reference to his dreams, which give the reader a less biased impression of his psychological make-up. Several responses portrayed Castel as trapped in the titular tunnel and as such, locked out of any form of consciousness at all.
- (b) Responses to this question generally focused on the physical blindness of Allende, which represented all the male characters' inability to understand María. Few pointed out that Castel, too, chose to be blind to those aspects of María and her life which he did not understand. The concept of the tunnel is important here in representing Castel's isolation but also echoed in the 'tunnel vision' of Mimí, for example, in her blindness to her own heritage as she extols the superiority of foreign culture. Castel is blind to reality as he creates his own. Some noted that Allende's suicide was as a result of Castel's confession to the murder of María. Would Allende have preferred to be kept in the dark, that is to say, blind to actual events? The concept of blindness was used in many ways.

Question 2 – Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*

- (a) Very many candidates chose to answer this question. The most successful responses gave thorough appraisals of the two characters and showed how their behaviours embodied the situation in the town. The colonel, impoverished but dignified and stoic was in contrast to Sabas, a wealthy yet corrupt and dishonest character. Even their illnesses echoed their situation. The colonel suffered dreadfully due to poverty whereas Sabas' diabetes was due to excess. The colonel had a soul but Sabas had no imagination at all.

- (b) This question also elicited a large number of responses, and gave candidates scope to analyse the text in a number of ways. All essentially agreed that the novel was more complex than it appeared. This was explored in terms of the depth and range of themes or employment of certain literary techniques and styles. Impact was defined as the creation of dramatic tension and the credibility of the characterisation and the political situation.

Question 3 – Anónimo: *Lazarillo de Tormes*

- (a) There always seems to be a strong temptation to narrate the story of Lazarillo rather than focus on the question set. In this case, we see Lazarillo recovering from the blow inflicted on him by his master after he had been found stealing and who then dismisses him. This contrasts with his previous experience – when Lazarillo himself had chosen to move on. The irony in the statement '*tan diligente servidor*' was not generally identified, but the cunning he learned from the 'ciego' was. So what did Lazarillo learn from this episode and how did he continue to adapt to benefit himself with subsequent masters and employers? The better responses suggested that the episode taught Lazarillo the dangers of lying, the need for caution and an awareness of the true nature of the clergy. It seemed as if Lazarillo began to acquire a better moral understanding but the extreme hunger and cruelty he suffered influenced subsequent decisions and choices, for example ignoring rumours concerning his unfaithful wife so as not to jeopardise the comfortable life he had created for himself at the end of the text.
- (b) The most thoughtful responses to this question chose to name the poor – as exemplified in Lazarillo himself, as those most deserving of sympathy and possibly respect. Every other group in society – the clergy, neighbours, nobles (Escudero), were found to be wanting. Some were kind to Lazarillo momentarily but most put themselves first. Many felt that Lazarillo, as representative of his background, was essentially innocent but bound to find a way to survive because of his circumstances. His mother was not feckless, rather desperate to give her son a chance. His stepfather tried to help the family. Society, and those who controlled it, had no sympathy.

Question 4 – Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

- (a) There were few answers to this question. Candidates knew the text well. **Part (iii)** raises the question of the role of the army. This can be interpreted in several ways. In terms of Calderón's consideration of society and its hierarchies, the army serves the King (who appears late in the play) and it must defend the state, expand its interests and follow the orders of the monarch. Officers of the army are of high status; hence they are billeted in the best homes in the village. The only residents who may complain are those of the nobility. However, in terms of the plot and theme, the army disrupts the harmony of life in the village, initiates a state of crisis and the matter is only resolved by the intervention of the King himself. Harmony is restored, at the expense of the wronged woman and the whole issue of justice is debated.
- (b) As with option (a), this was not chosen by many candidates. Answers focused on close appraisal of the main female characters, showing their strengths and weaknesses. In the main, we see women who have an important role to play within their community and display strong moral understanding and loyalty to both family and community. Some are open to coercion. Calderón's female characters tend to be well-rounded, intelligent and expressive.

Sección 2

Question 5 – Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) Most answers to this question expressed the view that Andrea was beginning a better life. This was supported with reference to the dreadful time she had in her grandmother's flat. However at the same time, being of an optimistic disposition, Andrea had found a way to survive in a hostile situation and had made friends at the University. She arrived as a naïve, immature girl and learned a lot about life in general during her time there. Her friendship with Gloria was particularly valuable to her. The novel presents a depressing, if realistic view of post-war Spain and although Andrea will benefit from the hospitality of a richer family; she may come across similar challenges in Madrid.
- (b) This question gave rise to a number of approaches. Many concentrated on Andrea's dysfunctional family in the flat, analysing what had happened to change the warm, happy memories of her visits there when she was very young. Others compared Andrea's family to Ena's. Superficially, the latter was ideal, but Ena's mother's experience with Ramón, and indeed Ena's too, show that nothing is

perfect. Some very thorough responses also discussed the role of Andrea's artist friends as a substitute family. Does an individual necessarily find love and understanding in a blood relationship, with all the responsibilities entailed with belonging to a family? Is it possible to be happy with like-minded people, subject to fewer expectations?

Question 6 – Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

Virtually all candidates answered on this text, showing good knowledge.

- (a) The most successful responses went beyond comparing the personalities and characters of the two men to analyse what they represent. In the case of the Novio, social order, conservative tradition and security and in Leonardo, rebellion, change and passion. The best answers examined the importance of the given names; one candidate said that 'el Novio cumple el rol universal de novio', whereas Leonardo 'desde la elección de su nombre no encaja dentro de un perfil predeterminado'. Most concluded that the end was fitting as order was restored, some mentioning the help of the supernatural forces of Destiny and Death. Passion is disruptive. It added to the argument to consider the Novia's views and the reasons for her decisions.
- (b) Responses to this question needed to go beyond the immediate reactions of grief to consider the society in which the Novia will have to live. She is clearly in despair and feels responsible for the deaths of both men as evidently she initiated the flight with Leonardo, which led to the physical struggle and knife fight. The Novio was duty bound to avenge the slur on his family's honour. The Novia was a bystander at the dénouement – which represents the role of women generally in that society. Her marriage to Leonardo was thwarted because he was unfit from the point of view of wealth and social standing, with no concern for the Novia's feelings. The betrothal to the Novio was arranged; the scene in which the Novio and his mother go to see the Novia and her father to officially agree the wedding is formal and transactional, with the Novia playing a minor role. The social implications for the Novia are likely to be dire, based on what has been expressed. Social isolation and lack of any purpose or role are most likely to mean that the Novia struggles to believe in any future for herself.

Question 7 – Gabriela Mistral: *Tala: Lagar*

As has been the practice in earlier sessions, a detailed report has not been given on responses to this text. The number of responses is small.

- (a) Candidates must have considerable experience in preparing a detailed commentary on a poem, with awareness of the use of poetic technique and choice of language as well as imagery and the presentation of themes.
- (b) Candidates have much scope in choosing three poems from the list on the syllabus to explore and analyse the question, so no two responses will be the same. Examiners look for judicious choice of poems, a clear understanding of how the poet expresses her sense of being an outsider, analysing the poetic techniques as well as the thematic content.

Question 8 – Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) There were some well-informed responses which examined the way Trueba ruled, both in his political role, within his family and at Tres Marías. He was seen to be autocratic, self-serving and misogynist in all aspects of his life. Candidates varied in their opinions over the degree to which Esteban Trueba was personally responsible or merely representative of egotistical and discriminatory leadership. More nuanced answers pointed to aspects of the regeneration of the community (and the role of Clara). Others emphasised the evidence that women are exploited, there is corruption in buying votes and democracy is undermined. Signs of hope can be seen in the new generation as Alba manages to soften her grandfather's attitudes and he understands how friends (Tránsito Soto) can play a part for good. His kindness to Tránsito many years ago is more powerful than any threats or violence in ensuring Alba's release. So there was some belief that the novel was more positive than the statement suggests.
- (b) All responses to this question agreed with the statement, with most basing their answers on Esteban Trueba. Candidates frequently used the example of Trueba's vengeful treatment of Clara and Blanca over the latter's relationship with Pedro Tercero, which was a source of much sadness to him as Clara never spoke to him again. Similarly, his harsh treatment of Esteban García (and his

grandmother) could be seen as the direct cause of Alba's arrest and torture. As a contrast, positive examples are seen in Trueba helping Blanca and Pedro escape to Canada and Tránsito Soto's compassion in helping to rescue Alba after previously receiving assistance herself from Trueba. Many felt that Alba's lack of bitterness or desire for revenge shown at the end of the novel could be interpreted as a more optimistic message.

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General comments

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Comments on specific questions

Sección A

Comments focus on responses to **part (iii)** of each question, which requires reference to the whole text. Candidates dealt with question **parts (i)** and **(ii)** well, for the most part.

Question 1 – Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

- (a) Answers to this option mainly identified Castel's bullying obsessive behaviour and María's evasiveness from the passage. However many were less successful in applying their ideas to the whole of the text. The question asked candidates to relate what is seen in this extract to the development of the relationship throughout the novel. One of the main issues to analyse is the evident lack of real communication between the two individuals. Castel seems to believe that he can find out what he wants to know by forceful interrogation of María whereas it becomes more apparent that she is not prepared or chooses not to respond directly. Some candidates argued that María was partly responsible for her own downfall due to her deceptive and manipulative nature. Castel initiated the relationship, based on his own interpretation of María's reaction to the painting and it is difficult to ascertain why she responded to him. Another factor to consider is that the whole story is seen from Castel's point of view, which makes objective assessment more challenging.
- (b) There were more responses overall to this option. Most essays condemned Castel whilst admitting the mitigation of mental illness. The fact that Castel 'es la voz narrativa', as one candidate mentioned is also important. The more thoughtful responses studied his character in greater detail, pointing out the paradox of his impulsive yet analytical behaviour. A number referred to his loneliness, as exemplified in the title, and his need to be understood, suggesting that the self-justifying confession might be an attempt to gain the understanding of the reader. He murdered the only person who may have been capable of understanding him 'Me has dejado solo'.

Question 2 – Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*

- (a) This was an extremely popular question. Unusually, there were a number of variations in interpreting the passage. Some candidates believed that the cockerel's behaviour denoted defeat or even death and others a victory; the bird's stoic passivity could be seen as representative of his owner's attitude. Most agreed that the cockpit offered a microcosm of society, with its violence,

corruption and optimistic sense of opportunity. The concept of 'farce' was less discussed; we see such enthusiasm and importance being given to what is essentially a meaningless display of violence, when the real issues affecting everyone's life are not being addressed. This is all the people can focus on as a distraction from the misery they live through daily.

- (b) Most answers to this option agreed that the colonel's wife did not give unconditional support to her husband. Undoubtedly she showed affection and stood by the colonel but also questioned his behaviour frequently, implying that he was not always right. The colonel's wife was patient and fulfilled her role admirably in caring for her husband. Her own feelings were largely kept under control and those outbursts, revealing the extent of her suffering too, were the more effective as a result. Some more thoughtful answers discussed the prevailing patriarchal attitudes and debated to what extent actual opposition to her husband would have been viable.

Question 3 – Anónimo: *Lazarillo de Tormes*

- (a) Many candidates answered this question. Some disagreed with Lazarillo's assessment of the 'buldero', citing the lack of physical harm and generally less despicable behaviour than the 'ciego'. On the other hand the 'buldero' conducted deception on a huge scale and those most affected were the innocent and impressionable poor. Another factor to support the assertion that this master is the worst so far relates to the way he is exploiting the influence of the Church in a purely selfish way going against all the tenets of Christian behaviour. This is not to ignore the fact that the clergy collude with him for their own gains. More thoughtful responses considered Lazarillo's estimation of the 'buldero' in terms of his own moral awakening, but also analysed to what extent the influence lasted in affecting Lazarillo's own decision-making.
- (b) This was another popular question. There was some debate over the difference between respect and empathy and a range of views on the seriousness of Lazarillo's humiliation by the Archpriest and the extent of his own self-deception. Only a few candidates referred to Lazarillo's rejection of the 'buldero' and his compassion for the 'Escudero' as worthy of respect. Some argued that respect for Lazarillo decreased as he rose up the social scale, exemplified in his purchase of better clothes. Most felt that Lazarillo had little choice but to look after himself in order to survive.

Question 4 – Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

- (a) This text was not such a popular choice this Session. Some answers to this option were too literal in simply stating that Mendo did not see Isabel as a suitable wife; her status was too low. He was never a real contender for Isabel's hand from her point of view, either, because he was such a ridiculous figure and had no money. The best responses went on to examine the whole theme of honour and social standing, and the true feelings of the Captain towards Isabel.
- (b) The debate between educating and entertaining was dealt with in a number of ways. Some felt that characters such as Mendo and Chispa were very central to the play and given a large amount of action, indicating that entertaining was most important. Others felt that the character of Crespo, through his instructions on how to conduct himself to his son and his own attitudes to honour could be seen as a clear message to the audience. Indeed examples such as his rejection of buying false honour or taking the law into his own hands point to this. The fact that his belief in morality trumping social rank is endorsed by the King himself would support this argument. It was also valid to consider that the subject matter of rape, execution and the solidity of justice is serious and challenging. By including entertaining, or lighter elements in the play made the lessons more appealing to the audience. Understanding of Golden Age theatre as a whole was helpful in this regard.

Sección B

Question 5 – Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) This question raised an important issue in examination technique. The wording of the question requires candidates to debate to what extent Andrea learned from the suffering she endured during her year in Barcelona. Those candidates who described or listed the difficulties she faced were not as successful as others who identified clearly what she actually learned along the way besides resilience. This could include, for example, how to understand and navigate through relationships within the family and amongst people she met of her own age. There are a number of approaches which all depend on effective analysis and reference to achieve success.

- (b) Angustias was not present throughout the novel and her role went beyond that of being a figure against whom Andrea could kick on her own journey of self-development. Angustias' life and the choices she made point to a more general representation of conservative values prevalent under post Civil War Francoism. Andrea was subject to Angustias' oppression in terms of her freedom and financial independence in the name of morality and religion. However Angustias herself did not subscribe to these rules; she was tainted by her own hypocrisy and showed the limited options open to unmarried women at the time.

Question 6 – Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de Sangre*

Virtually every candidate answered on this text.

- (a) There was some debate around the meaning of 'ser feliz' and how it might differ according to the circumstances of the various characters. For some, being happy could equate to passive contentment within conventional social boundaries whereas others seek abandoned joy, ignoring any social norms. Many saw the heart of the play lying in the conflict between these two experiences. Some comments made by candidates include 'se es feliz siguiendo el corazón', 'es cuestión de deseos personales o la presión de la sociedad'. For the Novio, his mother and the Novia's father, the important thing is to follow what is expected and honour the family. The Novia and Leonardo have different feelings. They have tried to do what is correct but it does not work. The power of tradition and reputation is victorious. The best answers analysed the way the individual is depicted in the play and considered Lorca's intentions.
- (b) This also aroused debate. Almost all felt that the Madre was a negative, critical person but that some of these attitudes were understandable and possibly justifiable. Opinions were divided as to whether her doom-laden view of life contributed to the final tragedy by sending the Novio to seek vengeance, or simply anticipated it. Her focus on death, suffering and honour could be said to be reflected in the attitude of the supernatural 'characters' who help to ensure that vengeance is carried out. The Madre's treatment of the Novia at the end could also be interpreted as cruel and an extension of avenging her own loss.

Question 7 – Gabriela Mistral: *Tala: Lagar*

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Question 8 – Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) Some interesting responses to this question challenged the statement given. They focused on Esteban Trueba and the relationship between internal passions and external political forces. He seemed to deal with his personal relationships in the same way as he exerted control in his political activities and those of his party. Trueba was patriarchal, with little concept of joint responsibility. He had influence in the collapse of the economy and the 'golpe de estado'. Here both the external and internal matters coincide as Trueba's family is shocked by Alba's detention and torture. This is as much a blow to Trueba as Clara's refusal to talk to him. However he generally seems distanced from the feelings of his family members. Individuals in the family are affected deeply by personal difficulties of all sorts as well as the trauma of wider political events.
- (b) The most successful answers to this option linked individual characters' suffering and the wider political events which had devastating consequences for the country, for example the assassination of Jaime and the 'golpe de estado'. Generally speaking, any challenge to the regime was quashed. There was no debate or democracy and the voice of the individual was not heard. The country suffered from the lack of a moral centre as corruption and the use of violence for control was rife. Those with a conscience were killed or escaped abroad.