SPANISH LITERATURE

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General comments

Examiners are pleased to observe that the majority of candidates continue to show understanding of and enthusiasm for the texts chosen for study. Those Centres which invest time in preparing their candidates in essay-writing skills as well as close study of the texts give their candidates an added advantage. Examiners look for a clearly-argued and focused response to the question, with reference to the texts to substantiate points made. This requires both deep knowledge and the ability to present a coherent answer.

Although there were a few cases where candidates did not follow the rubrics correctly and either did not answer the required number of questions, or wrote an essay on both options for the same text, these are decreasing.

Comments on individual questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Azuela: *Los de abajo*

(a)   This question gave much opportunity to discuss the more negative aspects of the Revolution and candidates were able to respond with detailed answers.

(b)   This question elicited a wider range of responses where weaker candidates tended to give a rather superficial treatment, commenting on the varied settings and scenes and the fact that war is a popular topic. The better answers may have referred to the scenic qualities but went on to consider the dramatic possibilities of events and characterisation within the context of the Revolution and also mentioning some of the *costumbrista* aspects of the dialogue and customs of the Mexican people. Candidates also considered how the episodic nature of the text lent itself to the medium of cinema and how the director would interpret the author's intentions.

Question 2 Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

Both **(a)** and **(b)** were answered by a relatively small number of candidates. The responses showed awareness of the cultural context of the play and careful reading of the text.

Question 3 García Márquez: *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*

(a)   This gave candidates much opportunity to give their interpretation of the events in the story and to relate this to others in the collection. Examiners are pleased to accept a variety of views, provided they are supported by reference to the text. In this case there were a number of approaches which gave rise to a wide range of stories used in **part (iii)** of the question.

(b)   This was also generally well answered as regards examples of humour, but some candidates did not analyse how it was used by the author.

Question 4 Buero Vallejo: *Hoy es fiesta*

These questions were chosen by a minority of candidates. There were no problems in dealing with the issues raised in the questions set, and candidates were able to use their knowledge of the texts to good effect.

Question 5 Lauro Olmo: *La camisa*

Again, this text was not chosen by a large number of candidates, but both options were understood and accessible.

Sección Segunda

Question 6 Ruiz Zafón: *La sombra del viento*

(a) This was by far the more popular of the two questions on this text. Candidates answered well, with a wide range of examples drawn from all the major characters in the novel. They were able to refer to the key decisions made and to analyse the effects and consequences with detailed reference to the text.

(b) This question also gave scope for a range of interpretations.

Question 7 Paola Kaufmann: *El lago*

Neither of these questions was a popular choice, but they gave candidates the opportunity to deal with the wider themes of the text in **(a)** and to focus more specifically on the role of a central character in **(b)**.

Question 8 García Lorca: *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

This was perhaps the most popular text.

(a) Some candidates tended to read the play as a documentary rather than a drama and therefore lost much of the impact of the themes, characterisation and poetry. The best answers showed how Lorca used the setting to explore the human condition.

(b) Candidates tended to choose the final scene of the play as the most important, and answers were often very effectively argued. Some candidates strayed from the text to the film version and included interpretations which were those of the director or actor rather than the playwright. These may be relevant as a point of discussion but time is better spent in analysing the text itself.

Question 9 Rubén Darío: *Selección de poemas*

This text was not widely chosen this session. Those candidates who prepared for the poetry tended to be well-practised in the techniques of critical analysis and generally presented detailed answers.

Question 10 Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

This text always attracts many answers and candidates show genuine empathy with the characters.

(a) There were many good answers showing understanding of the use of *realismo magico* in the novel, with clear examples to support the argument.

(b) This question also gave candidates the opportunity to give an individual response to the text by accepting or challenging the statement given and then choosing a range of examples to support their argument. The best essays considered both positive and negative aspects, and showed awareness of a degree of ambivalence in the text.

Concluding remarks

Centres are choosing texts which engage their candidates and provide scope for analysis in terms of theme, character and technique. It is important to ensure that all candidates are given exam practice and that they are taught effective essay-writing skills in order to help each of them to achieve his or her potential.

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/42
Texts 42

General comments

The general standard of performance by candidates was good and was comparable to that of previous sessions, although Examiners were pleased to note that candidates appeared to be generally more knowledgeable about the texts studied. There is a small caveat, however, in that some essays show confusion between the text and a film version thereof. The film is not always true to the original and can cause some problems in answers. Centres are requested to warn candidates of this as Examiners expect references to the original text.

Comments on individual questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Azuela: *Los de abajo*

(a) This was well answered and differentiated well between the stronger and weaker candidates. All could find something to say in each section of the question, with better answers showing understanding of the historical background of the novel and the ability to integrate this with clear references to the text. A number of candidates did not use the printed extract to its full advantage in responding to **parts (i)** and **(ii)**, rather making perfunctory remarks about the *ex federales* only. **Part (iii)** is the key section for determining the overall mark, and again, many candidates were too general in their comments. The passage pointed to a number of themes, such as the breakdown of communication and leadership within the rebels, which could be discussed in detail.

(b) There were fewer answers to this question, but candidates were able to refer to the effects of war on a population and individuals.

Question 2 Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

(a) This question was very popular. Candidates provided a clear context for the printed extract and showed understanding of the historical and social background. The best essays traced how the attitudes expressed affected subsequent events in the play.

(b) Fewer candidates chose this option, but there were some very good answers. These essays showed that candidates had studied the importance of the social hierarchies within the historical context.

Question 3 García Márquez: *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*

(a) This was a popular question and elicited responses at all levels. In order to achieve a high mark, candidates had to show knowledge of the text beyond that in the printed extract. A number of answers seemed to be based on assumptions drawn only from the passage printed in the question paper. As is usually the case, the response to **part (iii)** is key to determining the overall mark, and the best answers showed detailed understanding of the plight of the widow. Some considered that her sadness was a result of her having turned a blind eye to events for many years, and therefore was, to an extent, of her own making. Others gave more detailed accounts of her husband's affairs, the reactions of her children and made reference to other stories in the collection.

(b)   All were able to draw on three stories. Some candidates agreed that the search for love was the main theme, but some disagreed and went on to discuss other topics, such as social inequality and corruption; inevitably in a few cases this appeared to be writing out a pre-learnt essay. There are often a number of ways of approaching a question but Examiners can only accept a candidate's interpretation if their answer is a clearly focused response to the question asked.

Question 4 Buero Vallejo: *Hoy es fiesta*

(a)   Generally answers to this question were good. Candidates showed detailed knowledge of the play and were able to refer widely to the effect of the events of the day on a range of individuals.

(b)   Fewer candidates chose this question, but those that did were able to make logical comments, though few understood that the author was using the terrace as a literary device. Weaker candidates tended to simply recount events without considering the importance of the setting and its effect on characters.

Question 5 Lauro Olmo: *La camisa*

(a)   This question was quite popular. Candidates were able to give the context and explain what was happening. In **part (iii)**, there were differing views on whether young people promised hope for the future or not, but everyone found material to support their interpretation.

(b)   There were some good answers to this question, with a number of themes being sensibly identified. A few candidates spent too much time writing vaguely about present day problems and too little time referring to the text.

Sección Segunda

Question 6 Ruiz Zafón: *La sombra del viento*

(a)   This question was fairly popular. There were some strong answers, but weaker candidates struggled to find enough material, tending simply to list the places mentioned rather than considering the setting and atmosphere of the city as a whole.

(b)   This question was very popular and there were many excellent answers. Everyone could focus on the character and find plenty to say. All candidates noted the parallel between Julián and Penélope, and Daniel and Beatriz, but only the best considered why Zafón might have used this device.

Question 7 Paola Kaufmann: *El lago*

(a)   This was answered satisfactorily by a small number of candidates.

(b)   This did not attract a wide enough range of candidates to make significant general comments.

Question 8 García Lorca: *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

(a)   Many chose this question and answers were generally very good. Better candidates put the quotation into context and considered how Bernarda chose to suppress the situation.

(b)   This was the most popular question. Candidates showed sound knowledge of the characters and were able to discuss the play in detail. While all disagreed with the proposition, stronger candidates discussed to what extent it was true (i.e. the pressures to conform; their shared situation) and then went on to talk about the different personalities of the daughters. Weaker candidates tended to produce an answer that resembled a list of notes on each character, but everyone found plenty to say and the answer was easy to structure.

Question 9 Rubén Darío: *Selección de poemas*

(a) This was a straightforward question, giving a clear structure of 'compare and contrast'.

(b) This attracted a small number of responses and was well answered. Candidates had no difficulties in finding three poems to analyse.

Question 10 Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

(a) There were quite a lot of answers to this question. Candidates generally discussed the elements *recetas, amores y remedios caseros* one by one in order and achieved a reasonably good response. A few candidates responded that there was more to the novel and went on to discuss other themes as well.

(b) This question was extremely popular. Most candidates adopted the chronological approach, discussing how the character develops through the novel. This provided a structure for the answer and everyone found plenty to say.

Concluding remarks

Examiners are pleased to note the increasingly knowledgeable way in which candidates are approaching this paper. The best answers are able to use the knowledge of the text with an understanding of the broader context and the author's intention in writing the work, but this is always clearly focused on the question as set. Those Centres where candidates are given practice specifically in structuring an essay and selecting relevant material are providing valuable skills in tackling examination questions. Awareness of the techniques and skills involved helps candidates to achieve their potential, at whatever level, and reduces the risks of making mistakes such as answering both questions on the same text or not answering the correct number of questions on the paper.