SPANISH LITERATURE

| Paper 8673/41 |
| Texts |

General comments

Candidates were generally well prepared for this paper and showed knowledge and understanding of the texts. They were familiar with the way the paper is set out, and the majority chose the correct number of questions, covering both *Sección Primera* and *Sección Segunda*.

In order to achieve the highest marks, candidates need to bring other skills besides close study of the texts. This includes, for example, careful reading of each question to ensure that their response is relevant to the question as it is printed on the question paper – pre-learned answers to more general issues cannot score highly. In addition, if the question asks for reference to two stories or poems, these must be an integral part of the essay. Also, with reference to question **(a)** in *Sección Primera*, all three parts of the question must be answered. More emphasis should be placed on the answer to part **(iii)** as this is where candidates can show how much they have understood, and can discuss the main issues or themes of the text. Marks are not awarded for comparison of different texts on the question paper (for example, comparing a novel from *Sección Primera* with one from *Sección Segunda*). Candidates must focus on the text which is being tested. Good general essay writing technique is required to enable candidates to present and support an argument and then draw logical conclusions.

It is essential that candidates write legibly. There were several scripts which Examiners found extremely difficult to read. It is in candidates' own interests to ensure that their handwriting is clear and easy to read as illegible material cannot receive credit.

Comments on individual questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 *Los de abajo*

(a)   Most candidates used the printed extract to good effect in parts **(i)** and **(ii)**. Part **(iii)** was less well answered as candidates tended to repeat information given for the first two responses rather than consider the novel as a whole and show how the differences of opinion between the men grew and reflected the breakdown of the revolution itself.

(b)   This question asked candidates to focus on the way Demetrio's men are seen as *'los buenos'* at the beginning of the novel and how the reader's perception of them changes as the narrative develops, and why. It was not enough to simply re-tell the story.

Question 2 *El alcalde de Zalamea*

(a)   Many candidates wrote well about Isabel's plight and the reasons for her shame. The issue of justice for Isabel was sometimes analysed from a modern point of view, which was not relevant in the context of the play. The themes must be understood within the historical context of the work, with reference to a specific set of values.

(b)   This question focused on one of the crucial conflicts within the play. Answers needed to show the differences in values between Pedro Crespo and Don Álvaro, and the consequences of these in the outcome.

Question 3 *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*

(a)   There were many very good answers to this question. Candidates understood how the phrase *'Es la misma vaina'* reflects the degree of corruption within the society and redresses the balance of power back to the mayor. At an earlier point in the story, the dentist is able to assert his authority as the mayor has been forced by severe toothache to seek treatment. The dentist extracts the tooth without anaesthetic as a form of revenge against the mayor who is held responsible for the political killings in the village.

(b)   This question asked candidates to consider how many characters suffered loneliness and sadness, even though they were surrounded by friends and family. The issue of loneliness in itself was not a complete response as many individuals in the stories are not alone, but are islolated and sad. The best answers discussed the reasons for this is greater depth, pointing out the lack of effective communication and understanding in many instances, and the influence of the repressive atmosphere.

Question 4 *Hoy es fiesta*

(a)   This question focused on one of the central relationships within the play, which is both the most pitiable and, in the end, possibly the most hopeful. There was much scope for candidates to give an individual interpretation of the issue of '*disimular'*, and to show how other characters in the play are affected by failing to face the truth.

(b)   Candidates were able to choose from a range of examples to illustrate their argument in response to this question. The issues were well understood.

Question 5 *La camisa*

(a)   The extract gave much scope to open the argument in response to part **(iii)**, giving indications of Lola's desperation and her subsequent decision to leave. The exchange highlights Lola's concern over her children's future and increasing marital discord.

(b)   This question asked candidates to give an individual response according to their reading of the play. Many interpretations were possible and acceptable, provided the essay was supported by references to the text.

Sección Segunda

Question 6 *La sombra del viento*

(a)   There were some very good answers to this question. Candidates identified several evil forces in the novel, both literal and figurative. Fumero was the most hated character, and his malevolence was well documented.   The general post-war depressive atmosphere was also cited as a significant factor.

(b)   This question asked candidates to show how the author is able to lighten the atmosphere of the novel by the use of humour. The responses tended to be too general and sometimes suggested an unlikely reading of the text. Precise references and incidents were essential in order to present an effective answer. Some candidates misread the question as '*amor'* rather than *'humor'*.

Question 7 *El lago*

(a) / (b)   There were few answers on this text. Both questions allowed for a wide range of interpretations subject to sufficient reference to the text.

Question 8 *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

(a)   The best answers considered the house as a symbol of what was happening throughout the play, representing the themes of control, imprisonment and removal of choice, amongst other issues. The physical confinement, colours and heat are all important aspects. It was not enough to say simply that the house is important because it is where the action takes place, and then refer to different rooms.

(b)   This question needed candidates to consider the meaning and effect of *'el que dirán'* and its role within the narrative of the play. Candidates were not invited to offer another aspect as the *'esencia'* as the focus of their answer. It was important to refer to incidences of gossip, comment and reputation as part of the answer. In addition, candidates needed to show how characters are affected by this and why.

Question 9 *Selección de poemas*

(a) / (b) Both these questions elicited a varied quality of responses. Some candidates relied too much on the commentary in their edition of the poems. The best answers were a result of careful preparation in approaching poetry. Both questions gave candidates the opportunity to give an individual response to their reading of the poems and this can achieve high marks, provided the argument is fully supported.

Question 10 *Como agua para chocolate*

(a)   The best responses to this question focused on the passionate relationships and the role of food within the novel. Candidates discussed how individual characters' happiness was compromised and how they survived. Most were able to go beyond the simple explanation of the title to explore these issues.

(b)   The consensus of views in response to this question was that Rosaura deserves very little sympathy. Most candidates recognised that Rosaura is not able to make her own decisions as she is subject to the will of her mother. At the same time, Rosaura accepts her mother's ruling, even when the outcome is upsetting for others – and tragic for herself – as separating her son from Tita resulted in his death. There were many other examples cited to show how Rosaura absorbs her mother's point of view but, in mitigation, that her final illness and suffering was most distressing and possibly more than she deserved.

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Comments on individual questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 *Los de abajo*

(a)   The main issue regarding Valderrama's madness was best dealt with in considering the whole motivation of the war itself, together with the behaviour of the other characters – who, if anyone could be said to be mad or sane, and why?

(b)   The innovative aspects of the form of the novel include the episodic nature of the narrative, the lack of a clear time line, the use of much dialogue and the natural speech and pronunciation of the characters.

Question 2 *El alcalde de Zalamea*

(a)   The best responses to this question made reference to the sequence of events and then went on to analyse, for example, how the character traits shown in the scene printed can be seen to lead to the final tragedy.

(b)   Answers to this question required understanding of the concept of military law as shown in the play, and Don Álvaro's reasons for believing himself to be safe from prosecution. This could then be contrasted with Crespo's views, the discussion of justice and honour within the play, and the role of the King.

Question 3 *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*

(a)   The discussion of the '*realidad*' apparent in the stories led to a number of interesting debates. Many candidates referred to the concrete reality in which characters live largely unhappy lives, mentioning the repressive regime, the sense of fear and violence and poverty – and the way individuals react to it. Others took a more philosophical approach, showing how individuals create a kind of fantasy in order to enable them to cope with the reality and sometimes cannot distinguish between the two. This may lead to a comparison of characters such as Dámaso and Ana – one firmly rooted in reality, the other indulging in unrealistic dreams. There were a number of possible approaches here.

(b)   This question was open to a wide range of interpretations and application to many stories in the collection. Some obvious choices were '*La viuda de Montiel'* and *'Un día de éstos'*. This question enabled candidates to analyse and discuss in much detail.

Question 4 *Hoy es fiesta*

(a)   The issue of chance versus control was well understood, and candidates were able to show how some characters in the play were influenced by the events and consequently changed the way they saw their lives and prospects.

(b)   This question gave candidates the opportunity to investigate, for example, the depths of misunderstanding between individuals and the effect this had on their relationships and lives.

Question 5 *La camisa*

(a)   Most candidates took note of the rubric to consider Juan's reaction to events throughout the play, and it was essential to consider how and why Juan finally behaves in the way he does in the final scene.

(b)   In this question, candidates were able to show how Olmo depicts the physical poverty of the characters and the setting as well as analyse how individuals were affected psychologically. Juan was a good case in point, but many other examples could be given.

Sección Segunda

Question 6 *La sombra del viento*

(a)   The theme of friendship was well understood and the majority of answers were detailed and thoughtful. Some candidates believed that other themes were as important, but any analysis needed to be within the context of the question, in this case possibly contrasting the nature and consequences of relationships between friends and foes. Candidates should be careful to respond to the question set and not to re-write the question to suit the answer they wish to give.

(b)   Responses to this question needed careful planning – some answers were rather repetitive because candidates took the meaning of *luz* and *sombra* literally; a more figurative interpretation would have given rise to much more material and analysis.

Question 7 *El lago*

(a) / (b)   Few candidates chose to answer on this text.

Question 8 *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

(a)   This question allowed candidates to identify a number of incidents which they saw as central to the development of the plot, and analyse why the author chose to leave them off-stage. The most effective arguments centred on the claustrophobic atmosphere of the *casa* and the importance of sustaining this.

(b)   The issue of '*poder*' can be dealt with on several levels. Some candidates focused on Bernarda's physical control over her daughters' lives, others considered the psychological effect she has on them. Most compared Adela's approach to life to that of her sisters and her grandmother.

Conclusions differed from those who saw Adela as the one in control of her own destiny, to others who believed that Bernarda's power was strengthened by events.

Question 9 *Selección de poemas*

(a)   This poem enabled candidates to explore the themes, versification, influences and ideas which can be related to Darío's work in general. There was good attention to detail and reference in answers.

(b)   This question gave a wide choice of poems and candidates responded well to their individual selections.

Question 10 *Como agua para chocolate*

(a)   Gertrudis proved to be a popular character. Her role incorporates many themes within the novel, ranging from discussion of the role of women to family relationships and her response to Tita's food.

(b)   This question gave rise to much philosophical debate. The best answers showed sensitivity to the issues and to the individual tragedies of the characters.