

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41
Texts

Key messages

There are two key points to emphasise in the preparation for this Paper. The first is to have a very thorough knowledge and understanding of the texts studied. The second is to read most carefully the questions set, to ensure that the response is directly focused on the question.

General comments

Candidates generally followed the rubrics as required. In **Sección 1**, they responded to the instructions by answering **parts (i) and (ii)** very briefly so that **(iii)** was answered as fully as possible.

Those candidates who were well prepared for the Paper were able to perform well. Examiners are aware of continuing disruption to learning across the world and congratulate centres and candidates who have managed to work through this.

Comments on specific questions

Sección 1

Question 1 – Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: *Sab*

- (a) (i) In (i), some answers omitted the information that Sab had helped Enrique.
- (ii) **Part (ii)** only required the response that Sab did not respond as Carlota had expected him to.
- (iii) **Part (iii)** needed a detailed explanation as to why Sab could never be free. He had been offered his freedom from slavery before but refused this. Sab's enslavement to Carlota was a deep attachment, shown in many ways including saving Enrique's life and the lottery money incident. The best answers made reference to this as well as pointing out that Sab was not the stereotypical figure of a slave as he was educated as well as anyone, was given considerable responsibility at the ranch as well as for Carlota, and was highly intelligent and perceptive. His love for Carlota was beyond his control and his race and colour would always result in discrimination (e.g. Jorge Otway's reaction to him). Sab's reason for living was Carlota and her family. Reference to his death is highly relevant.
- (b) Fewer candidates chose this option. Most referred to the mutual support between Martina and Sab, but few recognised that Martina represents indigenous (Amerindian) people. A key scene to be analysed was the visit to her home where the differing attitudes of Enrique, Teresa, Don Carlos and Sab could be observed. Themes concerning society in general, slavery and the role of women also came into play.

Question 2 – Gabriel García Márquez: *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*

- (a) Candidates showed good knowledge of the text. Unfortunately, many responses did not address the question directly; **Part (iii)** clearly states "Hablando de esta pareja ...", referring to Juvenal and Fermina. Many candidates referred only to Fermina and Florentino in their answer. Those who answered correctly were able to analyse the relationship between husband and wife in some detail. It was acceptable to mention Florentino as a contrast, but he should not be central to the argument.

- (b) Hildebranda played an important role in the life of Fermina, offering support and refuge at key moments. They met when Fermina was sent away to forget Florentino and Hildebranda behaved like a sister. Hildebranda's enthusiastic personality was a positive influence on Fermina, and her advice saved the marriage after the Barbara Lynch episode. Ironically Hildebranda's own relationships were not successful as she was in love with a married man and then married someone she did not love. Some central themes of the novel were reflected in her life too.

Question 3 – Anónimo: *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*

- (a) **Parts (i) and (ii)** were answered well. In **part (iii)** the main theme identified was that of survival, followed by poverty. There was a common tendency to focus on only a few of Lazarillo's masters, notably the first three, rather than take a theme and consider its treatment in the novel as a whole. Some good answers analysed the theme of false impressions, linking Lazarillo's initial reactions to his stepfather to events later in the text, such as his experiences with the Escudero. This text was one which led many candidates to be tempted into narrative rather than analysis.
- (b) This question asked candidates to consider both how society and the individual within it are analysed. The nature of society informs the development of the individual. It is not relevant to compare society at the time of Lazarillo with that of the twenty-first century. Themes presented are largely perennial – divisions in society, hierarchies, exploitation of the weak, survival of the fittest, corruption, deception and self-deception. The best answers showed how Lazarillo's attitudes were shaped by his experiences from a range of encounters with individuals from different sectors of society, and why.

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

- (a) The difference between the responses to **parts (i) and (ii)** – birth status and reputation, is the central issue in **part (iii)**. Most candidates were able to differentiate between examples of inherited status and that gained by reputation, based on actions of the individual. Only the best essays analysed the subtleties of the tension between them, as seen in the scenes involving Pedro Crespo and Don Lope.
- (b) This option was less popular. The King does not appear until the end of the play but his influence is seen in the hierarchical nature of society, the fact that the soldiers are fighting on his behalf and the wider issues of loyalty and expectations. When the King arrives, society is in chaos as it appears the individuals have not kept to the accepted rules of behaviour. The King restores order and harmony to society as a whole, enabling all to move on, although in applying justice there are innocent victims. It is more important to restore stability than consider the fate of an individual.

Sección 2

Question 5 – Carmen María Gaité: *Las ataduras* (short story)

- (a) Most candidates were able to give an effective analysis of the narrative technique in this short story. Points made and explored included the use of flashbacks, beginning the narrative in the middle of the story, use of dialogue and a letter to enable the reader to hear the characters' own voices, introspection, metaphors and symbols, especially the river. Some good answers also showed how the techniques enhanced the psychological profiles seen in the text.
- (b) This was the more popular option. Essays generally displayed a good knowledge and sensitive reading of the text. A number of candidates muddled up the names of Alina's father and grandfather, which caused some confusion in the argument. Overall, most discussed Alina's upbringing as happy but influenced by the opposing views of her father and grandfather, and pointed out how this affected her ability to make her own decisions. The presence of Eloy provides a contrast – he is a boy, has family in the Americas and is able to live his life freely. Many missed the fact that Alina seemed to expect Eloy to ask her to go with him. Alina's disappointment and the death of Santiago and his encouragement of her to seek adventure cause her to lose confidence. Societal pressures in the village are clear. To what extent Alina chooses her life is a matter for discussion – some may say she moved from one prison to another. Either view is acceptable, provided the argument is supported from the text.

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

- (a) This text attracted the largest number of responses on the Paper, although this option was less popular than (b).

The essence of the question is to discuss to what extent Lorca's characters are recognisable as 'real' – of "huesos, sangre" and at the same time have "un traje de poesía", in that they express themselves through the language of poetry which takes their experience to a higher, lyrical and universal level. This can be seen in their own words, as the Novia compares the Novio and Leonardo – "un poquito de agua", "un río oscuro", in the "Nana del caballo grande" and the words of the supernatural characters in the final Act. Poetry is used to both heighten and temper the gruesome finale of the play as the victims are led to their fate and the action is off stage, avoiding the physical struggle of the fight. Destiny is at play. Some candidates interpreted the "huesos, sangre" references as a focus on the violence in the play and presence of knives. Many understood the role of the supernatural characters.

- (b) This was a very popular question. All essays referred to the fact that Leonardo was instrumental in the dénouement of the play and the most dynamic character overall. Few analysed the meaning of his name "león", "ardo", but most mentioned the importance of the horse. He is the one, who together with the Novia challenge accepted behaviour by following their feelings rather than the dictates of society and tradition. The background as to why their relationship in the past did not lead to marriage is relevant. The other point to be explored leads on from this; other characters in the play are known by their role in society, they follow the conventional route and are seen in those terms rather than as individuals. Candidates always show much interest in the text and are sensitive to the issues discussed. It is important to plan an answer and select references to make the best use of their knowledge of the play.

Question 7 – Gabriela Mistral: *Tala / Lagar*

- (a) This text attracted a relatively small number of entries so it is not appropriate to make detailed comments. There were some very good responses to this question. Candidates knew how to present a literary commentary and incorporate a personal response.
- (b) This was less popular but gave candidates a wide scope to choose the poems which they felt best addressed the question.

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

- (a) Many candidates chose this text.

This is the type of question when it is particularly beneficial to define the terms of discussion, in this case the meaning of "machismo". Most essays focused on Esteban Trueba, who displayed positive aspects in his fanatically hard work to improve his financial standing and bring prosperity to Las Tres Marías, to the benefit of all. He also swallowed his pride in seeking help to rescue Alba. There were many negative aspects to his behaviour, but as was stated by several candidates, his machismo was probably standard for the time, and necessary to succeed in politics. This was contrasted with Esteban García, who used his power in a malicious, innately evil way to avenge the wrongs done to his family by Trueba. Examples of positive machismo could be seen in Jaime, Severo and Pedro Tercero.

- (b) Most answers to this question tended to trace Tránsito's appearances in the novel and comment on them, rather than find a way of analysing her part within wider themes. She displayed unusual skills of entrepreneurship from a young age, turning her role as a prostitute to that of one supporting and protecting women in the same profession, thanks to a loan from Trueba. Tránsito survives and thrives, making contacts across society, behaving in a way which is unexpected and brave in a world dominated by men. We also have to recognise the fact that Trueba was prepared to support her and this friendship stood him in good stead in rescuing Alba. Consider how Tránsito was part of the unseen economy, but a powerful role model for female solidarity and success, without, as far as we know, a male partner.

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Comments on specific questions

Sección A

Question 1 – Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: *Sab*

- (a) Most answered well on **parts (i) and (ii)**, although the lottery money issue was not clear to some. In **part (iii)**, the majority of responses looked at the injustice of slavery. There were wider considerations here, such as the extremely moral behaviour of Sab, Teresa and Carlota's father compared with that of the Otways. As well as slavery there were references to colonialism, the position of women and the treatment of indigenous people.
- (b) This was a popular question. It is helpful to begin an answer to a question of this type by defining the issues to be discussed. What is the "*ambiente violento*"? The basis of the wealth of landowners depends on slave labour, as described vividly by Sab. The conditions they work in are harsh, in searing heat. They are imprisoned in this way of life. The geographical setting itself can be violent – the storm is a plot driver causing Enrique's fall. The Otways are selfish, greedy and unconcerned about the effect their behaviour has on others. Physical violence is at one remove – alluded to in the lives of slaves. Physical suffering is seen however. Society has been formed by the violent incursion of the Europeans taking control.

Question 2 – Gabriel García Márquez: *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*

- (a) This was a popular question. León was a substitute father figure for Florentino; he gave him a job, trained him, despite some difficult times and eventually gave him status and wealth in taking over the company. This gave Florentino the confidence to approach Fermina again as an equal, and provide their escape in the ship belonging to his company. Fewer candidates mentioned León's bad influence on Florentino's promiscuous behaviour. León also helped Florentino's mother and was generous overall, perhaps indulgent.
- (b) Most answers focused on the fact that Leona and Florentino did not have a romantic relationship. Few gave sufficient emphasis to the extent of Leona's importance in the novel as a whole, preferring to explain why Fermina was "*la verdadera mujer de su vida*". The first meeting between Florentino and Leona, on a tram, revealed Florentino's prejudices. Once these were overcome,

Leona, more than León, enabled Florentino to become wealthy and successful. She was a supreme business woman, running the company so skilfully that Florentino's future was secure. In this way she was the key woman in his life. Leona's attitude to Florentino is refreshing in that she sees him as a son rather than a potential partner, even though she is younger than he is. This reflects the difference in maturity and personality between them. Leona is secure in herself; Florentino needs the approbation of others. Florentino was however able to establish a meaningful relationship with a woman on an equal footing.

Question 3 – Anónimo: *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*

- (a) There were many answers on this text. Responses to this question tended to show how much Lazarillo had suffered through the course of his life with his many masters and that in contrast he now had a comfortable, secure way of life. The irony of the statement was not always addressed – was he really at the peak of his good fortune? An interesting comment was that as Lazarillo had already experienced the benefits of his mother's lover who provided food for him, he was prepared to accept the situation with the Archpriest. The moral aspect, in that Lazarillo had been corrupted by those he encountered, was less fully discussed. Some mentioned that Lazarillo was not purely led by benefit for himself, giving the example of him leaving the buldero. Self-deception was recognised by some.
- (b) This question also attracted many essays arguing whether the text is primarily a literary work rather than a picture of society at the time. A number of candidates felt that as a criticism of various institutions of the time, it is automatically realistic. Perhaps a better argument was the idea that the necessity for anonymity on the part of the author was evidence that the story would be taken seriously and therefore likely to contain some truth. One of the author's stated intentions was to entertain; this can be seen in the use of humour and exaggeration for dramatic effect as well as the lively dialogue. Many felt that Lázaro himself was a credible character and the reader was able to empathise with him and understand why he behaved as he did.

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

- (a) Answers to **part (i)** were generally secure although in **part (ii)** some candidates did understand Don Mendo's situation.

The best answers to **part (iii)** explained the meaning of "*linaje*" and gave examples of its importance to Pedro Crespo, one of the characters in the play who values his family, heritage and reputation as much as any noble. This is underlined by his refusal to buy an aristocratic title. Crespo sees honest acknowledgment and pride in one's own heritage is a virtue in itself. Some essays mentioned that prejudice regarding the status of family was instrumental in the way a number of characters behave; Isabel in particular was a victim of this. At the end of the play the King has to restore order and he recognises the merits of Crespo, even though a villano by birth.

- (b) The Sargento may not have a major part in the play but is instrumental in the plot development in organising lodgings for the Captain because he has heard about Isabel and knows this will be of interest. This suggests that he knows his master well, and is prepared to pander to his desires, whether these may be advisable or not. The audience gets to know the Captain better through the conversations with the Sargento, and begin to understand what motivates him and how he comes to a decision. As part of this, the Captain chooses to ignore the Sargento's sensible advice thus enhancing the Sargento's reputation in our eyes. A similar point was made in that the Sargento chose to tie up Crespo rather than execute him – a key episode in the plot.

Sección 2

Question 5 – Carmen Martín Gaité: *Las ataduras (short story)*

- (a) This question focused on whether the author was able to give the reader a psychological insight into the characters created in the story. The task could be described as examining how and why characters behave the way they do and the effect they have on others. Most answers focused on Benjamín, Santiago and Alina. Benjamín's wish that Alina stays in the village and follows his example reflects the life he has led, with great affection for the location and its traditions. Santiago recognises what Benjamín is doing and wishes to give Alina wider horizons and a belief that it is possible to move away from the familiar and be successful. These opposing views leave Alina with a difficult task. We trace her path, which suffers a setback when her friend Eloy leaves for the

Americas. There is much to discuss regarding Alina's choices to study away from home, but she then becomes pregnant, has to marry and then follows her husband's path. To what extent she chose her own way or let someone else decide for her gives us an insight into her psychological makeup. Some candidates felt that Philippe, as an outsider, has greater insight into the characters and dynamics in Alina's family.

- (b) More candidates chose to answer this question. The best responses argued that although the main character is female, she is irrevocably moulded by the male figures in her life, thus making the variety of male perspectives a key element in the novel. Some pointed out how deeply Alina absorbed influences in the scene where the waiter reminded her of Eloy, who had been a childhood friend and had travelled away many years previously.

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

- (a) The text was answered by virtually all candidates and this question was very popular. The question asks candidates to analyse the title. Most essays focused on the "*sangre*" element of the title, stating that it jarred with the concept of a wedding. The juxtaposition of the two ideas predicted a bloody end of some sort. Discussion of "*Bodas*" generally looked at this in the singular in that the wedding between the Novio and Novia was seen as a transactional arrangement as all the conversations focused on the practical issues. The fact that "*Bodas*" is plural could have led to an analysis of another wedding – that of the Novia and Leonardo. This did not go ahead as he was not wealthy enough, but the relationship between the two is that of attraction, passion, not finances. Which is the true "*Boda*"? "*Sangre*" also has other connotations such as family ties or inherited characteristics which are referred to in the play and could add another layer to the discussion.
- (b) This option was not quite as popular, but produced some interesting essays. Many candidates had good background knowledge of Lorca's study of Greek theatre. Essays recognised the poetic and dramatic value of the supernatural figures and their representations of death and destiny. There were also references to the idea of a higher order of beings taking charge after humans had subverted the natural order of things. The arranged marriage was against natural passions but the lovers had disrupted the traditional order in following their own feelings rather than accepting what society wanted. Analysis of the poetic images and the change of pace in the drama from the frenetic chase to a calm and controlled atmosphere, ironically leading to death, was also relevant. When asked which part of "*Bodas de sangre*" he liked the best, Lorca replied "*Aquel en que intervienen la Luna y la Muerte, como elementos y símbolos de la fatalidad. El realismo que precede hasta este instante la tragedia, se quiebra y desaparece para dar paso a la fantasía poética, donde es natural que yo me encuentre como el pez en el agua.*"

Question 7 – Gabriela Mistral: *Tala / Lagar*

- (a) This text was answered by fewer candidates. In these circumstances it is appropriate not to make specific comments on responses. This option requires candidates to be familiar with the technique of producing a detailed literary commentary.
- (b) This option gives much scope to candidates to choose whichever aspects of the title they choose to analyse and the poems used to support the argument.

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

- (a) This was the less popular option on this text. Responses were well informed, with candidates commenting on the fact that besides the familial link, all the female characters' names were associated with whiteness and clarity, a link to feminist ideals. The roles of these characters was traced from Nívea, who even persuaded her husband to become a politician in order to work for female suffrage. Clara, her daughter and granddaughter did not all take part in activism but all were clear about their wishes and rights and stood up for them, challenging the status quo.
- (b) Many candidates chose to answer this option. The theme of love is a wide ranging one throughout the novel, encompassing romantic love, friendship, love and loyalty to country and to family. In answering this type of question, planning is key to avoid lists without analysis or comment. Many candidates focused on Trueba but were able to show how he changed over time, becoming more empathetic and gaining a different perspective on life. He began as someone driven to succeed and become wealthy, using people for his own ends and motivated by selfishness. At the same time he improves the lives of many but does not consider the full picture. An interesting comment

here is the love of the indigenous people living on the ranch for their land, and how they were treated. His relationship with Clara is key to his life. As he grows older he moderates his views of Pedro Tercero for the sake of Blanca and his closeness to Alba results in a real crisis for him as he is prepared to do anything to secure her release. Here he relies on someone else, Tránsito, to bring this about. His pride no longer clouds his feelings as his compassion and protective love is selfless. Some candidates also felt that this gave an optimistic view of the future development of society.

