How would you evaluate the following introductions? How could they be improved?

(a) ‘Not every reader of La ciudad y los perros will agree that the price paid for the various stylistic permutations one finds in it, for the episodic structure of the book and its covert system of information, is justified’ (Peter Standish). Discuss.
Vargas Llosa employed an unconventional and striking narrative technique in the writing of his novel La ciudad y los perros. Rather than the traditional linear and chronological plot he used a sequence of episodes which alternate between past and present. He also introduced a number of distinct narrators and narrative styles which are not always clearly labelled for the reader. Unravelling the threads of the novel’s structure thus becomes a major focus during the reading process. This essay will argue that the ‘price’ paid for these is not merely ‘justified’, but that the structure is essential to the novel’s significance.

(b) Discuss the nightmare quality of Conrad’s narrative.
The essence of Conrad’s writing is not to be found in a common subject, characterization, theme or narrative technique, but rather in a style or approach that governs and transcends all of these. Conrad attempts to deal with human experiences of incredible depth and intensity, concentrating on the darker elements of emotional and psychological anguish, with a dual focus on the inner conflict created by external forces beyond a character’s control and the evil inherent in humanity. How does Conrad achieve this nightmarish effect?

(c) ‘In Cien años de soledad, humour is inseparable from a serious, even tragic view of human existence.’ Discuss.
Some of the major themes of Gabriel García Márquez’s most famous novel can fall foul to misinterpretation, or at least provoke different reactions across cultures. The novel is seen as ‘other’ to a British audience, a description of a fantasy world, which is incorporated into the European state of mind by terming it exoticism. Yet when the book was first published in Colombia, and Latin America as a whole, the response of its readership was one of recognition of everyday life and familial traditions, and a satirical representation of real historical events. This element of the book was naturally lost on the majority of non-Latin American readers, due to a lack of catch-all references to salsa or native savages covered in war paint – as Borges once said, there are no camels in the Quran. The one theme which crosses cultural boundaries with ease is that of humour, which is abundant from the outset, and both explicit and subtle. It is human nature across the planet to laugh, especially at the things we are most scared of, and to turn serious issues on their head in order to make them more bearable, but in Cien años de soledad, I would contest that not all of the humour has tragic or serious roots.

(d) Discuss the culterano features of Góngora’s works.
Arising from Renaissance poetic theory, ‘culteranismo’ and ‘conceptismo’ became, through the work of Góngora and his contemporaries, arguably the most significant stylistic developments in early seventeenth-century Spanish literature. In its broadest sense, the term ‘culteranismo’ refers to a deliberate attempt on the part of a poet to render his language and style more intricate and elaborate. Words and syntaxes of a Latinate origin were introduced; allusions and tropes of various kinds were woven densely into the verse. Poems in the ‘culto’ style were self-consciously crafted, their artifice being greatly admired by the learned reader for whom they were written. Although the target for much criticism, particularly concerning the narrowness of his ballads’ appeal in comparison with the traditional ‘romance’, the ‘culto’ style employed by Góngora was effective in enriching Spanish poetry in its diction, its syntax and its figurative language.