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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

FRENCH

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 8670/04

Texts

General comments

The recent reduction in the number of prescribed texts appears to have been matched by an increasing tendency for most Centres to choose the same texts. The vast majority of answers were on Alain-Fournier, Molière and Joffo. It should be noted, however, that the popularity of a text does not guarantee a consistently high quality of response to the questions set. Examiners awarded a very wide range of marks on these and other topics, and found some mature and well-informed answers to questions which few candidates attempted. Such answers provide Examiners with a welcome change from what can be repetitive material.

The overall level of performance was satisfactory, and few candidates scored very low marks. Those who attempted a context question often failed to gain much credit, because they spent too much time on narrative and not enough on analysis in relation to the precise points raised by the questions. Some candidates did not give equal attention to each part of a context question. There was a tendency to copy out lines of the printed text to no useful purpose.

Most essays displayed a sound knowledge of the text and understanding of the characters, but high marks could only be awarded to those – and they do not yet constitute a clear majority – who can marshal their material in such a way as to reach a clear and logically argued conclusion with regard to the question posed.

A particular problem arose in some scripts with the assessment of guided commentaries, in that candidates failed to indicate where the subsections of their answers began. Occasionally, it seemed that one part had been omitted altogether, or that the candidate had written a general essay on the text or mixed up the issues raised in the various sections of the guided commentary. Candidates are advised to focus on the passage and to label each part of the answer. Similarly, in **Section B** candidates should label their essays clearly.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) As always, a very large number of candidates had studied this text, and their answers produced a wide range of marks. Most were able to provide a sound explanation of the note left by Frantz. Many produced excessively detailed narrative at the expense of analysing what the note tells the reader about Frantz's character, whereas the better answers included such observations as 'Frantz était capricieux de nature', 'il ne voulait plus comprendre', 'il n'a pas le sens de la réalité', and wrote of his being an over-indulged child who retained an 'esprit enfantin' and, most obviously, a taste for self-dramatisation. With regard to the role of the clothes, most candidates successfully pointed out the distinction between the world of fantasy and that of reality, but the more competent answers included references to the fact that Meaulnes is still wearing the waistcoat later in the story. The third part of the question was handled fairly well on a narrative level. More credit was due to the minority of candidates who focused on Meaulnes long and painful search for an experience equal in intensity to that he had experienced in the 'domaine mystérieux'.
- (b) Answers to the essay question were, on the whole, mediocre. Very few candidates specified the context of Seurel's remark, i.e. the contrast between life with Meaulnes and life without Meaulnes, which was the essential focus of a good answer.

Question 2

- (a) There was a generally satisfactory response to this scene in terms of the situation and the opinions of the characters. Most candidates had a good grasp of Dorine's relationship with Orgon and her opinion of Tartuffe, and there were not many who failed to situate the passage in relation to Orgon's recent return and questioning of Dorine. It was generally agreed that Cléante's reproach was justifiable, but a number of candidates failed to specify what aspects of family life were being neglected as a result of Orgon's obsession, preferring to reiterate the exchanges between Dorine and Orgon dealt with in the first part of the commentary. Very few answers dealt competently with the comic aspect of Orgon's description of Tartuffe, and it was disappointing to find that an understanding of the unconscious irony of Orgon's words was restricted to a small number of candidates.
- (b) The essay question on Dorine prompted many competent character studies, but few who attempted the question went beyond 'Commentez le rôle de Dorine' to include 'par rapport à ce jugement', i.e. her role in defusing potentially tense or worrying developments. Many could manage comments such as 'Dorine est très perspicace', but it was a rare pleasure to read, for example, 'Grâce à son ironie, elle aide à détendre l'atmosphère du dernier acte', together with examples of her use of wit and irony in a dramatic situation.

Question 3

- (a) Relatively few candidates opted for this text. Most of those who did showed a clear knowledge of the situation and were able to assess the attitudes of Jupiter and Electre with a fair degree of accuracy and detail. Shortcomings in the commentaries were over-use of apparently ill-digested existentialist jargon, uncertainty as to the implications of the citizens' possible release from their subservient life-style, and a lack of reference to the negative aspects of Oreste's upbringing by the Pédagogue and his itinerant existence.
- (b) There were very few answers to the question on the role of 'les mouches'. They ranged from thorough and perceptive analysis of the destructive effect of remorse and the vulnerability of certain characters to vague summaries of the plot.

Question 4

- (a) This work was studied by only a small number of candidates. The guided commentaries generally displayed a fairly clear awareness of the situation and a reasonable level of understanding of the characters. Most were able to supply substantial detail on mademoiselle Gamard's plans for revenge on Birotteau, but relatively few understood the importance attached by Balzac to the fact that she is a spinster. Examiners were surprised that most candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with this central theme.
- (b) Few attempted the essay question, but those who did were mostly able to give a fair account of the society described in the novel.

Section B

Question 5

- (a) Option (a) was a popular choice. Some candidates spent too much time describing the child's illness and the husband's behaviour. Many wrote at length about the traumatic experience of witnessing a death by burning, but did not always show successfully how or why Anjali overcame this trauma. The better essays concentrated not only on the idea of capitulation to various pressures but also on the issue of self-discovery and emancipation.
- (b) Not many candidates chose to write about the relationship between Anjali and Mauritius. Answers tended to be about the role of women in that society and failed to look at the ambiguities implied by the statement in the essay's title.

Question 6

- (a) Candidates' perceptions of life in 'free France' were astonishingly varied. Some thought that when the boys crossed the frontier they entered a kind of paradise, insofar as they could go to the cinema, go swimming and so on. Others focused on the dangers and deprivations encountered there, and concluded that it was just as bad as occupied France. The best essays aimed not only at a balanced view, but also showed an awareness of the particular circumstances of Italian occupied Menton and Nice, and the changes brought about by the arrival of the Germans after Italy's surrender.
- (b) Many candidates attempted the essay question, and Examiners felt that it was mistakenly seen as an easy option by those who were keen to write well-prepared character studies. Their mistake was to ignore to a greater or lesser degree the need to explain why they found the characters interesting. Many had prepared an essay on the ways in which war brings out positive human qualities, but 'kind' does not mean the same as 'interesting', and an essay answering a question which has not been set cannot score a high mark. That said, candidates who made a valid attempt to justify their choice were suitably rewarded.

Question 7

- (a) There were more good answers on the study of 'la condition féminine' than on the question as to whether Pomme is ordinary or extraordinary. In the former case, some dwelt at length on general matters of feminist propaganda and offered sweeping generalisations based on only two or three characters. A few answers were perceptive and detailed and showed a good understanding of the novel.
- (b) The latter topic prompted many candidates to change their minds several times as they wrote their answer. They were not required to classify each phase of Pomme's behaviour as ordinary or extraordinary, but to show how and why her inability to communicate with people gets worse rather than better. Candidates often seemed confused by the need to make a judgement, preferring to relate events and to include superfluous detail about the other protagonists.

Question 8

- (a) Only a few candidates attempted (a) and they did not find it easy to score high marks, largely as a result of an imbalance between their appreciation of the tragic aspects of the story but not the comic.
- (b) Answers to (b) were generally painstaking rather than interesting. The better answers demonstrated the ability to address the issue of bad luck and fate as well as the character of the mother and the injustice practised by the authorities.