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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 majority of candidates wrote a maximum of 600 words in line with the recommendation on the front page of the Paper. Those who wrote at excessive length often did so at the expense of relevance to the question, and thereby did themselves no favours. Answers were attempted on all the prescribed texts. Once again, there was a strong preference for *Le Grand Meaulnes* and *Tartuffe*. A substantial number of candidates answered questions on *Les Mouches*, but in a good many cases they appeared to find the text challenging. There were relatively few answers on *Le Curé de Tours*, and although most candidates were familiar with the plot, they were less adept at analysing characterisation and social satire. Predictably, the majority of answers to questions in **Section B** were on *Un Sac de billes*, a text which candidates invariably enjoy and know well. Their knowledge of the text is not always matched by an ability to focus this on the question. Those who have studied the other texts in this section produced work of widely varying quality.

The overall level of performance was satisfactory. However, rather more candidates scored very low marks than was the case last June, and there were few scripts which could be described as consistently good or excellent. This was because factual knowledge was not supported by analytical skill or the ability to structure essays convincingly. A significant number of candidates gave the impression that they were producing rehearsed material with only a tenuous link to the question. Commentaries on the set passages were again bedevilled by excessive and often irrelevant narrative with insufficient analysis in relation to the precise points raised by the questions.

It was pleasing to see that Centres appeared to have taken note of comment in last year's report with regard to the observance of rubrics and in particular the labelling of answers. However, some scripts again offered commentaries in which the subsections were not indicated. Most candidates make it clear in the first paragraph of their answer that they are intending to address a particular issue. Many return to this in the conclusion. Examiners welcome and reward consistent evidence in the body of the essay that the candidate has not neglected the set topic in favour of a general discussion of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Alain-Fournier, *Le Grand Meaulnes*

As always, a very large number of candidates had studied this text, and their answers produced a wide range of marks. The passage was easily identified by most candidates. They should be reminded that the first question on each passage does not demand a lengthy answer, let alone a paraphrase of the text up to the point at which the passage occurs. Most were able to explain Meaulnes' *désarroi* in terms of his encounter with Frantz. The better answers included reference to the fact that Frantz unburdened himself to Meaulnes despite their never having met and also to the appearance of the revolver. Most understood the reasons for the guests' preparations for departure, but weaker candidates thought that they were already fully informed about the collapse of Frantz's plans. The last question gave the opportunity to able candidates to discuss the essential ambiguity of Meaulnes' position at this point, situating it in the context of his continuing restlessness throughout the novel rather than focusing solely on the ambitions which he had fulfilled. It was important to see the irony implicit in the rhetorical question. Answers to the essay question were, on the whole, mediocre, often because they attempted to reach a value judgement about each relationship rather than taking an overall view of the author's position and evaluating it with examples. There was a tendency in one or two Centres to produce prepared essays on the relationships between Meaulnes, Seurel and Frantz. Candidates who did so found it difficult to convince Examiners that these friendships were strictly relevant to the theme of love.

Question 2Molière, *Tartuffe*

The majority of candidates were able to identify the *crime* referred to in the first question. A number of answers failed to specify Tartuffe's attempt to seduce Elmire, others unnecessarily reviewed his behaviour throughout the play. The circumstances of Orgon's discovery were accurately described by almost all candidates. Mme Pernelle's reaction was appropriately discussed, although only a minority of candidates were minded, and rightly so, to describe the character as grotesque, bigoted, and above all ridiculous. Commenting on Orgon's behaviour in relation to his earlier insistence on Tartuffe's saintly qualities, some candidates again rehearsed the *Et Tartuffe...le pauvre homme* scene (among others) whereas the more astute concentrated on the irony of the situation in which Orgon is hoist with his own petard. Few candidates seemed well acquainted with Molière's comic techniques, exemplified here by Mme Pernelle's mechanical responses and the predictability of Orgon's rage at not getting the response he required. Answers to the essay question fell broadly into two categories: those who correctly addressed the issues of false piety and blinkered bigotry and those who failed to take account of the crucial point spelled out by Cléante, namely that true and discreet piety is not the object of Molière's satire. The best essays showed knowledge and understanding of both Orgon and Mme Pernelle as examples of piety gone mad, and Tartuffe as a caricature of piety who cannot conceal his true nature from anyone but the most blind and obsessive.

Question 3Sartre, *Les Mouches*

Rather more candidates opted for this text than was the case last year. For some, it seemed to have been problematic, in that they apparently experienced difficulty in grasping the philosophical issues sufficiently well to be able to adapt their knowledge to the demands of the passage and the questions. However, there was some very good work here too, with apposite comments on the lives of the people of Argos and the defiant behaviour of Electre. Fewer answers dealt confidently with the question about Oreste's behaviour in the passage: those who asserted that it was indeed typical of him missed the point that this is the first occasion in the play on which he identifies himself with the situation and expresses a degree of involvement. Candidates who understood the implications of this defining moment scored high marks. Those who attempted the essay question showed a sound understanding of the role of authority and supported their argument with relevant references.

Question 4Balzac, *Le Curé de Tours*

This work was studied by only a small number of candidates. The guided commentaries generally displayed a fairly clear awareness of the situation, although not all commentaries focused successfully on Mlle Gamard's frustrated social ambitions. There was a good level of understanding of the character of l'abbé Troubert and the irony of his description of Mlle Gamard. Not many attempted the essay question, and there were few among them who went beyond a narrative level to explore the self-seeking aspects of the characters' activities or to analyse Balzac's portrayal of the motivating forces underlying their changes of allegiance.

Section 2**Question 5**Devi, *Le Voile de Draupadi*

Candidates' work on this text seems to have improved steadily since it first appeared. Option (b) was a popular choice, and most answers demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the reasons for Anjali's decision. The better answers avoided dwelling at length on the obvious factor of her son's illness, and the best addressed the second part of the question in relation to her resolve to determine her own fate. Those answers which glossed over the very important issue of emancipation were less able to come to a view about whether or not admiration was an appropriate response.

Question 6

Joffo, *Un Sac de billes*

This text has clearly been read and enjoyed by many candidates. Whereas the existence of past essay questions on the Devi text seems to have had a positive effect on the quality of examination answers, the same cannot be said of this (ultimately much more straightforward) option. Examiners have repeatedly been faced with pre-learned essays which offer only a mention of the current question. Thus, at the lowest level of attainment, a conventional study of the negative features of the war and the Nazi occupation was not appropriate as a response to either of the questions set in this Paper. Mutual support within the family and the generosity of spirit shown by complete strangers offered good evidence of the positive aspects evoked by the first question, and it was particularly good to find the occasional answer offering a sense of the darker side of events in order to show that this is outweighed by an ultimately affirmative mood. Answers on the humorous elements were mostly superficial and often failed to go beyond narrative accounts of incidents which the boys simply enjoyed. Examples of humour offered by candidates were not always appropriate, and many essays gave the impression of producing a random sample of the boys' experiences. Examiners found only occasional evidence that a candidate had appreciated the nature of the author's sense of humour.

Question 7

Lainé, *La Dentellière*

There were more competent answers on the work as a critique of society than on the *mélange de styles différents*. Those who were aware of the feminist theme and the author's agenda were able to do well on the former question. That said, some who attempted it only wrote a series of character sketches which did not usually constitute an argument. Examiners expect candidates to be aware of any 'message' explicit or implicit in a work studied at this level, and award high marks to those who can discuss the text in this light. It must be repeated that candidates are at liberty to challenge in an informed way the validity of an author's agenda, but appropriate credit is not available to those who distort or misunderstand it. Answers on the novel's mixture of styles were almost all very disappointing, and Examiners were surprised that candidates who appeared to have little or no understanding of this aspect had opted for this question.

Question 8

Duras, *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*

The overall improvement in candidates' performance on the Devi text is also true of this one. There was some good work in response to both these questions. Option (a) gave the opportunity to write a balanced account of two contrasting aspects, and Examiners were happy for candidates to weight their argument in either direction provided that their case was clearly argued and supported by suitable examples. Answers on (b) similarly generated plenty of appropriate detail, and most candidates were able to place the three objects in the context of the themes of the novel. Answers on this text were found to be relatively well focused on the question. Once again, this feature of an essay is highly significant in the awarding of marks.