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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

Most candidates made a conscious effort to respect the word limit for each essay. Those who did not appear to do so were often penalising themselves on two counts: essays of excessive length cannot score more than 17, and candidates who write too much usually fail to focus on the question, and often leave themselves insufficient time to do equal justice to all three questions.

The number of candidates attempting only two questions or writing two essays on the same text, increased this year.

There remain considerable differences of approach to the planning of essays. Where a plan is in note form and demonstrates an ability to focus on the issues raised by the question, it serves its purpose well. However, some candidates spend too much time writing unnecessarily detailed outlines, and others write out plans of prepared essays. These are counter-productive in that they betray a lack of consideration for the Examiner's agenda.

The legitimate presence of texts in the examination room has given rise to a number of concerns. There was clear evidence that some candidates relied too heavily on printed introductions and/or notes. In some Centres, many candidates obviously drew on the same material, particularly when writing opening paragraphs. In extreme cases, much of a candidate's essay appeared to be derivative. Examiners have referred such cases to Cambridge for the attention of the Malpractice authorities, and it must be made clear that such practices are systematically penalised.

With regard to the use of texts for quotation, candidates could be reminded that no credit is awarded for copying out lengthy extracts from the text, or indeed from the examination paper. Credit is given for the appropriate use of brief, relevant quotations in order to illustrate a point.

Examiners again reported the extensive use of pre-learned material, often unrelated to the question set and failing to demonstrate understanding. Such material, like extensive and largely irrelevant narrative, usually places an answer in a category which is not regarded as 'passable'.

The most popular texts were, once again, *Le Grand Meaulnes*, *Tartuffe* and *Un Sac de billes*. There were very few takers for *Le Curé de Tours*, and fewer than in previous sessions for *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Alain-Fournier: *Le Grand Meaulnes*

Most candidates were confidently able to place the extract in its context and explain Meaulnes' sense of regret and anger. Some wasted valuable time on unnecessarily detailed narrative. The second part of the question produced responses of more variable quality. The least perceptive contented themselves with observations based on the idea that Frantz was similar to Meaulnes, or merely that he was his best friend.

Answers which addressed only the similarities between the characters tended to miss the point of Meaulnes' use of the superlative here. Whilst many were able to refer to their shared sense of loss, relatively few focused on the important idea of Frantz's Romantic idealism and quest for perfect happiness. Responses to the question of Valentine's level of culpability were too often unduly censorious of her, and what was wanted was a more balanced account, including some suggestion that a measure of blame could also be ascribed to both Meaulnes and Frantz.

Most candidates who attempted the essay question found it difficult to take an overall view of the author's intentions. They were too inclined to take a narrative line and demonstrate that this or that experience brought happiness or failure. This generally led to a kind of quantitative conclusion based on the number of positive or negative experiences for the characters that the candidate happened to remember. Those opting for this essay should perhaps have considered at the outset what the work conveys as a whole, and illustrated this as appropriate, rather than taking the story as the point of departure.

Question 2

Molière: *Tartuffe*

The first part of the commentary provided an object lesson in the value of a judicious use of the text under examination conditions. The 'lessons' referred to in the question could easily be identified by referring to what Dorine had said. Many candidates failed to look at this precise reference and indulged in lengthy paraphrases of Dorine's views on *Tartuffe*, and on Orgon as well as on Mariane's circumstances. A large number of answers thus failed to highlight the issue of potential infidelity. Candidates were divided in their opinions of Dorine's tone, finding it either out of place for a servant (some seemed quite shocked!) or appropriate in view of the need to be forceful. The best candidates recognised Dorine's loyalty to Mariane as a key factor, and the very best also saw that she was motivated by loyalty towards the family in general, and to Orgon himself. Orgon's high-handed behaviour found more or less universal disapproval among the candidates, although some found mitigation in the social conventions of the time, often failing in the name of historical accuracy to note a significant feature of Molière's comic characterisation: the tyrant who is not ultimately threatening because he is isolated and incompetent. The third part of the question again found some candidates failing to look at the text; those who mistakenly wrote as though this was also about Dorine's perception of the marriage could earn no credit here, as the whole point was Orgon's fantasy and its laughable lack of contact with reality.

Answers on Cléante were either pedestrian or, in a minority of cases, very good. Paraphrases of his views and descriptions of his character were generally accurate, but candidates were generally incautious in their use of the term *porte-parole*, seeing this as the character's only *raison d'être*. Relatively few showed an understanding, either of the dramatic function of the *raisonneur* as a purveyor of rather boring advice, which the comic character systematically ignores, or of the specific issues which Molière had to address in view of the accusations of anti-clericalism. It was also rare to find answers which quoted the key lines spoken by Cléante on the subject of religion in order to promote the idea of 'une religion humaine et traitable'.

Question 3

Sartre: *Les Mouches*

Once again, this text often seemed to have proved very testing for those who studied it, as answers were rarely indicative of a sound grasp of the issues. The phrase *précieux fardeau* was deliberately chosen to test candidates' understanding of the ambiguous nature of the exercise of freedom and the acceptance of responsibility, but only a minority of answered conveyed this. Answers to the second question were mostly vague and superficial. The matter of Électre's behaviour was more competently handled, with most showing an understanding of her weakness.

The theme of freedom was mostly illustrated by the situation in Argos (artificial enslavement) rather than by the development of Oreste's understanding of freedom, from his earlier education to his affirmation of its true nature and value. Once again, an overall view of the author's intentions was needed rather than an episodic approach attempting a series of conclusions in relation to each character or group of characters.

Question 4

Balzac: *Le Curé de Tours*

Only a handful of candidates attempted these questions, with the result that no general conclusions usefully be drawn.

Section B**Question 5**

Devi: *Le Voile de Draupadi*

There has been some very good work on this text in the last few sessions. On this occasion, its popularity seemed to be declining, and the quality of answers was generally lower. Some candidates who wrote about Anjali's mother did so with considerable insight, although relatively few answers managed to trace each of the passages in the book, which focus on her lot in life. Surprisingly, a number of candidates either misread the question or ignored it, presenting essays on Anjali herself. There were not many answers to the second question. Most concentrated on the negative aspects, showing a fair range of knowledge. Only a few answers perceived the possibility of a glimmer of optimism.

Question 6

Joffo: *Un Sac de billes*

Again, many candidates chose to respond to this text. High marks were reserved for those who dealt with all four brothers, and who offered some understanding of the way in which the relationship between Maurice and Joseph evolved. Many essays dwelt at unnecessary length on the opening section of the story at the expense of a balanced account, and then simply recounted one or two episodes in which the brothers helped each other. It was apparent that a good many candidates did not appreciate the difference between the instructions *analysez* and *racontez*, only one of which was given. The second essay offered some very able candidates the opportunity to discuss the author's underlying aims, and their efforts were suitably rewarded. Others, wrongly saw the opportunity to write pre-learned essays on such topics as 'la perte de l'enfance' or 'l'horreur de la guerre', which were inevitably one-sided in their approach.

Question 7

Lainé: *La Dentellière*

The first essay produced a range of responses varying from the sensitive and intelligent to the seriously confused. Most were able to offer some insight into the passivity of Pomme and of her mother. Fuller responses dealt appropriately with the theme of food. Able candidates tackled the relationships which demonstrate Pomme's passivity, but the weaker ones strayed into arid territory, attempting to show that the manipulative characters were also passive, which suggested a limited grasp of the implications of the question. The issue of class barriers was generally not well handled. Candidates wrote about male versus female and rich versus poor, but the issue of lack of communication between social categories was rarely found in these candidates' answers.

Question 8

Duras: *Barrage contre le Pacifique*

Several Examiners found no answers on this text. Those who did, found fairly detailed responses on the characters of Monsieur Jo, with relatively few answers going on to indicate the importance of his role in providing, among other things, the opportunity for the family to escape to the city. There were so few attempts at the second question that there emerged no discernible patterns worthy of comment.