

FRENCH

Paper 8670/04

Texts

General comments

The paper produced a wide spread of marks, but with a more substantial proportion in the middle and lower reaches of the scale than at the top. All questions were attempted, but so few candidates answered on *Le Chercheur d'Or* and *Tanguy* that it is impossible to comment usefully on trends, strengths and weaknesses. As expected, Molière and Zobel were the most popular authors. That said, there was a good response to the return of Mauriac, and a fair degree of interest in that of Flaubert.

Only one or two Centres presented a significant number of candidates who wrote at excessive length. The pattern was clearly defined, and it appeared that in these isolated cases, it had not been explained to candidates that an essay which could have scored a high mark was capped at a maximum of 17, as has been the case for some considerable time. A number of candidates, notably from Centres with a very small entry, answered two questions on the same text. There were even some instances of candidates attempting six essays. It must be repeated that this practice is self-penalising.

The vast majority of scripts were legible and well presented. Examiners continue to draw attention to the fact that some candidates do not state, in **Section B**, which essay they are attempting, and it is not always easy to tell. There is no need for candidates to waste time copying out the title, but they should be told to write clearly the number and letter of the question they have chosen. Candidates should also be aware that there is no merit in reproducing objective information about dates of publication, first performances of plays and other facts which, in most cases, have no bearing on the essay topic. An introductory paragraph which outlines the candidate's approach to the question and communicates a clear understanding of its implications is of much greater value.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Mauriac: *Le Nœud de vipères*

- (a) There were considerable variations in the amount of detail candidates supplied about the situation described in the extract. Candidates who knew the text well had no difficulty here, but a small number failed to establish that the scene unfolds in Paris, and assumed that the church was in Calèse, thus distorting the answer. There was some uncertainty about why Louis went to the café, and about the accidental nature of his presence at the planned meeting. In the second part of the question, most sympathised with Louis' attitude and justified it by referring to his betrayal by Robert and the determination of the others to get their hands on the inheritance. It would have been refreshing to find some suggestion that he was at least partly responsible for the conspiracy against him. However, most candidates tended to take a 'black and white' approach. Conversely, commentary on Hubert's nauseating hypocrisy, characterised by his crossing himself with holy water, did not require a balanced judgement. Candidates were curiously reluctant to state that it was typical of him, insofar as it revealed his complete inability to perceive any conflict or even ironic contrast between his true preoccupations and the superficial display of piety.

- (b) Relatively few candidates opted for the essay question, and their performance was generally poor. In some cases, the essay was completely off the point, and little credit was gained by those who did not focus on the material referred to in the question. Candidates did not seem able to comment on the contrast between Hubert's attitude and that of Janine, let alone to analyse the letters in order to point out, for example, the importance to Hubert of destroying the evidence in the interests of his family's reputation. It was not possible to answer this question adequately without an understanding of the two characters' differing interpretations of Louis' 'conversion', and it was regrettable that candidates who were not in a position to do this opted unwisely to attempt this topic.

Question 2

Molière: *Les Femmes savantes*

- (a) Most candidates gave a clear and detailed account of Martine's 'crime' and the significance of Chrysale's reaction. Few failed to understand that he was avoiding a confrontation he was bound to lose. That said, most candidates found it difficult to maintain the standard of the first part of their answer when tackling the issue raised in the second. It was simply not enough to paraphrase Martine's ungrammatical utterances in order to demonstrate their comic effect. Once again, candidates did not seem to appreciate the nature of Molière's comic techniques. The issue here was one of interplay and excessive reaction, not just of the inaccuracy of Martine's grammar. A major misunderstanding was the notion that Martine was deliberately making mistakes in order to annoy Philaminte, whereas it is in fact her naturalness, in comic contrast to the artificiality of the other women, which is at issue. Comments on Bélise were mostly sound but some candidates included irrelevant references to her dealings with Clitandre.
- (b) The above comments on (ii) are equally valid for the way in which many candidates dealt with the essay question. They tended to labour the issues which might be considered as 'dramatic' without going on to say that the whole point of the play is to provoke mocking laughter at the expense of those whose pretensions are not matched by their performance.

Question 3

Anouilh: *Becket*

- (a) Candidates showed a good awareness of the strained relationships in this scene, but many were less clear about the precise reason for Folliot's annoyance, failing to refer to the conflict concerning the King's intention to tax the Church, and his cavalier suspension of the discussion just before this extract. Interpretations of *la chasse* reasonably included hunting animals and hunting women! Comments on Becket's behaviour during this exchange were usually sound in terms of his loyalty to Henri and his apparent self-confidence. Weaker candidates tended to paraphrase the text without drawing any conclusions. Few tackled the important issue raised by Becket's questions about being 'worthy'. In the third section, candidates understandably preferred the attitude of the Archbishop, and their explanation for this preference ranged from the superficial to the mature and sensitive.
- ((b) Candidates who chose the essay question showed little knowledge or understanding of the issues it raised. Essays contained little beyond narrative and character study, the latter loosely linked to the title as an instance of dramatic interest. There was very little evidence that this aspect of the play had been studied, despite the highly inventive use of scene changes, lighting, registers of language, humour, and so on. Examiners are aware that most candidates do not have the opportunity to see a performance of a play they are studying, but will continue to expect some awareness of the author's intentions and the well-documented reasons for a play's enduring success. Candidates should also feel free to comment on perceived weaknesses, provided that they can defend their argument with detailed examples.

Question 4

Le Clézio: *Le Chercheur d'or*

- (a) The first appearance of this text produced sound work from the few who chose it. They had a good understanding of Alexis' obsession with the sea and the implications of that for the narrative. The role of Denis in introducing Alexis to the world of nature and giving him an expectation of adventure were also competently documented. In the third section, weaker candidates confined themselves to the obvious point about Alexis' prolonged absence, without referring to the father's fragile state of mind as a consequence of his financial problems.
- (b) Only one or two candidates tackled this question. They were not able to muster sufficient material to make their answers a valid basis for this report.

Question 5

Flaubert: *Madame Bovary*

- (a) Candidates showed a good knowledge of Emma's reading at school, and a clear understanding of the effect of this on her life. Whilst almost all were able to describe the Romantic dreams which she sought to turn into reality, there was a wide range of performance when it came to supplying relevant detail. All could write about her disappointment with Charles and with marriage, and most included appropriate references to Léon and to Rodolphe. Despite repeated mentions of *des romans à l'eau de rose*, only the most able ventured to point out that the inability of human beings to live up to Emma's expectations must be seen in the light of her own perpetual immaturity. What was missing from many answers was not critical comment about the men in her life but examples of her unrealistic attitude. There was, likewise, little mention of La Vaubyessard, the perfect example of her naïve perspective.
- (b) This oft-quoted line was not well understood by most of those who elected to write about it. Candidates wrote disparagingly about Charles' inability to provide for Emma's needs. Whilst they understood that Emma felt the need to marry in order to escape from her father's farm, they seemed reluctant to lay any of the blame for the failure of the marriage at the door of Emma herself. An analysis of her irrational behaviour throughout the novel would have been more useful than a catalogue of Charles' shortcomings.

Question 6

Del Castillo: *Tanguy*

- (a) It was pleasing to see that some of the candidates who answered this question realised that it was worth mentioning the positive aspects of Tanguy's experience. Indeed, Tanguy's experience of people was mixed, and it was not possible to give a good account of this question without establishing that point. Candidates were generally able to discuss Tanguy's lapses into despair. Those who had a good knowledge of the final section of the book naturally reached a positive overall conclusion.
- (b) Many essays on this question offered little beyond narrative. Some candidates did not seem to know where *Les Illusions détruites* began and ended. There was a general lack of relevant detail in the answers, suggesting a rather random approach to the task and therefore, perhaps, insufficient familiarity with the text to make this question a viable choice.

Question 7

Camus: *Les Justes*

- (a) Answers to this question were disappointing. Rambling accounts of the aims of the terrorists were no substitute for a proper focus on the relationship between Kaliayev and Dora, which is, after all, the context in which the remark is made. What was wanted was an account of the logic of the extremist, and the sacrifice this necessitated, along with some balanced critical comment on their dedication to the cause.
- (b) What has been written about *Becket* in this report applies equally to this play. Why has the dramatic quality been criticised? Do you agree that it is too wordy and static? Candidates were able to give some examples of the tensions within the play, but a balanced and detailed appraisal was lacking.

Question 8

Zobel: *La Rue Cases-Nègres*

- (a) Inevitably, this question presupposed an understanding by candidates of the idiom *en dit long*. Those who discussed the length of José's education did not score well. Little more credit could be awarded to those who devoted much of their essay to José's early life, M'man Tine's views on the importance of education and her heroic efforts in this regard. The question clearly asked for comments on José's experience of the education system as a reflection of social attitudes and values. Those who chose to answer the question directly were suitably rewarded.
- (b) Candidates found this question quite straightforward in essence, although not all followed the evolution right through to the end. Credit was awarded largely for relevance and appropriate detail. Essays which indulged in narrative and generalisation could not be given the same credit as those which cut out unnecessary preamble and got on with the business of describing the influences and experiences which led him from innocent boyhood to militant manhood.