

CONCOURS GÉNÉRAL DES LYCÉES

SESSION DE 1999

COMPOSITION EN LANGUE ANGLAISE

(classes terminales ES, L et S)

Durée : 5 heures

L'usage de tout dictionnaire est interdit

CHAPTER FIVE

Doubled I walk the street. Though we are no longer in the Commanders' compound, there are large houses here also. In front of one of them a Guardian is mowing the lawn. The lawns are tidy, the façades are gracious, in good repair; they're like the beautiful pictures they used to print in the magazines about homes and gardens and interior decoration. There is the same absence of people, the same air of being asleep. The street is almost like a museum, or a street in a model town constructed to show the way people used to live. As in those pictures, those museums, those model towns, there are no children.

This is the heart of Gilead, where the war cannot intrude except on television. Where the edges are we aren't sure, they vary, according to the attacks and counterattacks; but this is the centre, where nothing moves. The Republic of Gilead, said Aunt Lydia, knows no

bounds. Gilead is within you.

Doctors lived here once, lawyers, university professors. There are no lawyers any more, and the university is closed.

Luke and I used to walk together, sometimes, along these streets. We used to talk about buying a house, like one of these, an old big house, fixing it up. We would have a garden, swings for the children. We would have children. Although we knew it wasn't too likely we could ever afford it, it was something to talk about, a game for Sundays. Such freedom now seems almost weightless.

We turn the corner onto a main street, where there's more traffic. Cars go by, black most of them, some grey and brown. There are other women with baskets, some in red, some in the dull green of the Marthas, some in the striped dresses, red and blue and green and cheap and skimpy, that mark the women of the poorer men. Econowives, they're called. These women are not divided into functions. They have to do everything; if they can. Sometimes there is a woman all in black, a widow. There used to be more of them, but they seem to be diminishing.

You don't see the Commanders' Wives on the sidewalks. Only in cars.

The sidewalks here are cement. Like a child, I avoid stepping on the cracks. I'm remembering my feet on these sidewalks, in the time before, and what I used to wear on them. Sometimes it was shoes for running, with cushioned soles and breathing holes, and stars of fluorescent fabric that reflected light in the darkness. Though I never ran at night; and in the daytime, only beside well-frequented roads.

Women were not protected then.

I remember the rules, rules that were never spelled out but that every woman knew: don't open your door to a stranger, even if he says he is the police. Make him slide his ID under the door. Don't stop on the road to help a motorist pretending to be in trouble. Keep the locks on and keep going. If anyone whistles, don't turn to look. Don't go into a laundromat, by yourself, at night.

I think about laundromats. What I wore to them: shorts, jeans, jogging pants. What I put into them: my own clothes, my own soap, my own money, money I had earned myself. I think about having such control.

Now we walk along the same street, in red pairs, and no man shouts obscenities at us, speaks to us, touches us. No one whistles.

There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it.

In front of us, to the right, is the store where we order dresses. Some people call them *habits*, a good word for them. Habits are hard to break. The store has a huge wooden sign outside it, in the shape of a golden lily; Lilies of the Field, it's called. You can see the place, under the lily, where the lettering was painted out, when they decided that even the names of shops were too much temptation for us. Now places are known by their signs alone.

Lilies used to be a movie theatre, before. Students went there a lot; every spring they had a Humphrey Bogart festival, with Lauren Bacall or Katherine Hepburn, women on their own, making up their minds. They wore blouses with buttons down the front that suggested the possibilities of the word *undone*. These women could be undone; or not. They seemed to be able to choose. We seemed to be able to choose, then. We were a society dying, said Aunt Lydia, of too much choice.

I don't know when they stopped having the festival. I must have been grown up. So I didn't notice.

We don't go into Lilies, but across the road and along a side-street. Our first stop is at a store with another wooden sign: three eggs, a bee, a cow. Milk and Honey. There's a line, and we wait our turn, two by two. I see they have oranges today. Ever since Central America was lost to the Libertheos, oranges have been hard to get: sometimes they are there, sometimes not. The war interferes with the oranges from California, and even Florida isn't dependable, when there are roadblocks or when the train tracks have been blown up. I look at the oranges, longing for one. But I haven't brought any tokens for oranges. I'll go back and tell Rita about them, I think. She'll be pleased. It will be something, a small achievement, to have made oranges happen.

Those who've reached the counter hand their tokens across it, to the two men in Guardian uniforms who stand on the other side. Nobody talks much, though there is a rustling, and the women's heads move furtively from side to side: here, shopping, is where you might see someone you know, someone you've known in the time before, or at the Red Centre. Just to catch sight of a face like that is an encouragement. If I could see Moira, just see her, know she still exists. It's hard to imagine now, having a friend.

Margaret ATWOOD, 1986, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

I. VERSION

Dans le texte précédent, traduire en français de " Lilies used to be a movie theatre... " (l. 44) jusqu'à la fin du texte.

II. COMPOSITION

Lire le texte en entier et répondre en anglais aux questions suivantes s'y rapportant :

1. Gilead or reality turned utopia.
2. The I- and eye-narration in the passage.
3. Remembering and reconstructing.
4. *We live in a society dying of too much choice*. Freedom and choice. Discuss.