

CONCOURS GÉNÉRAL DES LYCÉES

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SESSION 2017

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**COMPOSITION EN LANGUE ANGLAISE**

(Classes de terminale toutes séries générales et technologiques)

Durée : 5 heures

*L'usage de tout dictionnaire est interdit*

Consignes aux candidats

- Ne pas utiliser d'encre claire
- N'utiliser ni colle, ni agrafe
- Numéroté chaque page en bas à droite (numéro de page / nombre total de pages)
- Sur chaque copie, renseigner l'en-tête + l'identification du concours :

Concours / Examen : CGL

Section/Spécialité/Série : ANGLA

Epreuve : 00101

Matière : ANGL

Session : 2017

*It is better to marry than to burn*, says Corinthians I, chapter seven, verse nine.

Good advice. Of course, Corinthians also informs us that we *should not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain* – so, go figure.

5 By February 1975, Clara had deserted the church and all its biblical literalism for Archibald Jones, but she was not yet the kind of carefree atheist who could laugh near altars or entirely dismiss the teachings of St Paul. The second dictum wasn't a problem – having no ox, she was excluded by proxy. But the first was giving her sleepless nights. Was it better to marry? Even if the man was a heathen? There was no way of knowing: she was living without props now, *sans* safety net. More worrying than God was her mother. Hortense was fiercely opposed to the affair, on grounds of colour rather than of age, and on hearing of it  
10 had promptly ostracized her daughter one morning on the doorstep.

Clara still felt that deep down her mother would prefer her to marry an unsuitable man rather than live with him in sin, so she did it on impulse and begged Archie to take her as far away from Lambeth as a man of his means could manage – Morocco, Belgium, Italy. Archie had clasped her hand and nodded and whispered sweet nothings in the full knowledge that the furthest a man of his means was going was a  
15 newly acquired, heavily mortgaged, two-storey house in Willesden Green. But no need to mention that now, he felt, not right now in the heat of the moment. Let her down gently, like.

Three months later Clara had been gently let down and here they were, moving in. Archie scrabbling up the stairs, as usual cursing and blinding, wilting under the weight of boxes which Clara could carry two, three at a time without effort; Clara taking a break, squinting in the warm May sunshine, trying to get  
20 her bearings. She peeled down to a little purple vest and leant against her front gate. What kind of a place *was* this? That was the thing, you see, you couldn't be *sure*. Travelling in the front passenger seat of the removal van, she'd seen the high road and it had been ugly and poor and familiar (though there were no Kingdom Halls or Episcopalian churches), but then at the turn of a corner suddenly roads had exploded in greenery, beautiful oaks, the houses got taller, wider and more detached, she could see parks, she could  
25 see libraries. And then abruptly the trees would be gone, reverting back into bus-stops as if by the strike of some midnight bell; a signal which the houses too obeyed, transforming themselves into smaller, stairless dwellings that sat splay opposite derelict shopping arcades, those peculiar lines of establishments that include, without exception,

one defunct sandwich bar still advertising breakfast  
30 one locksmith uninterested in marketing frills (KEYS CUT HERE)  
and one permanently shut unisex hair salon, the proud bearer of some unspeakable pun (*Upper Cuts* or *Fringe Benefits* or *Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow*).

It was a lottery driving along like that, looking out, not knowing whether one was about to settle down for life amongst the trees or amidst the shit. Then finally the van had slowed down in front of a house, a  
35 nice house somewhere midway between the trees and the shit, and Clara had felt a tide of gratitude roll over her. It was *nice*, not as nice as she had hoped but not as bad as she had feared; it had two small gardens front and back, a doormat, a doorbell, a toilet *inside* ... And she had not paid a high price. Only love. Just love. And whatever Corinthians might say, love is not such a hard thing to forfeit, not if you've never really felt it. She did not love Archie, but had made up her mind, from that first moment on the  
40 steps, to devote herself to him if he would take her away. And now he had; and, though it wasn't Morocco or Belgium or Italy, it was nice – not the promised land – but *nice*, nicer than anywhere she had ever been.

Clara understood that Archibald Jones was no romantic hero. Three months spent in one stinking room in Cricklewood had been sufficient revelation. Oh, he could be affectionate and sometimes even charming, he could whistle a clear, crystal note first thing in the morning, he drove calmly and responsibly and he  
45 was a surprisingly competent cook, but romance was beyond him, passion, unthinkable. And if you are saddled with a man as average as this, Clara felt, he should at least be utterly devoted to you – to your beauty, to your youth – that's the least he could do to make up for things. But not Archie. One month into their marriage and he already had that funny glazed look men have when they are looking through you. He had already reverted back into his bachelorhood: pints with Samad Iqbal, dinner with Samad Iqbal,

50 Sunday breakfasts with Samad Iqbal, every spare moment with the man in that bloody place, *O'Connell's*,  
in that bloody dive. She tried to be reasonable. She asked him: *Why are you never here? Why do you*  
*spend so much time with the Indian?* But a pat on the back, a kiss on the cheek, he's grabbing his coat, his  
55 foot's out the door and always the same old answer: *Me and Sam? We go way back.* She couldn't argue  
with that. They went back to before she was born. No white knight, then, this Archibald Jones. No aims,  
no hopes, no ambitions. A man whose greatest pleasures were English breakfasts and DIY. A dull man.  
An *old* man. And yet ... good. He was a *good* man. And *good* might not amount to much, good might not  
60 light up a life, but it is something. She spotted it in him that first time on the stairs, simply, directly, the  
same way she could point out a good mango on a Brixton stall without so much as touching the skin.  
These were the thoughts Clara clung to as she leant on her garden gate, three months after her wedding,  
silently watching the way her husband's brow furrowed and shortened like an accordion, the way his  
stomach hung pregnant over his belt, the whiteness of his skin, the blueness of his veins, the way his  
'elevens' were up – those two ropes of flesh that appear on a man's gullet (so they said in Jamaica) when  
his time was drawing to a close. Clara frowned. She hadn't noticed these afflictions at the wedding.

Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, 2000.

## I. Questions

1. The portrait of a man: what portrayal of Archibald Jones is provided and how?
2. Focalisation and point of view: how does focalisation influence the way the story is narrated?
3. How does Clara relate to her cultural and religious heritage?
4. “They lived happily ever after...” Comment using examples from English-language literature, theatre and film.

## II. Translation

Translate into French from “It was a lottery driving along like that ...” (line 33) down to “...nicer than anywhere she had ever been” (line 41).

