EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 03

Your commentary should be focused on *negation*.

Not everyone may have feared the end, but the General sensibly did. A thin man of excellent posture, he was a veteran campaigner whose many medals had been, in his case, genuinely earned. Although he possessed but nine fingers and eight toes, having lost three digits to bullets and shrapnel, only his family and confidants knew about the condition of his left foot. His ambitions had hardly ever been thwarted, except in his desire to procure an excellent bottle of Bourgogne and to drink it with companions who knew better than to put ice cubes in their wine. He was an epicurean and a Christian, in that order, a man of faith who believed in gastronomy and God; his wife and his children; and the French and the Americans. In his view, they offered us far better tutelage than those other foreign Svengalis who had hypnotised our northern brethren and some of our southern ones: Karl Marx, V. I. Lenin, and Chairman Mao. Not that he ever read any of those sages! That was my job as his aide-de-camp and junior officer of intelligence, to provide him with cribbed notes on, say, *The Communist Manifesto* or Mao's *Little Red Book*. It was up to him to find occasions to demonstrate his knowledge of the enemy's thinking, his favourite being Lenin's question, plagiarised whenever the need arose: Gentlemen, he would say, rapping the relevant table with adamantine knuckles, *what is to be done?* To tell the general that Nikolay Chernyshevsky actually came up with the question in his novel of the same title seemed irrelevant. How many remember Chernyshevsky now? It was Lenin who counted, the man of action who took the question and made it his own.

In the gloomiest of Aprils, faced with this question of what should be done, the general who always found something to do could no longer do so. A man who had faith in the *mission civilisatrice* and the American Way was at last bitten by the bug of disbelief. Suddenly insomniac, he took to wandering his villa with the greenish pallor of a malarial patient. Ever since our northern front had collapsed a few weeks before in March, he would materialise at my office door or at my room in the villa to hand off a snatch of news, always gloomy. Can you believe it? he would demand, to which I said one of two things: No, sir! Or Unbelievable! We could not believe that the pleasant, scenic coffee town of Ban Me Thuot, my Highlands hometown, had been sacked in early March. We could not believe that our president, Thieu, whose name begged to be spit out of the mouth, had inexplicably ordered our forces defending the Highlands to retreat. We could not believe that Da Nang and Nha Trang had fallen, or that our troops had shot civilians in the back as they all fought madly to escape on barges and boats, the death toll running to thousands. In the secret privacy of my office, I dutifully snapped pictures of these reports, which would please Man, my handler. While they pleased me, too, as signs of the regime's inevitable erosion, I could not help but feel moved by the plight of these poor people. Perhaps it was not correct, politically speaking, for me to feel sympathy for them, but my mother would have been one of them if she were alive. She was a poor person, I was her poor child, and no one asks poor people if they want war. Nor had anyone asked these poor people if they wanted to die of thirst and exposure on the coastal sea, or if they wanted to be robbed and raped by their own soldiers. If those thousands still lived, they would not have believed how they had died, just as we could not believe that the Americans—our friends, our benefactors, our protectors—had spurned our request to send more money. And what would we have done with that money? Buy the ammunition, gas, and spare parts for the weapons, planes, and tanks the same Americans had bestowed on us for free. Having given us the needles, they now perversely no longer supplied the dope. (Nothing, the General muttered, is ever so expensive as what is offered free.)

Viet Thanh NGUYEN, *The Sympathizer*, 2015, US.
717 words

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 04

Your commentary should be focused on *passive forms*.

Only dead people are allowed to have statues, but I have been given one while still alive. Already I am petrified.

This statue was a small token of appreciation for my many contributions, said the citation, which was read out by Aunt Vidala. She'd been assigned the task by our superiors, and was far from appreciative. I thanked her with as much modesty as I could summon, then pulled the rope that released the cloth drape shrouding me; it billowed to the ground, and there I stood. We don't do cheering here at Ardua Hall, but there was some discreet clapping. I inclined my head in a nod.

My statue is larger than life, as statues tend to be, and shows me as younger, slimmer, and in better shape than I've been for some time. I am standing straight, shoulders back, my lips curved into a firm but benevolent smile. My eyes are fixed on some cosmic point of reference understood to represent my idealism, my unflinching commitment to duty, my determination to move forward despite all obstacles. Not that anything in the sky would be visible to my statue, placed as it is in a morose cluster of trees and shrubs beside the footpath running in front of Ardua Hall. We Aunts must not be too presumptuous, even in stone.

Clutching my left hand is a girl of seven or eight, gazing up at me with trusting eyes. My right hand rests on the head of a woman crouched at my side, her hair veiled, her eyes upturned in an expression that could be read as either craven or grateful—one of our Handmaids—and behind me is one of my Pearl Girls, ready to set out on her missionary work. Hanging from a belt around my waist is my Taser. This weapon reminds me of my failings: had I been more effective, I would not have needed such an implement. The persuasion in my voice would have been enough.

As a group of statuary it's not a great success: too crowded. I would have preferred more emphasis on myself. But at least I look sane. It could well have been otherwise, as the elderly sculptress—a true believer since deceased—had a tendency to confer bulging eyes on her subjects as a sign of their pious fervour. Her bust of Aunt Helena looks rabid, that of Aunt Vidala is hyperthyroid, and that of Aunt Elizabeth appears ready to explode.

At the unveiling the sculptress was nervous. Was her rendition of me sufficiently flattering? Did I approve of it? Would I be seen to approve? I toyed with the idea of frowning as the sheet came off, but thought better of it: I am not without compassion. "Very lifelike," I said.

That was nine years ago. Since then my statue has weathered: pigeons have decorated me, moss has sprouted in my damper crevices. Votaries have taken to leaving offerings at my feet: eggs for fertility, oranges to suggest the fullness of pregnancy, croissants to reference the moon. I ignore the breadstuffs—usually they have been rained on—but pocket the oranges. Oranges are so refreshing.

I write these words in my private sanctum within the library of Ardua Hall—one of the few libraries remaining after the enthusiastic bookburnings that have been going on across our land. The corrupt and blood-smeared fingerprints of the past must be wiped away to create a clean space for the morally pure generation that is surely about to arrive. Such is the theory.

But among these bloody fingerprints are those made by ourselves, and these can't be wiped away so easily. Over the years I've buried a lot of bones; now I'm inclined to dig them up again—if only for your edification, my unknown reader. If you are reading, this manuscript at least will have survived. Though perhaps I'm fantasizing: perhaps I will never have a reader. Perhaps I'll only be talking to the wall, in more ways than one.

Margaret ATWOOD, *The Testaments*, 2019, CAN.
668 words

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 05

Your commentary should be focused on *prepositions and adverbial particles*.

I met Giovanni during my second year in Paris, when I had no money. On the morning of the evening that we met I had been turned out of my room. I did not owe an awful lot of money, only around six thousand francs, but Parisian hotel-keepers have a way of smelling poverty and then they do what anybody does who is aware of a bad smell; they throw whatever stinks outside.

My father had money in his account which belonged to me but he was very reluctant to send it because he wanted me to come home—to come home, as he said, and settle down, and whenever he said that I thought of the sediment at the bottom of a stagnant pond. I did not, then, know many people in Paris and Hella was in Spain. Most of the people I knew in Paris were, as Parisians sometimes put it, of *le milieu* and, while this milieu was certainly anxious enough to claim me, I was intent on proving, to them and to myself, that I was not of their company. I did this by being in their company a great deal and manifesting toward all of them a tolerance which placed me, I believed, above suspicion. I had written to friends for money, of course, but the Atlantic Ocean is deep and wide and money doesn't hurry from the other side.

So I went through my address book, sitting over a tepid coffee in a boulevard cafe, and decided to call up an old acquaintance who was always asking me to call, an aging, Belgian-born, American businessman named Jacques. He had a big, comfortable apartment and lots of things to drink and lots of money. He was, as I knew he would be, surprised to hear from me and before the surprise and the charm wore off, giving him time to become wary, he had invited me for supper. He may have been cursing as he hung up, and reaching for his wallet, but it was too late. Jacques is not too bad. Perhaps he is a fool and a coward but almost everybody is one or the other and most people are both. In some ways I liked him. He was silly but he was so lonely; anyway, I understand now that the contempt I felt for him involved my self-contempt. He could be unbelievably generous, he could be unspeakably stingy. Though he wanted to trust everybody, he was incapable of trusting a living soul; to make up for this, he threw his money away on people; inevitably, then, he was abused. Then he buttoned his wallet, locked his door, and retired into that strong self-pity which was, perhaps, the only thing he had which really belonged to him. I thought for a long while that he, with his big apartment, his well-meant promises, his whiskey, his marijuana, his orgies, had helped to kill Giovanni. As, indeed, perhaps he had. But Jacques' hands are certainly no bloodier than mine.

I saw Jacques, as a matter of fact, just after Giovanni was sentenced. He was sitting bundled up in his greatcoat on the terrace of a cafe, drinking a *vin chaud*. He was alone on the terrace. He called me as I passed.

He did not look well, his face was mottled, his eyes, behind his glasses, were like the eyes of a dying man who looks everywhere for healing.

"You've heard," he whispered, as I joined him, "about Giovanni?"

I nodded yes. I remember the winter sun was shining and I felt as cold and distant as the sun.

"It's terrible, terrible, terrible," Jacques moaned. "Terrible."

"Yes," I said. I could not say anything more.

"I wonder why he did it," Jacques pursued, "why he didn't ask his friends to help him." He looked at me. We both knew that the last time Giovanni had asked Jacques for money, Jacques had refused. I said nothing. "They say he had started taking opium," Jacques said, "that he needed the money for opium. Did you hear that?

James BALDWIN, *Giovanni's Room*, [1956] 2000, US.
680 words

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 06

Your commentary should be focused on *A*.

It's been a long time since he has let Judith into his life, but with a whisky in his hand and an attic ceiling over his head and Sasha's crooked back not ten feet from him, it's hard to control the memories swirling around.

It's Christmas evening in Berlin, he decides, except that no carols play, no church candles flicker on piles of stolen books. And Sasha is cooking, instead of a chunk of bullet-hard venison, Mundy's favorite Wienerschnitzel from the shopping bag that he nursed so carefully up the spiral staircase. The attic apartment has rafters and bare brick walls and skylights, but that's as far as the similarity goes. A modern kitchen of ceramic tile and brushed steel fills one corner of the room. An arched window looks onto the mountains.

"Do you own this place, Sasha?"

When did Sasha ever own anything? But as with any two friends reunited after more than a decade, their conversation has yet to rise above small talk.

"No, Teddy. It has been obtained for us by certain friends of mine."

For *us*, Mundy notes.

"That was considerate of them."

"They are considerate people."

"And rich."

"You are correct, actually. They are capitalists who are on the side of the oppressed."

"Are they the same people who own that smart Audi?"

"It is a car they have provided."

"Well, hang on to them. We need them."

"Thank you, Teddy, I intend to."

"Are they also the people who told you where to find me?"

"It is possible."

Mundy is hearing Sasha's words, but what he is listening to is his voice. It is as intense as it ever was and as vigorous. But what it can never conceal is its excitement, which is what Mundy is hearing in it now. It's the voice that bounced back from whichever genius he had been talking to last, to announce that they are about to reveal the social genesis of human knowledge. It's Banquo's voice when he stepped out of the shadows of a Weimar cellar and ordered me to pay close attention and keep my comments to a minimum.

"So you are a contented man, Teddy," he is saying briskly, while he busies himself at the stove. "You have a family, a car, and you are selling bullshit to the masses. Have you as usual married the lady of your choice?"

"I'm working on it."

"And you are not homesick for Heidelberg?"

"Why should I be?"

"You ran an English-language school there until six months ago, I believe."

"It was the last of a long line." How the hell does he know this stuff?

"What went wrong?"

"What always went wrong. Grand opening. Flyers mailed to all the big firms. Full-page ads. Send us your tired and weary executives. Only problem was, the more students we had, the more money we lost. Didn't somebody tell you?"

"You had a dishonest partner, I believe. Egon."

"That's right. Egon. Well done. Let's hear about you, Sasha. Where are you living? Who've you got? What are you doing and who to? And why the hell have you and your friends been spying on me? I thought we'd given all that up."

A lift of the eyebrows and a pursing of the lips as Sasha selects one half of the question and pretends he hasn't heard the other. "Thank you, Teddy, I am fully extended, I would say. My luck appears to have changed for the better."

"About time then. Itinerant radical lecturer in the hellholes of the world can't have been a laugh a minute. What's extending you?"

Another no-answer.

The table is laid for two. Fancy paper napkins. A bottle of burgundy on an arty wooden coaster. Sasha lights the candles. His hand is shaking the way he says it shook when it carried Mundy's visa application to the Professor more than twenty years ago. The sight triggers a rush of protective tenderness in Mundy that he has sworn not to feel.

John LE CARRÉ, *Absolute Friends*, [2003] 2004, UK.
666 words

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 08

Your commentary should be focused on *modal auxiliaries*.

After being rescued, Troy had decided to stay on the ship and work as a sailor, but he was not happy with this travelling life, and finally returned to England. He hesitated to go back to Bathsheba and a comfortable life on the farm. Perhaps Bathsheba would fail at farming and then he would be responsible for her. And anyway, perhaps she would not welcome him back. For the moment he was working as actor and horse-rider with the circus. So it was with no plans for the future that Troy found himself at Greenhill fair, dangerously close to Weatherbury.

When he looked through a hole in the curtain to see the audience, he was horrified to see his wife. She looked more beautiful than he remembered. Perhaps she would laugh at him, a nobleman's son, working in a circus! As he rode into the tent, he was careful to keep his face away from her, and remain wrapped in his cloak. She did not seem to recognize him.

When the show was over, Troy went out into the darkness. In the large tent where meals and drinks were being served, he saw Bathsheba talking to a man. Was she forgetting her husband so soon? thought Troy angrily. He decided to listen to their conversation, and knelt down outside the tent, making a little hole with his knife in the heavy cotton so that he could see the two people inside.

She was drinking a cup of tea, which Boldwood had just brought her. Troy watched her every movement. She was as handsome as ever, and she belonged to him. After a few moments Troy got up and walked slowly from the tent. He was considering what to do next.

Meanwhile Boldwood had offered to ride back to Weatherbury with Bathsheba, as it was getting late, and she accepted. Her pity for the man she had hurt so deeply made her behave more kindly towards him than was perhaps sensible. Her kindness made poor Boldwood dream of their future marriage, and suddenly, unable to stop himself, he said, 'Mrs Troy, will you marry again some day?'

'You forget that my husband's death has never been proved, so I may not really be a widow,' she said, confused. 'I've a feeling he's alive, and I'm not thinking of marrying anyone else.'

'Do you know, Bathsheba, that according to the lawyers, you can remarry seven years after your husband's supposed death, that is, six years from now? Could you—promise to marry me then?'

'I don't know. Six years is too far away. I'm bitterly sorry I behaved so stupidly towards you, but—I can promise I'll never marry another man while you want me to be your wife, but—'

'You could put right the mistake you made by promising to be my wife in six years' time!' There was wild hope in his eyes.

'Oh, what shall I do? I don't love you, but if I can give you happiness by just promising, then I will—consider—and promise—soon. Shall we say, by Christmas?'

'You'll promise at Christmas. Well, I'll say no more.'

As Christmas came nearer, Bathsheba became more anxious, and one day she confessed her difficulty to Gabriel.

'The saddest reason of all for agreeing to his proposal,' she said, 'is that if I don't, I'm afraid he'll go mad. His feelings are so extreme. I don't say that because I'm vain, but I believe I hold that man's future in my hands. Oh Gabriel, it's a terrible worry!'

'Then why don't you promise, ma'am? I don't think people would think it wrong. The only thing that makes it wrong in my view is that you don't love him.'

'That is my punishment, Gabriel, for playing that foolish trick with the valentine on him.' Gabriel had given her a reasonable, sensible answer, as she knew he would, but she felt annoyed with his cool advice. Not once had he spoken of his love for her, or said that he could wait for her too. She would have refused him of course, but at least it would have shown that he still admired her.

Thomas HARDY, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, [2014] 1874, UK.
696 words

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 10

Your commentary should be focused on *DO*.

They said they came from Special Branch, and they had printed cards with photographs in cellophane cases. The plump one did most of the talking.

'I believe you were friendly with Alec Leamas,' he began. She was prepared to be angry, but the plump man was so earnest that it seemed silly.

'Yes,' Liz answered. 'How did you know?'

'We found out quite by chance the other day. When you go to … prison, you have to give next of kin. Leamas said he hadn't any. That was a lie as a matter of fact. They asked him whom they should inform if anything happened to him in prison. He said you.'

'I see.'

'Does anyone else know you were friendly with him?'

'No.'

'Did you go to the trial?'

'No.'

'No press men called, creditors, no one at all?'

'No, I've told you. No one else knew. Not even my parents, no one. We worked together in the library, of course – the Psychical Research Library – but only Miss Crail, the librarian, would know that. I don't think it occurred to her that there was anything between us. She's queer,' Liz added simply. The little man peered very seriously at her for a moment, then asked:

'Did it surprise you when Leamas beat up Mr Ford?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Why did you think he did it?'

'I don't know. Because Ford wouldn't give him credit, I suppose. But I think he always meant to.' She wondered if she was saying too much, but she longed to talk to somebody about it, she was so alone and there didn't seem any harm.

'But that night, the night before it happened, we talked together. We had supper, a sort of special one; Alec said we should and I knew that it was our last night. He'd got a bottle of red wine from somewhere; I didn't like it much. Alec drank most of it. And then I asked him, "Is this good-bye" – whether it was all over.'

'What did he say?'

'He said there was a job he'd got to do. I didn't really understand it all, not really.'

There was a very long silence and the little man looked more worried than ever. Finally he asked her:

'Do you believe that?'

'I don't know.' She was suddenly terrified for Alec, and she didn't know why. The man asked:

'Leamas has got two children by his marriage, did he tell you?' Liz said nothing. 'In spite of that he gave your name as next of kin. Why do you think he did that?' The little man seemed embarrassed by his own question. He was looking at his hands, which were pudgy and clasped together on his lap. Liz blushed.

'I was in love with him,' she replied.

'Was he in love with you?'

'Perhaps. I don't know.'

'Are you still in love with him?'

'Yes.'

'Did he ever say he would come back?' asked the younger man.

'No.'

'But he did say good-bye to you?' the other asked quickly. 'Did he say good-bye to you?' The little man repeated his question slowly, kindly. 'Nothing more can happen to him, I promise you. But we want to help him, and if you have any idea of why he hit Ford, if you have the slightest notion from something he said, perhaps casually, or something he did, then tell us for Alec's sake.'

Liz shook her head.

'Please go,' she said, 'please don't ask any more questions. Please go now.'

As he got to the door, the elder man hesitated, then took a card from his wallet and put it on the table, gingerly, as if it might make a noise. Liz thought he was a very shy little man.

'If you ever want any help – if anything happens about Leamas or … ring me up,' he said. 'Do you understand?'

John LE CARRÉ, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, [1963] 1999, UK.
648 words

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 11

Your commentary should be focused on *nominal clauses*.

Now here's a funny thing. I was on my way to work this morning. I probably haven't explained that there are two ways of walking to the station. One takes me along St Mary's Villas and Barrowclough Road, past the old municipal baths and the new DIY and wholesale paint centre; while the other means cutting down Lennox Gardens, taking that street whose name I always forget into Rumsey Road, then past the row of shops and back into the High Street. I've timed both ways and there isn't any more than twenty seconds in it. So some mornings I go one way, and some mornings the other. I sort of toss up as I leave the house over which direction to take. I tell you this as background information.

So, this morning I set off down Lennox Gardens, the Street with No Name, and then into Rumsey Road. I was looking about a lot. You know, that's one of the many differences since Gill and I have been together: I start seeing things I never would have noticed before. You know how you can walk along a street in London and never raise your eyes above the top of a bus? You go along, and you look at the other people, and the shops, and the traffic, and you never look up, not really up. I know what you're going to say, if you did look up you'd probably step in a pile of dog turds or walk into a lamp-post, but I'm serious. I'm serious. Raise your eyes just that little bit more and you'll spot something, an odd roof, some fancy bit of Victorian decoration. Or lower them, for that matter. The other day, one lunchtime in fact, I was walking up the Farringdon Road. All of a sudden I noticed something I must have walked past dozens of times. A plaque set in the wall at shin height, painted cream with the lettering picked out in black. It says:

These premises
were totally destroyed
by a
ZEPPELIN RAID
during the World War
on
September 8th 1915

John Phillips
Governing Director

Rebuilt 1917

I thought that was interesting. Why did they put the plaque so low down, I wondered. Or perhaps it's been moved. You'll find it at Number 61, by the way, if you want to check up. Next door to the shop that sells telescopes.

Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that I find myself looking around more. I must have passed that florist's in Rumsey Road several hundred times and never really looked at it, let alone into it. But this time I did. And what did I see? What was my extraordinary reward at 8.25 on a Tuesday morning? There was Oliver. I couldn't believe it. Oliver of all people. It's always been quite hard getting Oliver up to this end of town – he jokingly claims he needs a passport and an interpreter. But there he was, going round the flower shop, accompanied by this assistant who's picking out great armfuls of flowers.

I knocked on the window but neither of them turned round, so I went in. They were standing at the desk by now and the girl was working on the bill. Oliver had his wallet out.

'Oliver,' I said, and he turned round and looked really surprised. He even started to blush. That was a bit embarrassing – I'd never seen him blush before – so I decided to have a joke. 'So this is how you spend all the money I've lent you,' I said, and do you know what – he really did blush at that. Completely scarlet. Even his ears went bright red. I suppose on reflection it wasn't a very kind thing to say, but he really reacted oddly. He's obviously in a bad way at the moment.

'Pas devant,' he finally said, indicating the girl in the shop. 'Pas devant les enfants.' The girl was staring up at the two of us, wondering what was going on. I thought the best thing to do was spare Oliver's blushes, so I murmured something about getting off to work.

Julian BARNES, *Talking It Over*, 1991, UK.
690 words

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 12

Your commentary should be focused on *degree*.

'I hitched a ride. I could hardly let you go off on an epic journey all by yourself. There's no telling what kind of trouble you might get yourself into. So I climbed into the rucksack while you were taking a pee back at The Wife's Legs. Been living on the daddy's field rations. Can't say much for the mother's coffee though. And I could really use the toilet about now.'

'Well,' said Cornelius. 'Just fancy that. You hitchhiking in my rucksack all the way up here without me knowing and then doing a perfect impression of a police loud hailer.'

Tuppe held his nose and barked into the empty thermos flask. 'Throw down your weapon and come out with your hands up, you are surrounded.'

Several nearby windows came up and a number of guns flew down into the street. 'Don't shoot, G-man,' called someone.

'I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't heard it myself,' said Cornelius. 'Thanks very much indeed.'

'Don't mention it. You would have done the same for me.'

'Naturally. And I would have bested those blighters eventually, you know.'

'I have absolutely no doubt of that. I just wanted the fight to stop before you began wading in with the rucksack.'

'Quite so. Then, as my breath has now returned to me and I find myself in the company of my bestest friend, it is my considered opinion that we proceed together upon the epic journey and face as one whatever adventures lie before.'

'Well said. And wherefore art we headed?'

'The auction room, Sheila na gigh.'

'And how might we get there, do you think?'

Across the road a bus drew up at a stop. It was a big bright green bus and the sign on the front read, SHEILA NA GIGH.

'We'll take the bus,' said Cornelius Murphy, smiling merrily.

His name was Felix Henderson McMurdo. But they called him the uncanny Scot.

The old grizzled grannies cursed him as he passed them by. Doggies bared their fangs and babbies filled their nappies. Small boys spat down on him from the safety of high windows and their mothers clenched their buttocks and turned away their glowing cheeks.

All that knew McMurdo agreed that he'd end his days on a hangman's rope.

Felix, who always thought of himself as a bit of a lad and an all-round popular fellow, took it with a smile.

'The folk in these parts have a funny sense of humour,' he told strangers to the parts of which he spoke. And the strangers smiled back at him and shook their heads.

But once he was safely out of sight, these same strangers unclenched their buttocks and declared that 'there goes a wrong'n if ever there was, who'll end in a gallows dance.'

Now, on the corner of Agamemnon Street in Sheila na gigh there was a tobacconist shop owned by a Scotsman named Patel. And outside that shop was the last outdoor cigarette machine in Scotland.

And approaching that very machine, his only pound coin clutched in his fist, was Felix Henderson McMurdo.

And just across the street was an auction room.

It was one of those memorial halls or Methodist Congregationals, or Wesleyan chapels or whatever they were. They all look pretty much the same and you see them everywhere. They were raised in the middle years of the Victorian era from sturdy stocks and grey slate, with glorious tiled floors and superb vaulted ceilings. And they are a perfect testament to the canny Victorians' sense of foresight.

Because their interiors perfectly reflect the fine reproduction pine furniture that you find for sale in them today.

There was scaffolding up outside this particular one and a pair of rugged, manly types were bolting a large sign into place. This sign announced that The Victorian Fitted Kitchen Company would soon be opening here for business.

But today was auction day and the hall looked very well inside, stacked up with all that bygone bric-a-bracery.

Cornelius and Tuppe entered the hall.

'Nice ceiling,' said Cornelius.

'Nice tiled floor,' said Tuppe.

'Shall we peruse Mr Kobold's intended purchase?'

'Why don't we do that very thing.'

Robert RANKIN, *The Book of Ultimate Truth*s, 1993, UK.
695 words