

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 6
-------------------	-------------------	-----------------------	--	-------------------	--------------

Your main commentary should be focused on *OF*. Other topics may also be addressed.

5 Sometimes on a Saturday, Coleman Silk would give me a ring and invite me to drive over from my side of the mountain after dinner to listen to music, or to play, for a penny a point, a little gin rummy, or to sit in his living room for a couple of hours and sip
10 some cognac and help him get through what was always for him the worst night of the week. By the summer of 1998, he had been alone up here—alone in the large old white clapboard house where he'd raised four children with his wife, Iris—for close to two years, ever since Iris suffered a stroke and died overnight while he was in
15 the midst of battling with the college over a charge of racism brought against him by two students in one of his classes.

20 Coleman had by then been at Athena almost all his academic life, an outgoing, sharp-witted, forcefully smooth big-city charmer, something of a warrior, something of an operator, hardly the prototypical pedantic professor of Latin and Greek (as witness
25 the Conversational Greek and Latin Club that he started, heretically, as a young instructor). His venerable survey course in ancient Greek literature in translation—known as GHM, for Gods, Heroes, and Myth—was popular with students precisely because of everything direct, frank, and unacademically forceful in his
30 comportment. "You know how European literature begins?" he'd ask, after having taken the roll at the first class meeting. "With a quarrel. All of European literature springs from a fight." And then he picked up his copy of *The Iliad* and read to the class the opening
35 lines. "'Divine Muse, sing of the ruinous wrath of Achilles . . . Begin where they first quarreled, Agamemnon the King of men, and great Achilles.' And what are they quarreling about, these two violent, mighty souls? It's as basic as a barroom brawl. They are quarreling over a woman. A girl, really. A girl stolen from her father. A girl
40 abducted in a war. Mia kouri—that is how she is described in the poem. Mia, as in modern Greek, is the indefinite article 'a'; kouri, or girl, evolves in modern Greek into kori, meaning daughter. Now, Agamemnon much prefers this girl to his wife, Clytemnestra.

45 'Clytemnestra is not as good as she is,' he says, 'neither in face nor in figure.' That puts directly enough, does it not, why he doesn't want to give her up? When Achilles demands that Agamemnon return the girl to her father in order to assuage Apollo, the god who is murderously angry about the circumstances surrounding her
50 abduction, Agamemnon refuses: he'll agree only if Achilles gives him his girl in exchange. Thus reigniting Achilles. Adrenal Achilles: the most highly flammable of explosive wildmen any writer has ever enjoyed portraying; especially where his prestige and his
55 appetite are concerned, the most hypersensitive killing machine in the history of warfare. Celebrated Achilles: alienated and estranged by a slight to his honor. Great heroic Achilles, who, through the strength of his rage at an insult—the insult of not getting the girl—
60 isolates himself, positions himself defiantly outside the very society whose glorious protector he is and whose need of him is enormous. A quarrel, then, a brutal quarrel over a young girl and her young body and the delights of sexual rapacity: there, for better or worse, in this offense against the phallic entitlement, the phallic dignity, of a powerhouse of a warrior prince, is how the great imaginative literature of Europe begins, and that is why, close to three
65 thousand years later, we are going to begin there today . . ."

70 Coleman was one of a handful of Jews on the Athena faculty when he was hired and perhaps among the first of the Jews permitted to teach in a classics department anywhere in America; a few years earlier, Athena's solitary Jew had been E. I. Lonoff, the all-but-forgotten short story writer whom, back when I was myself
75 a newly published apprentice in trouble and eagerly seeking the validation of a master, I had once paid a memorable visit to here.