

**Transcending the Classics:
Derek Walcott's *Omeros*
[Richard Sacks](#) — Spring 2023**



**Enrichment Program
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER**

Six Monday evening sessions from 6:30-8:30pm MDT: March 20, 27, April 3, 10, 17, 24

Live on Zoom ([registration link](#)), with class size limited to 23

Course homepage: <https://sacks-richard.com/walcotts-omer-atos-at-du>

Professor Sacks' email: sacks.richard@gmail.com

COURSE OVERVIEW

Derek Walcott's epic-length Nobel Prize-winning poem *Omeros* – celebrated as one of the most poetically dazzling and spiritually soaring works of 20th century literature – takes us on a transformative journey deeply rooted in Walcott's love of his native Caribbean island home (St. Lucia), as well as in his love of Homer (hence the title *Omeros*) and Homer's millennia of literary successors. And as the poem simultaneously inhabits the Mediterranean as well as the Caribbean, the Old World as well as the New, it also transports us to other distant horizons of time and place, especially as it leads us through agonizing trails of tears, what it calls "the incurable / wound[s] of time," from the Atlantic slave trade to Wounded Knee and beyond, in our seemingly impossible hopes that our wounds -- historical and personal -- may heal. Join Dr. Richard Sacks, who spent four decades at Columbia University teaching its core great books course, in a close reading of the luminous poetic language and complex narrative structures of this astonishing poem, as it asks us to explore whether there is something in the human spirit and in the language of poetry that can discover and embrace a "cure / that precedes every wound" and thus can make it possible to "heal [t]he incurable."

Please note: the course assumes some familiarity with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as with the close reading of poetry.

READING SCHEDULE

- March 20 pp. 3-47 (book 1, chapters 1-8): "*scann[ing] the opening line[s] / of our epic horizon*"
beginning with Philoctete's wound, the parsing of *omer-atos*, and a shadow named Helen
- March 27 pp. 47-104 (book 1, chapters 9-13 – book 2, chapters 14-19): "*that slow, ancestral beat*"
the "ances-tree[d]" journeys of the narrator and Major Plunkett
- April 3 pp. 104-168 (book 2, chapters 20-24 – book 3, chapters 25-32): "*that slow, ancestral beat*" (continued)
Achille's "ances-tree[d]" journey(s) to Africa and back
- April 10 pp. 169-219 (books 4-5, chapters 33-43): "*one elegy from Aruac to Sioux*"
the digressive "sharper grief" of Catherine Weldon's "Ghost Dance"
- April 17 pp. 221-277 (book 6, chapters 44-55): "*the cure / that precedes every wound*"
healing amidst the funerals of Hector and Maud Plunkett
- April 24 pp. 279-325 (book 7, chapters 56-64): beyond "*All that Greek manure*"
ending with "Helen at the Halcyon" and "aching Achilles"

COURSE RESOURCES

Materials such as weekly handouts and updates, as well as links to online resources, will be posted on the course website "materials and info" page (<https://sacks-richard.com/omer-atos-at-du-materials>).