

**Some basic facts about and features of
Derek's Walcott's *Omeros*
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There are 7 books in *Omeros*, each with between 4 and 13 chapters.

There are 64 chapters in all, numbered sequentially through the poem as a whole, rather than anew in each book:

- book 1 – chapters 1-13 (pp. 3-76)
- book 2 – chapters 14-24 (pp. 77-131)
- book 3 – chapters 25-32 (pp. 133-168)
- book 4 – chapters 33-36 (pp. 169-188)
- book 5 – chapters 37-43 (pp. 189-219)
- book 6 – chapters 44-55 (pp. 221-277)
- book 7 – chapters 56-64 (pp. 279-325)

There are 3 sections in each chapter, with sections ranging between 3 and 33 stanzas in length.

Each stanza is 3 lines in length, with the exception of section 3 of chapter 33 where the stanzas are 2-line couplets.

Lines may be orthographically split (as we see sometimes in Shakespeare with a line shared by 2 speakers).

The "home" location of the poem is St. Lucia, the eastern Caribbean island where Walcott was born and grew up; the island's history includes at least three different names by which it has been called:

- *Iounalao: "... the hunched island was called / "Iounalao," "Where the Iguana is found." (1.1.38-9, p. 4)
- *Helen: "... the name's shadow; the island was once / called Helen" (5.3.68-9, p. 31)
- *St. Lucia: " A Genoan wanderer / ... named the place / for a blinded saint" (57.1.43-5, p. 286)

The basic structure of the poem revolves around 3 male characters (**Achille**, **Major Plunkett**, and the **narrator**), each in his own way obsessed with a St. Lucian woman named **Helen**.

Achille is a St. Lucian fisherman; he lives with Helen (who had been Plunkett's maid), though at one point she leaves Achille and moves in with an ex-fisherman named **Hector**.

Major Plunkett is English by birth; he and his Irish-born wife **Maud** moved to St. Lucia after WW2, and own a pig farm.

The narrator is essentially Walcott who returns to visit St. Lucia from Boston (Brookline to be specific) where his lover (a Greek woman named Antigone) has left him.

In the first half of the poem (mostly in books 1-3), each of the 3 central male characters obsessed with Helen ends up taking a kind of ancestral journey:

- *the narrator visits with the ghost of his father at the end of book 1 (chapters 12-13) and again in the last section of book 4 (chapter 36).
- *Major Plunkett's journey – in the first half of book 2 (chapters 14-19) – involves a Midshipman named Plunkett who died during the so-called "Battle of the Saints" (1782), the sea-battle in which the British Admiral Rodney defeated the French fleet under Comte de Grasse, finally giving the British long-lasting possession of St. Lucia "after thirteen treaties" (5.3.72, p. 31).
- *Achille, in the first half of book 3 (chapters 25-28) visits his ancestral village in Africa and witnesses the raid which sent his ancestor Afolabe to the new world as a slave.

In books 4-5, we somehow end up with a woman named **Catherine Weldon**, a widow who travelled from Boston first to proselytize among, and who then ended up helping, Sitting Bull and the Sioux; we first meet her in the middle of book 4 (specifically, the last section of chapter 34), and she fades away in the last section of book 5 (chapter 43).

In books 4-5, we also spend time with the narrator visiting museums and cultural monuments in Boston and Europe; in particular, his father's ghost sends him on the European journey he takes in the first half of book 5 (chapters 37-40).

Book 6 features three culminating events in St. Lucia: the death and funeral of Hector; the healing of the wound of another ex-fisherman whose name is **Philoctete**, is the first character we meet in the poem, and is healed by a woman named **Ma Kilman**, a widow who owns the No Pain Café; and the death and funeral of Maud Plunkett.

One other St. Lucian character to note: a blind old man (whom we meet in the second section of the second chapter) called **Seven Seas**, and also at times called *Omeros*.