



### Update Page for Class of 3/27/23

Course materials and info page: <https://sacks-richard.com/omeros-at-du-materials>

**For our second class (that of 3/27)**, we'll continue our exploration of the opening books of *Omeros*, with the goal of working our way toward and through the narrative's first two ancestral journeys: that of the narrator at the end of book 1 (chapters 12-13) and that of Major Plunkett in the first half of book 2 (chapters 14-19). As per the schedule on the syllabus, please read through chapter 19 (which ends on page 104) for class on 3/27, and as you go along, continue to give some thought to what you see as the fundamental narrative strategies and emphases of these opening chapters of the poem, as well as to the artistry of Walcott's poetic language. Also, here are some passages you might find productive/provocative to think about, though I hasten to add that any passage is fair game for our discussion. You'll see I've gone overboard a bit by providing one question for each chapter; I just thought having something from each chapter might give us a better chance of keeping track of – and thus getting our heads around – where we are as the narrative progresses. But you should absolutely feel free to ignore any of this.

**Chapter 4)** What do you make of **our first direct view of the narrator back in St. Lucia**, which we get in 4.3 (pp. 23-24) beginning with "I sat on the white terrace waiting for the cheque" (4.1.1/p23)?

**Chapter 5)** What do you make of **our introduction to the Plunketts** (extending through all three sections of chapter 5, pp. 24-32), who have "been out here / since the war and his wound. Pigs. Orchids. Their marriage..." (5.1.16-17/p.25), a sequence with frequent changes in narrative voice and focus?

**Chapter 6)** What do you make of **the narration's first extended look at Helen** (extending through all three sections of chapter 6, pp. 33-37), which culminates in the narration turning to its 1<sup>st</sup> person voice with "I saw her once after that moment on the beach / when her face shook my heart..." (6.3.31-32/p36)?

**Chapter 7)** What do you make of **the combination and sequence of scenes in chapter 7** (pp. 37-42), as it moves from 7.1's confrontation between Helen and Achille amidst "The iron roar of the market" (7.1.1/p37) to 7.2's focus on Achille "diving conchs under the lower redoubt" (7.2.8/p39) and finally to 7.3's sudden switch to the 1<sup>st</sup> person narrative voice beginning "In this boat we were shipmates" (7.3.1/p41)?

**Chapter 8)** What do you make of 8.2 (pp. 45-47) focusing on Achille "**In the corals' bone kingdom**" (8.2.10/p45) with its "corpses / that had perished in the crossing" (8.2.22-23/p45)?

**Chapter 9)** What do you make of **the storm in 9.3** (pp. 51-54), featuring "thunderous weather / where Ogun can fire one with his partner Zeus" (9.3.38-39/p53)?

**Chapter 10)** What do you make of 10.2-3 (pp. 57-63) which focus on **the Plunketts' post-storm drive** "[o]nce the rains had passed... / round the shining island" (10.2.1-2/p57) until finally "their peace was so deep" 10.3.60/p63) before returning "down to the flat, real world" (10.3.63/p63)?

**Chapter 11)** What do you make of 11.1 (pp. 63-64), **the scene in which "Plunkett decided that what the place needed / was its true place in history**, that he'd spend hours / for Helen's sake on research" (11.1.31-33)?

**Chapter 12)** What do you make of 12.1 (pp. 67-69), which is **the first scene of the narrator's visit with his dead father** and takes place mostly inside the house in which Walcott grew up – at this point it's a "printery" (12.1.2/p67) – until the section ends with an exchange "At the door to the yard" (12.1.41/p69).

**Chapter 13)** What do you make of **the way in which the narrator's ancestral journey proceeds in chapter 13** (pp. 71-76), beginning at the shop of "the town anarchist [/] corner barber" (13.1.3/p71) with "*The World's Great Classics* read backwards in his mirrors" (13.1.8/p71), and ending "Along this coal-blackened wharf" (13.3.1/p74) as his father speaks of the "women climb[ing] / like ants up a white flower-pot, baskets of coal / balanced on their torchoned heads, ... / ... Helens from an earlier time" (13.2.31-36/p73)?

**Chapter 14)** What do you make of **the transition into book two – as well as into Plunkett's ancestral journey** – which begins with a "midshipman" on a "Dutch road" (14.1.1-3/p77), features the repeated presence of "poplars" in 14.1 (lines 9, 14 & 42/pp77-78), capitalized "Night Watch" in 14.2 (lines 23 & 30/pp80-81), and "hare" also in 14.2 (lines 25, 27, 31, 34, 36 & 39/p81), before suddenly switching to the renaming of a slave named Afolabe in 14.3 (pp. 81-83)?

**Chapter 15)** What do you make of **chapter 15 (pp. 84-86), all of which takes places during the Battle of the Saints** and which ends in 15.3 (p. 86) with the death of the midshipman?

**Chapter 16)** What do you make of 16.1 (pp. 87-88) which focuses on "**Plunkett's ances-tree**" (16.1.1/p87) and ends with "No heir: end of the line / No more Plunketts." (16.1.23-24/p88)?

**Chapter 17)** What do you make of **the climactic moment in Plunkett's research at the end of chapter 17** (pp. 93-94), beginning with the last 2½ lines of 17.2 when Plunkett "found the entry / in pale lilac. *Plunkett. One for the lacy trough*" (17.2.19-20/p93), and extending through all 12 lines of 17.3 (p. 94)?

**Chapter 18)** What do you make of **the "bracelet coiled like a snake" (18.1.1/p96) sequence**, which extends from the last six stanzas of 18.1 (p. 96) through all of 18.2 (pp. 96-97), and which begins with Plunkett finding Helen in his bedroom "one long arm / its fist closed like a snake's head, slipped through a bracelet / from Maud's jewel-box, and, with eyes calm as Circe..." (18.1.40-42/p96)?

**Chapter 19)** What do you make of **19.3 (pp. 102-104) "As the fever of History began to pass"** (19.3.1/p102), leading to Plunkett's reflection that "he had paid the debt. / The breakers had threshed her name with the very sound / the midshipman heard. He had given her a son" (19.3.25-27/p103)?