



Update Page for Class of 4/3/23

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

For our third class (that of 4/3), we'll continue our exploration of *Omeros*, focusing on the ancestral journeys of Major Plunkett in the first half of book 2 (chapters 14-19) and of Achilles in the final chapter of book 2 (chapter 24) and then continuing in book 3 (chapters 25-28), including his return in chapters 29-31. As per the schedule on the syllabus, please read through chapter 32 (the final chapter of book 3 which ends on page 168) for class on 4/3. As usual, here are some passages you might find productive/provocative to think about, though I again hasten to add that any passage is fair game for our discussion. You'll see that I've continued the approach I began last week of providing one question for each chapter to help us in our attempts of getting/keeping our bearings as we wrestle with the narrative and poetic complexities of the poem. Note that the first six questions (those for chapters 14-19) repeat the ones I posed last week for those chapters.

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, 24 & 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)?

Chapter 20) What do you make of the switch in focus to Statics' election campaign in chapter 20, and in particular **the way 20.2 ends (lines 36-51/pp107-108) with Philoctete** in the Comet (which is serving as Statics' campaign transport) wondering "Why they couldn't love the place, same way, together, / the way he always loved her, even with his sore?" (20.2.46-47/p108)?

Chapter 21) What do you make of **21.3 (pp. 114-5), which focuses on Achille and Helen after she returns from the village blocko** and during which "Achille saw Helen's / completion for the first time" (21.3.20-21/p115)?

- Chapter 22)** What do you make of **22.2 (pp. 117-118) which focuses exclusively on Hector** and which ends as "he thought of his *comerades* hauling their canoes / and the dusk thatching their sheds without any noise" (22.2.50-51/p118)?
- Chapter 23)** What do you make of **23.3 (pp. 122-125) with its extended scene between Maud and Helen** when Helen comes to borrow money?
- Chapter 24)** What do you make of **the progression of chapter 24 (pp. 125-131), the final chapter of book two and the beginning of Achille's ancestral journey**, which opens as Achille "followed the skipping of a sea-swift / over the waves' changing hills" (24.1.2-3/p125), beneath which are the drowned dead including "the nameless bones of all his brothers / drowned in the crossing, plus a Midshipman Plunkett" (24.2.33-34/p128), and up from which "Achille saw the ghost / of his father's face shoot" (24.2.86-87/p130) and "questioned his name and its origin" (24.3.7/p130)?
- Chapter 25)** What do you make of **25.3 (pp. 136-139) which features Achille's dialogue (when he first arrives in Africa) with his ancestor Afolabe**?
- Chapter 26)** What do you make of **26.3 (pp. 142-143) which features "three centuries / of walking"** (26.3.18-19/p142)?
- Chapter 27)** What do you make of **chapter 27 (pp. 144-148), which focuses on Achille during and after the raid by the slavers**?
- Chapter 28)** What do you make of **chapter 28 (pp. 148-152), the chapter after the raid**, which moves from "the griot muttering his prophetic song" (28.1.1/p148) to a vision of the captured slaves in the hold as "coals, firewood, dismembered / branches, not men / ... / [as] each carried / the nameless freight of himself to the other world" (28.2.16-21/p150)?
- Chapter 29)** What do you make of **29.1-2 (pp. 152-154) in which the narrative turns its focus back to St. Lucia and those awaiting Achille's return**, Helen in 29.1 as "the O's encircled her" (29.1.13/p152), and Seven Seas and Philoctete in 29.2 believing "He go come back soon" (29.2.15/p154)?
- Chapter 30)** What do you make of **30.2 (pp. 159-160) which features the idea of "the shout on which each odyssey pivots"** (30.2.7/p159)?
- Chapter 31)** What do you make of **31.1 (pp. 161-162), the first scene with Achille back on land in St. Lucia after his ancestral journey to Africa**, as Achille turns "Buffalo Soldier" (31.1.7ff./p161), with "Red Indians bouncing to a West Indian rhythm" (31.1.19/p161), until "he fired the oar / and a palm-tree crumpled / ... / until the shore / was littered with palm-spears, bodies" (31.1.29-32/p162)?
- Chapter 32)** What do you make of **32.1 (pp 165-166), the narrator's visit with his mother** who, because of her dementia, is living in the "Marian [nursing] Home" (32.1.6/p165) and has "entered a dimension / where every thought was weightless, every form clouded / by its ephemeral halo" (32.1.13-15/p165) as "untranslatable / answers accompanied these actual spirits" (32.2.12-13/p167)