

Take-home exam

Instructions

Your exam should consist of three essays of about two pages each (double-spaced, one-inch margins, Microsoft Word if possible). This time around, I've organized things a little differently. You'll find the topics grouped under headings, and differentiated by symbols: the first group of your topics (#) are ones for which I was able to think of follow-up questions relating to *Omeros* (*). The second group of your topics (\$) are ones which I've left as free-standing ones. **Please choose one topic marked *, one marked # or \$, and a third from any category you wish.**

Writing essays (or, answers to questions) of this abbreviated length imposes certain necessities: you should get right to the point of what you're interested in without a lengthy (or any) introduction; you should try to be concise; and you should make your concluding point clear, but brief. I don't expect fancy writing, just good grammar and prose that gets its point across. Try not to generalize but to be quite specific to a particular text (or, in the case of *Omeros*, a particular passage). Close reading is good, even in the case of the longer poem, and now's the time for it.

The take-home will be due Friday, May 18, at 5 p.m. Requests for extensions until Monday should be sent to me by email. **Please e-mail your essays to me in some format which I will not have trouble opening.**

Topics

1. *Names.*

- 1.1. #In "The Schooner Flight," Shabine says, "we live like our names and you would have to be colonial to know the difference". What does that poem indicate to be the particular significance of names, or naming, in the Caribbean? Where else do names matter in "The Schooner Flight"?
- 1.2. *In *Omeros* III, Philoctete suggests that part of what's wrong with him is "this name that felt like a fever." The name, in other words, is involved with the wound.
Look at some of the passages describing Ma Kilman's discovery of the healing plant (XLVII, XLVIII) and her cure for Philoctete (XLIX); pick one of them, and tell me what you are able to understand from it about the nature of his cure, and thus the nature of his "disease."

2. *Nature: Trees and Fish.*

- 2.1. # "The Schooner Flight" tells us that the naming of the casuarinas matters.
What kind of light does this passage about trees shed on the story about felling trees that opens *Omeros*?
- 2.2. #In "Tarpon," we see an enormous fish that has suffered a violent death.
What does Walcott evoke with the images of this poem, and what is the result of the whole?
- 2.3. **Omeros*
portrays Achille's way of life – fishing from a canoe – as both valuable ("work was prayer," LX) and in jeopardy from both tourism and more modern ways of fishing (LVIII, LX, LXII). What is being threatened, and by what? (You can pick just one passage).
- 2.4. *At the same time, *Omeros*
never loses sight of the violence against nature inherent in fishing, from the opening "slaughter" of trees (I) to the successful catches associated with Achille's imagined voyage to Africa (XXX) and the close of the poem (LXIV). How does the longer poem represent Achille's relation to nature (the ocean, fish) in one of the later two passages?

3. *Adam and Eden.*

- 3.1. \$Compare Walcott's depiction of Adam in "New World" and "Adam's Song". If the two Adams are different, why?
- 3.2. \$In class, we discussed "Adam's Song," and explored Adam's relationship with Eve. Walcott revisits this expulsion from Eden as a topic

in "New World," but the second poem focuses primarily on Adam's relationship with the snake. How would you characterize this relationship, and the "New World" that the two create together?

3.3. \$Walcott's "A Sea Chantey" is prefaced by an excerpt from [the 19th-century French poet's] Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au Voyage". The poem comes from Baudelaire's collection *Fleurs du Mal* ["Flowers of Evil"], which portrays a modern life as characterized by lust, isolation, and decay,. Baudelaire's poem invites a lover to escape to an idyllic Mediterranean paradise, "there, where all is luxury, calm, and voluptuousness". How does Walcott's invocation of Baudelaire alter our reading of "A Sea Chantey"?

4. *The sea.*

4.1.

#Why does the speaker in "The Sea Is History" reference the particular books of the Bible that he does [i.e., the Old Testament narrative of exile and bondage, followed by a journey to the Promised Land], and what does this choice illustrate about his view of the Caribbean's relationship to Western-style history in the poem?

4.2. **Omeros*

LIX, section II revisits the earlier poem's idea of the sea as a place of "parodic architecture" with its own temples, minarets, and parthenons. In section I of the chapter, the narrator says more simply, "the sea was my privilege. And a fresh people." Tell me something about the sea, as landscape and image, in this first section. What does the narrator mean?

5. *Poetry.*

5.1. \$In "The Spoiler's Return," the verse has a powerful sense of rhythm. What contribution does this rhythm make to the poem, and how? If you like, you can include an example of how you think the poem should sound (either by leaving it on my voicemail, x38848, or by other technical means at your disposal).

6. *The yellow dress.*

6.1. #In *Omeros*, Helen steals a yellow frock from Maud.

The frock sets up a thread of imagery comparing Helen to a butterfly -- what is the significance of this characterization? (As context, remember some of Walcott's other insect imagery: the "caterpillar" judges in "The Sea Is History," the personification of men as ants throughout *Omeros*, the comparison of lovers to insects in *Omeros* XLVIII).

6.2. *In *Omeros* LV, Achille puts on Helen's/Maud's yellow dress so that he and Philoctete can perform a Boxing-Day dance, and their performance closes Book VI. What is the significance and effect of that performance? The dress originally signifies, to Major Plunkett, something about the guilty debt he and Maud owe their former maid.

Why is Achille wearing the dress, and does it mean something different now, in this new context?