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"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"

Regarded as a classic short story belonging to the science fiction genre, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" is a critically acclaimed piece by the Ursula K. Le Guin. The philosopher William James advocated a moral quandary that visualized the hideousness of happiness if it stemmed from the suffering of a child (Le Guin). The author of this story envisaged the entire plot of the story around this notion. The story revolves around a city, Omelas, which appears to be the epitome of prosperity and happiness and where everyone seems to be contented. As the story comes to an end, it is revealed that this all-pervading happiness in the city is chiefly dependent upon the miserable existence of a child who is constantly being maltreated and abused in a locked room. The majority of the citizens agree upon the acceptance of this situation but a significant chunk leaves the city. In the story, ‘The Child’ is deployed as a poignant symbol to efficaciously trigger emotional responses in the readers' mind and is also used to effectively critique the members of contemporary society simultaneously. Structurally, the story is divided into two parts whereby the first section fairly strives to portray the general conditions of Omelas and the latter section focuses on the misery of the child upon whom the city’s happiness is primarily dependent.

Le Guin presents a story emanating from a varied notion of the normative concept of scapegoatism. Additionally, ideas in the story are largely procured from a utilitarian philosophical thought. Conventionally, the idea of scapegoatism alludes to the act of laying or assigning the blame of one’s own wrongdoing in lieu of another, but Le Guin’s variation on this advocates the miserable suffering being inflicted upon the child in lieu of that same pain being borne by all the other residents of the city.

Largely considered as an allegorical story, one unique interpretation of this allegory is the contiguity of the child with the rest of the city. This interpretation is primarily representative of the sharp contrast between the wealthy and the unprivileged segments of society in a nation where the pervading economic system is capitalism. Another interpretation that is largely macrocosmic in nature sheds light on the disparities in living standards and quality of life in countries belonging to the First and Third World. The reader comes to realize that in the contemporary world, the prevalent economic and political systems chiefly work to benefit the wealthy segments of society and the majority of the populations strive to maintain the status quo.

The narrator in the story creates a tone of curious wonder and admiration towards the city and the citizens of Omelas. In the subsequent section, there seems to prevail a tone of mysterious thought process and apprehension towards those who leave the city in an attempt to place emphasis on the consequential difficulty of the ethical decision made by the ones who walk away. The inherent nature of humanity and its presentation in a sarcastic and exaggerated manner is carefully crafted in the story. Some themes that are apparent in the story are utilitarianism, community ideals, alienation, and religious interpretation. "[The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas](https://www.enotes.com/topics/ones-who-walk-away-omelas?en_action=hh_answer_body_click&en_label=%2Fhomework-help%2Fcan-you-give-me-one-sentence-summary-story-93429%23answer-881724&en_category=internal_campaign)" is more of a distinct thought experiment than a conventional plot and poses a moral interrogation to its readership.

Basically, there is a levy of criticism against utilitarianism and its adherents in the story. Utilitarianism is a multi-faceted approach to normative ethics that attempt to comprehend moral decision-making as a kind of cost-benefit analysis in which the consequences of an individual’s actions are thought to be the precursor of his general undertakings in life.

# **Works Cited:**

Le Guin, Ursula K. "The ones who walk away from Omelas."." *Evil and the Hiddenness of God* (2014): 23.