

The People of Omelas: Those Who Have to Decide

Omelas Halkı: Karar Vermek Zorunda Olanlar

Abstract

The individual and society are two intertwined elements that influence each other. In her short story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1974), Ursula K. Le Guin employs a distinctive approach to demonstrate these two concepts by illustrating a situation in which the preservation of the happiness, health, and prosperity of all individuals in Omelas society is ensured by the constant suffering of a child. Consequently, this moral dilemma divides Omelas society into two groups: those members who prioritize the collective happiness and are committed to achieving it, and those individuals who are motivated by their desire to leave. In the narrative, the moral dilemma depicted by Le Guin remains unresolved, thus inviting further examination. This study aims to present an objective analysis of the motives and justifications of opposing sides, offering readers a detailed understanding of the ideas and choices made by each. Therefore, the ones who focus on the collective interest and choose to stay are internalized with John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism theory, while the ones who choose to walk away by focusing on individual concerns are analysed with Transcendentalism approach.

Keywords: Omelas, utilitarianism, transcendentalism, collectivism, individualism

Öz

Birey ve toplum birbirini etkileyen iç içe geçmiş iki unsurdur. Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1974) adlı kısa öyküsünde, Omelas toplumundaki tüm bireylerin mutluluk, sağlık ve refahının korunmasının bir çocuğun sürekli acı çekmesiyle sağlandığı bir durumu resmederek bu iki konsepti yansıtmak için farklı bir yaklaşım kullanır. Böylece bu ahlaki ikilem Omelas toplumunu iki gruba ayırır: kolektif mutluluğuna öncelik veren ve bunu sağlamaya kararlı olan üyeler ve ayrılma isteğiyle motive olan bireyler. Hikâyede, Le Guin tarafından resmedilen ahlaki ikilem çözümlenmemiş bir şekilde kalmakta ve bu da daha fazla incelemeyi beraberinde getirmektedir. Bu çalışma, okuyuculara tarafların fikirleri ve tercihleri hakkında ayrıntılı bir anlayış sunarak, her iki tarafın motifleri ve gerekçelerinin objektif bir analizini sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, kolektif çıkarı odaklanarak kalmayı tercih edenler John Stuart Mill’in Faydacılık teorisiyle içselleştirilirken, bireysel kaygılara odaklanarak uzaklaşmayı tercih edenler ise Transandantalizm yaklaşımıyla analiz edilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Omelas, faydacılık, transandantalizm, kolektivizm, bireycilik

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Geliş Tarihi/Received 04.04.2025
Kabul Tarihi/Accepted 22.09.2025
Yayın Tarihi/Publication Date 30.04.2026

Cite this article as: Kalkan, D. & Erkan, M. (2026). The people of Omelas: Those who have to decide. *Current Perspectives in Social Sciences*, 30(2), 265-273.



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Introduction

Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973) is a significant short story that employs a dualistic narrative structure, juxtaposing a utopian and a dystopian setting. While the narrative presents a utopian society characterized by absolute happiness and prosperity, it also portrays a dystopian reality for some of its inhabitants. The portrayal of a unified society whose collective happiness depends on the sufferings of a child creates a moral dilemma that remains unresolved throughout the story. The moral dilemma faced by the citizens of Omelas divides the population into two distinct groups: the ones who stay and the ones who walk away. The two opposing sides, which may be regarded as two sides of the coin, have their own perceptions, motivations and beliefs on their decisions. Therefore, neither the stayers nor the walkers are able to interfere with or influence the other side's ideologies. This dichotomy invites readers to engage with the issue through the lens of a citizen of Omelas. Thus, in order to gain insight into their perspectives, this paper aims to examine the two opposing viewpoints. In this manner, the collective ideologies and motives of the ones who choose to stay in Omelas will be analysed through John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism principles. On the other hand, the beliefs of the individuals who choose to walk away from Omelas will be analysed in the light of Transcendentalism.

Literary Review

The presentation of the issue in Le Guin's work has important conceptual implications when analysed through a critical lens. In his writing "The Talking Porcupine Liberates Utopia: Le Guin's 'Omelas' as Pretext to the Dance" (1991) Kenneth M. Roemer exemplifies the unique style of Le Guin's narrator in the story, specifically regarding the characteristics of a utopian narrator and how it differs from other such narrators. "...also gives us a series of stimulating images to get our minds going and then offers us the freedom to invent other images to suit our wishes" (Roemer, 1991, p. 9). The open invitation presented by the narrator provides readers with the opportunity to engage in active questioning and thus become active participants in the narrative. As a result, it is necessary to present the mindsets of the two sides to the readers. As Le Guin depicts two groups of citizens and a child who experiences persistent suffering in this utopian (or dystopian for the child) setting, some critics have conducted analyses of the groups and the child in particular ways. Nihal Farhan Kabir's study "Evaluating the Values of the Sheepish Slaves: A Synthetical Analysis of 'The Lottery' and 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas' in Light of Nietzsche's Ruminations" (2022) offers an analysis of the division between citizens of Omelas and the child who bears the burden of suffering as a scapegoat with "...their respective traditional values and the community members in light of Nietzsche's 'master-slave morality'" (Farhan, 2022, p. 29). Thus, he examines the society through the master and slave concept. In Annabel Herzog's study, "Dilemmas of Political Agency and Sovereignty: The Omelian Allegory" (2021), the question of morality is examined through the lens of neoliberal capitalism. She interprets the action of leaving Omelas through "the conditions of resistance in circumstances of political liberty" (Herzog, 2021, p. 72). While analysing the portrayal of suffering children in the works of particular writers in "Ethics and Theory: Suffering Children in Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Le Guin" (2008) Laurie Langbauer expresses that "...their stories denounce that we scapegoat the figure of the child, try to make it draw off human horror, while at the same time demonstrating that logic" (Langbauer, 2008, p. 90). Langbauer's focus on the child highlights that the depiction of the suffering child in Omelas also presents a paradoxical dilemma to the readers. The theme of sacrifice is also addressed in Alexander Keller Hirsch's study of "Walking off the Edge of the World: Sacrifice, Chance, and Dazzling Dissolution in the Book of Job and Ursula K. Le Guin's 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas'" (2016). He internalizes the concept of sacrifice with the walkers as a result of their decision to leave prosperity behind, following "George Bataille's theory of sacrifice as useless expenditure, and developed his concept of the 'will to chance'" (Hirsch, 2016, p. 1). In Andrew Dennis Bassford "Conscientious Utilitarianism; or, the Utilitarians Who Walk Away from Omelas" (2022), he conceptualizes conscientious utilitarianism by placing conscience at the centre of utilitarianism by addressing that "importing conscience into utilitarianism will clearly make some difference to utilitarian epistemology, since conscience is a moral epistemic concept" (Bassford, 2022, p. 11). By doing so, he internalizes the story with conscientious utilitarianism which differs from John Stuart Mill's classical utilitarian principles. Consequently, in this research paper, the citizens of Omelas will be classified into two distinct categories: the stayers and the walkers. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the actions of both parties, it is necessary to analyse them from a variety of perspectives. Thus, the motives of the stayers will be examined in accordance with Mill's utilitarianism and the intentions of the walkers will be examined in the context of Transcendentalism as an individual force.

The Division Caused by the Dilemma

In her narrative, Le Guin portrays Omelas as a place where its citizens live in a state of endless prosperity and collective

happiness. “In other streets the music beat faster...and the people went dancing, the procession was a dance. Children dodged in and out, their high calls rising like the swallows’ crossing flights, over the music and the singing” (Le Guin, 1991, p. 1). The people of Omelas, regardless of age, collectively enjoy the delightful days that are part of their shared experience. This atmosphere of happiness is accompanied by dance and music. “How can I tell you about the people of Omelas? They were not naive and happy children –though their children were, in fact, happy. They were mature, intelligent, passionate adults whose lives were not wretched” (Le Guin, 1991, p. 2). Furthermore, the positive atmosphere of Omelas also has an impact on the personalities and qualities of individuals. The children are regarded as a source of pride and joy for the city, while the elders are seen as a source of wisdom and guidance for the younger generation. However, all of these circumstances are dependent on a single condition: to maintain wealth and high-quality standards of life, a child must be kept in prison without any fundamental rights. Therefore, while citizens live on welfare, they are aware of the fact that one child is shouldering all the burden of ugliness and harshness of reality rather than them. “Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness...depend wholly on this child’s abominable misery” (Le Guin, 1991, p. 4). Thus, Le Guin’s Omelas can be regarded as a utopia for the ones who stay, yet a dystopia for the ones who walk away. Even though the existence of the prisoned child is an objective truth to both groups, their motives to decide and act are subjective. Consequently, this conflict divides Omelas’ citizens into two groups. John Stuart Mill, a significant figure of societal issues, describes his opinion on how to act when there is a conflict between different sides of society in his work *Utilitarianism* (2017):

Yet to support their pretensions there ought either to be some one fundamental principle or law, at the root of all morality, or if there be several, there should be a determinate order of precedence among them; and the one principle, or the rule for deciding between the various principles when they conflict, ought to be self-evident. (Mill, 2017, p. 3)

The need to decide the state of Omelas and the future of the citizens is a necessity for both the stayers and the walkers. While doing so, they may face some moral challenges. Therefore, to determine the decision and future of Omelas, the citizens consider several aspects both as individuals and as a society. The stayers are willing to accept the condition and are committed to maintaining the continued well-being of their society by living there in unity. On the other hand, the walkers, who view this attitude as wrong, are willing to act individually by separating themselves from the stayers, and Omelas. This difference between their actions is also reflected in both of their mindsets. In this regard, it can be assumed that stayers are mainly driven by collective aims, while walkers are driven by more personal motivations.

The Stayers: Utilitarianist Motives

The theory of Utilitarianism is “...the principle of utility, or as Bentham latterly called it, the greatest happiness principle” (Mill, 2017, p. 4) that shapes the actions and motivations of utilitarianists. As a pioneer of this philosophy, Mill interprets and evaluates the aims and actions as “right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (Mill, 2017, p. 8). A comparable classification of happiness is presented in Le Guin’s narrative: “happiness is based on a just discrimination of what is necessary, what is neither necessary nor destructive, and what is destructive” (Le Guin, 1991, p. 2). Thus, the concept of happiness is the determining factor that shapes the future of Omelas. In this manner, the decision of the stayers to maintain the captivity of the child can be seen as an act of promoting collective happiness since it ensures the continuity of happiness in Omelas. Conversely, freeing the child is a threat which endangers collective happiness and opens the door to instability and worse, destruction: “...since utility includes not solely the pursuit of happiness, but the prevention or mitigation of unhappiness” (Mill, 2017, p. 15). This utopia offers everyone a free choice in their decision to stay or leave, except the child. As a result, the representation of the joy of the citizens is intertwined with the suffering of the child. Hence, the collective happiness of the stayers and dissatisfaction of the walkers are depicted together in the narrative along with the child's suffering. “If it were cleaned and fed and comforted, that would be a good thing, indeed; but if it were done, in that day and hour all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed” (Le Guin, 1991, p. 4). The end of the child’s agony would result in the destruction of all that is positive and beautiful in humanity and the city. Although this Faustian condition may first appear easy to determine, it is a considerable burden for any individual responsible for evaluating and complying with it. Therefore, the presence of the child in the basement is a collective rule, rather than a written one, which the citizens must preserve. This unwritten rule is respected by all participants, regardless of whether they are stayers or walkers. “They all know that it has to be there” (Le Guin, 1991, p. 4). While living a prosperous lifestyle, the stayers also seek to avoid any circumstances or actions that might

potentially result in collective unhappiness. Thus, there is no mention of the violation of this law by either of the two sides throughout the story.

The stayers' mindset which is set on the collective happiness of Omelas can be internalized through the concept of Utilitarianism. The Utilitarianist "...standard is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether" (Mill, 2017, p. 13). Thus, the stayers ignore the individual pain that the child suffers every single day and hour by putting the collective happiness of citizens in front of it. Mill exemplifies one of the stereotypes that utilitarianists face by others: "it is often affirmed that utilitarianism renders men cold and unsympathizing; that it chills their moral feelings towards individuals; that it makes them regard only the dry and hard consideration of the consequences of actions" (Mill, 2017, p. 23). The utilitarian approach to decision-making considers the amount of happiness in a given choice or action in order to preserve the welfare of a society. In doing so, they are open to taking actions that may be regarded as adverse to the interests of a minority. For that reason, this may lead to a depiction of utilitarianists as unsympathetic from the perspective of others. "It is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their science" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 5). The presence and extent of these qualities are dependent on the condition of the child. The positive developments in society, as well as the health of individuals, are all secured through the child who is imprisoned in exchange. "It is because of the child that they are so gentle with children" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 5). Furthermore, the child plays a significant role in strengthening the relationships between other children and their families. This situation provides the other children of Omelas with a source of joy and comfort. As a result, the stayers' certain decision of protecting majority can be justified on the grounds that the only alternative course of action would result in greater collective harm:

To exchange all the goodness and grace of every life in Omelas for that single, small improvement: to throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of the happiness of one: that would be to let guilt within the walls indeed. (Le Guin, 1991, p. 4)

A parallel prejudice, as outlined by Mill about utilitarianism, can be exemplified by the walkers regarding the stayers. Similarly, those who walk away decide to leave the place as they do not wish to be associated with the stayers, who prioritize the collective interest as the main focus of their actions. Although the walkers may consider this behaviour to be cruel, the stayers can be praised for their dedication to their ideology and commitment to aim for the greatest amount of happiness. "...when once the general happiness is recognized as the ethical standard, it will constitute the strength of the utilitarian morality" (Mill, 2017, p. 39). In this sense, once the stayers preserve the general happiness by protecting the deal, they will also achieve the idealized utilitarian society that is united and harmonious without any dilemmas.

Another motivating factor for the stayers is their desire to live in this fertile and prosperous place in a unity, without any internal dilemmas. "This firm foundation is that of the social feelings of mankind; the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures, which is already a powerful principle in human nature" (Mill, 2017, p. 39). Similarly, this aspired goal of the utilitarian community is also reflected in the narrative. Despite their individual identities within society, they seek to act collectively in order to maintain stability. Consequently, to achieve this intended outcome, the stayers also obtain social roles that are in harmony with one another and support the sense of a union. In their ideal unified community, there is no space for any form of discord; instead, there is a prevailing sense of concord. In the course of the narrative, a state of peace and prosperity is portrayed on the day of the festival celebrating summer: "an old woman, small, fat, and laughing, is passing out flowers from a basket, and tall young men, wear her flowers in their shining hair" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 3). Both the elders and the younger generation aspire to enhance this collective happiness. Thus, the arrival of summer is welcomed with a sense of collective symphony. "The horses rear on their slender legs, and some of them neigh in answer. Sober-faced, the young riders stroke the horses' necks and soothe them, whispering, 'Quiet, quiet, there my beauty, my hope'" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 3). In addition to humans, other living beings, such as animals, are of great significance and are highly valued for the maintenance of this unified atmosphere. The state of prosperity of citizens is positively correlated both with their own behaviour and with their treatment of other living creatures. "He comes, as though instinctively, to be conscious of himself as a being who *of course* pays regard to others" (Mill, 2017, p. 40). In this regard, the utilitarian actions which stayers embrace serve as a means of establishing a unified place. Thus, the stayers are capable of overlooking the child's sufferings for the collective cause, even though such behaviour can be challenging for one. The decision to imprison the child, regarded selfish by the walkers, is in fact the foundation on which this unified society depends. In order to preserve the society as united Omelas needs to

be guarded.

Omelas is not a place where there is an absolute pleasure, due to the child's sufferings, but can be regarded as a utilitarian society which aims for the greatest number of content citizens. In this happy community, there is no destructive events such as war:

A boundless and generous contentment, a magnanimous triumph felt not against some outer enemy but in communion with the finest and fairest in the souls of all men everywhere and the splendor of the world's summer; this is what swells the hearts of the people of Omelas, and the victory they celebrate is that of life. (Le Guin, 1991, p. 3)

The citizens are not preoccupied with external conflicts; rather, their focus is on achieving internal peace. They find this peace from their social interactions and the collective well-being of the city. The celebration of life in all its forms is the foundation of their sense of victory, with the goal of achieving this in as many numbers as possible. Therefore, it requires a responsibility to protect this number. The final motivation that drives the actions of stayers' is their sense of social responsibility towards the citizens of Omelas. "Neither pains nor pleasures are homogeneous, and pain is always heterogeneous with pleasure" (Mill, 2017, p. 13). Similarly, the dichotomy between the pleasures of the citizens and the pain of the child is also exemplified in Omelas. As a result, the stayers become protectors of the society to control this dilemma. One might ask, does utilitarianism allow collective happiness to exist by exchanging never-ending suffering for one? Can they coexist in the establishment of a utilitarian society? As a human being who lives in the same society as the rest, does the child not have the right to be on the bright side of society? In his work *Utilitarianism*, Mill gives a clear statement on these issues: "all persons are deemed to have a *right* to equality of treatment, except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse" (Mill, 2017, p. 76). If an exception is needed, the required actions may change, resulting in some unpleasant consequences for someone. This is a consequence of the situation experienced by the citizens of Omelas. "Even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom...it is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 5). As Le Guin depicts an alternative perspective on the child's freedom, this would not offer the child any advantage, given that it has already forgotten how to act and be accepted as a human. Within this respect, the stayers may have considered the available options and selected the most suitable one for the greatest number of people. It can be argued that the humanistic behaviour towards the child would not be beneficial even for the child itself. Conversely, the preservation of its captivation can bring the society to the highest level. As Mill continues to specify his statement explained above by exemplify it: "to save a life, it may not only be allowable, but a duty, to steal, or take by force, the necessary food or medicine, or to kidnap, and compel to officiate, the only qualified medical practitioner" (Mill, 2017, p. 77). For Omelas, the suffering child is "the only qualified medical practitioner" narrated in the scenario. His role is not to save a single life, but rather to preserve the lives of all. Therefore, in the light of Utilitarianism, it is justifiable and a moral obligation. In this regard, as the guards of the city, the stayers of Omelas are responsible for considering their collective duty to the society of which they are a part. "...as in truth the pleasure and pain seldom exist separately, but almost always together" (Mill, 2017, p. 47). Consequently, the indispensable environment of pleasure and pain will continue to exist so long as the necessities are carried out in the city of Omelas.

The Walkers: Transcendentalist Motives

Those who choose not to live in a place where there is absolute happiness, conditioned on one's sufferings, are the ones who walk away from Omelas. "This is usually explained to children when they are between eight and twelve, whenever they seem capable of understanding" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 4). The citizens of Omelas are made aware of the reality of the situation long before they reach adulthood. Thus, the notions of conscience and responsibility influence their actions from an early age. "No matter how well the matter has been explained to them, these young spectators are always shocked and sickened at the sight" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 4). However, some choose not to conform to the majority of society, leading them to experience a range of complex emotions. Therefore, the mind, unable to cope with the pressure of these emotions, is willing to allow the soul to make the decision. This ultimately results in their decision to leave Omelas. Their decision, strengthened by the power of individuality and intuition, can be interpreted with Transcendentalism: "the concepts of 'Higher Reason', 'Spirit', 'Mind', 'Soul', etc. gradually formed the core of the spiritual awakening later to receive the name American Transcendentalism" (Bakratcheva, 2013, p. 9). Walkers, perceiving their souls and minds as divergent from the other citizens of Omelas who prioritize living in harmony, search for another option:

This drive towards a better way of acting and reacting to the world became known as transcendentalism. At its root was the fundamental idea that humanity is good when stripped back to basics, and that society, culture, and religion only serve to corrupt this goodness when left unchecked. (Thoreau, 2018, p. vii)

Corruption has the potential to lead humanity towards inevitable endings; therefore, it is necessary to not be oppressed by it. Similarly, the society of Omelas is a corrupt place for the walkers and their principles. However, the walkers, who are in the minority, may perceive themselves to be outnumbered and oppressed by the majority of stayers, who collectively agree to maintain society's current situation. Hence, this situation reveals an injustice towards both the child and the walkers.

The pursuit of equality and justice can be identified as a fundamental element of Transcendentalism. Henry David Thoreau, one of the leading figures of Transcendentalism, raises voice against the various challenges faced by minority groups in general: "can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?" (Thoreau, 2018, p. 317). Moreover, in his work, William A. Herr interprets Thoreau's transcendentalist idea of questioning the power of majority as: "For him, willingness to accept the decision of the majority meant willingness to accept and to cooperate with injustice, or worse, if that was what the majority wanted. With this Thoreau could never agree" (Herr, 1975, p. 481). Additionally, William Stuart Nelson, an activist who has been inspired by Thoreau's ideas on his writings asks a further question: "What place, we may then inquire, is left in such a government for conscience? If it is desirable to develop a respect for law, it is essential to cultivate a respect for conscience" (Nelson, 1962, p. 57). Likewise, the walkers are also experiencing the consequences of a lack of freedom to act upon their conscience as a result of being collectively directed by the majority. "They feel disgust...They feel anger, outrage, impotence, despite all the explanations" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 4). Consequently, the lack of justice resulting from the different interpretations of conscience functions as a prominent motive guiding walkers' decision.

The dilemma causes suffering for both the child and society, whether the walkers accept or reject the situation. "They know that they, like the child, are not free" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 5). Therefore, they perceive that they are not free to choose either option. "Often the young people go home in tears, or in a tearless rage, when they have seen the child and faced this terrible paradox" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 5). The experience of observing the child's condition leads them to a sense of despair. As hopeless as this may seem, walkers discover another way to react individually. Given the limited number of them, walkers are not in a position to intervene in the destiny of the child or the stayers. However, they are free to shape their own future, even if the future itself remains uncertain. In order to create an affective change in any situation, Thoreau interprets "that regimes are self-supporting structures, so proactive opposition has the effect of strengthening that structure. Non-cooperation, on the other hand, has an undermining quality because the integrity of the structure relies on those who form the foundations" (Thoreau, 2018, p. vii). Since opposition has the potential to reinforce the power of the majority's structure, walkers distance themselves from others by refusing to conform to collective decision of stayers. Thus, instead of fighting against —and strengthening the current ideology of Omelas, they abandon the society, consequently become the ones who walk away from Omelas:

At times one of the adolescent girls or boys who go to see the child does not go home to weep or rage, does not, in fact, go home at all. Sometimes also a man or woman much older falls silent for a day or two, and then leaves home. (Le Guin, 1991, p.5)

Walkers, who are unable to bare the reality of the child's sufferings, choose to leave all the prosperity and happiness behind for the sake of their principles. This decision belongs not only to the elderly, but also to teenagers. "Each one goes alone, youth or girl, man or woman" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 5). Perhaps, one of the most notable features of their decision is their individualistic choice to walk alone, which is also an essential notion for Transcendentalism.

Transcendentalist influences of self-reliance and intuition are reflected in the personality of individuals, creating distinct differences between walkers and stayers. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the pioneer of Transcendentalism, interprets society and its core structure by exemplifying its expectations over members: "the virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion" (Emerson, 2008, p. 89). This expected conformity demonstrates itself as one of the main goals of Omelas citizens, who aspire to preserve the unity and happiness of society. Consequently, any behaviour grounded in self-reliance is not aligned with the stayers. On the other hand, the walkers aim to align their future actions with elements of individuality. From

a transcendentalist perspective, the conception of individuality, which can inspire personal growth, serves as a key element. In his work, Christopher L. Bodily, addresses Emerson's conceptions of individuality, while also supporting it: "Where intuition is absent, traditions, habits, holy causes, dogmatism, and a host of paltry occupations will flourish" (Bodily, 1987, p. 206). Furthermore, Lawrence Buell highlights the importance of individuality in transcendentalism and Emerson's writings: "For Emerson, individual freedom is always prior to social equality" (Buell, 2004, p. 63). Thoreau also expresses his perspective on how one should act in accordance with individuality when witnessing injustice within society: "it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support" (Thoreau, 2018, p. 322). Similarly, self-reliance embodies the role of the guiding factor in this conflict for the walkers. In fact, this is exactly what the walkers do: they question the authority of Omelas and its principles, thus, they walk away and wash their hands off. By walking away, they refuse to endorse and support the current situation of society as a part of it. "They keep walking, and walk straight out of the city of Omelas, through the beautiful gates" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 5). Furthermore, this causes them to disassociate themselves from all the wealth and positive things which Omelas can offer. "When souls reach a certain clearness of perception, they accept a knowledge and motive above selfishness. A breath of will blows eternally through the universe of souls in the direction of the Right and Necessary" (Emerson, 2020, p. 22). In this sense, walkers' souls achieve to a level of putting the child before themselves and the rest of the stayers of Omelas as they do not wish to break the condition which can lead the city to the destruction as a whole —and listen to the wind which blows them to a place far away from deception.

Thus, Le Guin's narrative does not portray a clear representation of the ultimate destination or the intended direction of the walkers' journey. It is also possible that they do not have one in particular because their journey is never-ending. Additionally, Edward F. Mooney, one of Thoreau's foremost scholars, provides a comprehensive analysis of Thoreau's transcendental concept of walking by providing a deeper understanding as: "Our walking is undying because Nature holds all changing things, living and dying, and hence is inexhaustible, making our walks of discovery unending" (Mooney, 2015, p. 45). Therefore, the walkers saunter and leave the borders of Omelas for their eternal journey. This action of sauntering can be identified with the walkers as Thoreau describes the origin of the word: "derive the word from sans terre without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere" (Thoreau, 2024, p. 8). Similarly, walkers find themselves without a sense of belonging to Omelas and no specific place that can be identified as home. Moreover, the association between this feeling of isolation and walking can be analysed with reference to Thoreau's contemplations in his work "Walking":

If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again, —if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man; then you are ready for a walk. (Thoreau, 2024, p. 8)

Walkers are ready to leave behind not only worldly prosperity, but also their families and loved ones. Moreover, they do not owe any debts to Omelas, as they do not take anything from it either. As individuals who are free from all the associations of society, they keep on walking towards their intuition. "They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back" (Le Guin, 1991, p. 5). They are dedicated to their instincts and free will, physically and spiritually. Consequently, as they depart from the lightened path which Omelas offers openhandedly, walkers refuse to embrace it and instead move towards an unknown source that is either bright or dark. Moreover, it is also conceivable that, from their perspective, the true darkness is not the unknown path itself, but rather Omelas. Therefore, they allow themselves to be carried by the wind, while listening to their soul, which is their ultimate source of true light.

Conclusion

Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" is a narrative which presents a strong moral dilemma both to the characters and to the readers. Despite its initial characterization as a utopia, Omelas is later depicted as a dystopia after revealing the condition which is dependent on the child's imprisonment. Thus, this duality is also characterized by two distinct perspectives among the citizens in the narrative: the ones who perceive Omelas as a utopia and the others as a dystopia. As a result, throughout the story, the citizens must decide whether to leave or stay. However, it is important to note that both groups are motivated by different factors in their ideologies and actions. Therefore, this study does not aim to determine whether one perspective is correct, and another is incorrect. This research's objective is to depict the motivations from necessary perspectives. Consequently, this paper has examined these two dichotomies to offer an insightful analysis.

John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism approach has served as a means of describing the stayers' collective aims. Given that the stayers prioritize the happiness of the greater number as their primary ideology, it is essential to consider their motivations. In accordance with the pursuit of the greatest amount of happiness in Omelas, the stayers also aim to promote a wealthy and unified atmosphere. For this reason, they also need to be able to preserve this atmosphere and ensure that there is no risk involved. Therefore, as demonstrated by Mill's Utilitarianism, the decision to imprison the child for the sake of their own needs reflects deeper underlying motivations.

Furthermore, the walkers, who possess high individual qualities, have been associated with Transcendentalism in the study. Similarly, the walkers' ability to identify their individual voices through the lens of Transcendentalism offers a more detailed analysis of their motives, such as their refusal to be oppressed by the majority. Moreover, this individuality enables them not to prioritize personal benefits over a situation of injustice. Finally, it gives them the courage to leave behind all their wealth, including their loved ones, and take a journey to an unknown place all alone. Consequently, the study has identified and analysed the duality from both perspectives. This analysis is based on the presentation of justifications for their motives. Thus, all citizens, whether staying or leaving, attempt to reach the destination that awaits them at the end of the "tunnel" on which their values are grounded.

Yazar Katkıları: Fikir- D. K.; Tasarım- D. K.; Denetleme- M. E.; Kaynaklar- D. K.; Veri Toplanması ve/veya İşlemesi D. K.; Analiz ve/veya Yorum- D. K.; Literatür Taraması- D. K.; Eleştirel İnceleme- M. E.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazarlar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazarlar, bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

Yapay Zeka Kullanımı: Yazarlar, bu çalışmanın hazırlanmasında yapay zeka kullanmadığını beyan etmiştir.

Author Contributions: Concept – D. K.; Design- D. K.; Supervision- M. E.; Resources- D. K.; Data Collection and/or Processing- D. K.; Analysis and/or Interpretation- D. K.; Literature Search- D. K.; Critical Review- M. E

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Financial Support: The authors declared that they received no financial support for this study.

Use of Artificial Intelligence: The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation of this study.

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