

Key Facts about “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”

When Written: 1973

Where Written: Portland, Oregon

Genre / Period: Speculative fiction / New Wave Science Fiction

Point of View: Le Guin defies literary convention by using a combination of first person limited (the narrator speaking to their audience) and third person omniscient (the narrator describing Omelas).

Brief Biography of Ursula K. Le Guin

Ursula Kroeber was born on October 21, 1929, the daughter of writer Theodora Kracaw and anthropologist Alfred Kroeber. With three older brothers and access to her father’s extensive library, Le Guin developed an early interest in speculative fiction, writing her first science fiction story at age nine. She channeled her literary interests into her studies, graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Radcliffe in 1951 and then earning a master’s degree from Columbia in 1952 (she studied French and Italian literature). She won a Fulbright to continue studying Renaissance literature in Paris, but on the voyage across the Atlantic, she met historian Charles Le Guin and fell in love. Le Guin abandoned her literature studies to marry Charles and move to Portland, Oregon, where she would find time to write while raising three children. Le Guin found national acclaim with her 1970 novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, set on a genderless planet called Gethen. That year, she won the Hugo and Nebula awards for her novel, a feat she would repeat a year later with her anarcho-feminist book, *The Dispossessed*. Though Le Guin came to be known for her science fiction and fantasy, particularly her *Earthsea* series, she wrote prolifically in a number of genres. By the time she died, Le Guin had penned 12 books of poetry, 7 books of essays, 5 volumes of translation, and 13 children’s books, in addition to her 20 novels. In April 2000, the Library of Congress named Le Guin a “Living Legend” for her immense contribution to literature.

Historical Context of The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas

The city of Omelas is never given a specific location in time or space but seems to occur in an imaginary universe outside the realm of human history. Even so, the story was written during a moment of political change in the United States. Le Guin wrote and published “Omelas” in the early 1970s, on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement and in the later years of the Vietnam War. As the bright-eyed radicalism and optimism of the ‘60s counterculture movement faded (along with its hopes for political revolution), many Americans found themselves searching for answers to some of the questions that Le Guin poses to her readers in this story.