ABSTRACT

VINCENT AGOSTA. Returning to Omelas: A formal Analysis of Ursula K. Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” and its Relationship to Traditionalist Narrative Structure and Postmodernism. (Under the direction of Professor Michael Grimwood).

Current scholarship on Ursula K. Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” addresses only the substantive elements of the story, ignoring a potential reading of “Omelas” as situated in postmodernism and problematizing the presentation traditionally associated with narrative. This analysis argues that Le Guin is using the formal aspects of her presentation in “Omelas” to challenge the form of traditional narratives, and myriad substantive issues regarding gender, ethics, and plot arise naturally from these rhetorical changes. A literature review of the scholars of “Omelas” shows that scholars have left a gap in the treatment of form in Le Guin’s story. Specifically, scholars have only thus far approached the story from an ethical perspective, from either a feminist or anti-feminist point of view, or from the perspective that “Omelas” represents an overarching “ur-story.”

Next, a consideration of the term “postmodernism,” along with a consideration of the formal properties traditionalists require of narratives, provides a theoretical framework within which to situate “Omelas.” This is accomplished using Ihab Hassan’s article “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism” and Scholes and Kellogg’s The Nature of Narrative. Finally, this analysis provides a novel interpretation of “Omelas” that posits that the form in which Le Guin wrote “Omelas” directly challenges traditional habits of narrative structure similar to the work of postmodernists such as John Barth and Donald Barthelme. Further, this essay argues that Le Guin’s “Omelas” can be situated in a postmodern context due to its shared formal qualities it shares with postmodernism, as discussed by Hassan, and prototypical postmodernist works.