

Everyday use and the
ones who walk away
from omelas` essay



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The short stories *Everyday Use* by Alice Walker, *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* by Ursula K. Le Guin, and *Greasy Lake* by T. Coraghessan Boyle all speak about a form of transformation that has occurred due to an event that may be called the turning point of the characters' lives. The transformation in each of the stories relates to how the characters in the stories deal with and accept the realities of life.

However, the realities in each story are quite different and speak of three different facets of life. The manners in which these are presented provide the full impact of realization. In the case of Alice Walker's *Everyday Use*, the turning point happened to the main character who can only be identified as Mama or Mrs. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson, who is also the narrator of the story, is a very traditional African American woman who is uneducated but very capable of running a farm.

She is not highly intellectual but she is extremely aware of everything that is going on and since the story is narrated in the first person, the reader gets to see her thoughts and opinions on a first hand perspective allowing the reader to be able to understand where Mrs. Johnson is coming from the moment the transformation occurred. The setting in the story is in the farmhouse of Mrs. Johnson which by the manner Mrs. Johnson was speaking is filled with items and furniture that have been passed down from one generation to another or crafted by one of the family member in a traditional way.

This gives the impression that the way Mrs. Johnson is living with her daughter Maggie has been the same lifestyle of their ancestors which is

totally different from that of Dee, the other daughter, who by changing her name to Wangero has represented the character that has left all tradition behind her. She wrote me once that no matter where we “choose” to live, she will manage to come see us. But she will never bring her friends.

” (Walker, 1994) Walker’s perfect use of language allowed the reader to see the illiteracy of Mrs. Johnson and the exact feeling when Mrs. Johnson realized to accept that Dee/Wangero will never be reconciled as far as beliefs and manners are concerned.” Just like when I’m in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout.

I did something I never done before...”(Walker, 1994) In the case of Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas*, the story is being told by a third person who had experienced being in a utopian place called Omelas. There are no real characters in the story except the residents of Omelas which can only be characterized by describing the way of life in Omelas. Le Guin makes heavy use of similes and metaphors to fully describe what Omelas and the people of Omelas are about.

She also uses comparisons to the world that we know to contrast it to the blissful life that the Omelans seem to enjoy. “Perhaps it would be best if you imagined it as your own fancy bids, assuming it will rise to the occasion, for certainly I cannot suit you all. For instance, how about technology? I think that there would be no cars or helicopters in and above the streets; this follows from the fact that the people of Omelas are happy people.” (Le Guin, 1974) In a highly descriptive story, the transformation may not be quite apparent immediately. However, the transformation of some of the residents

of Omelas happen nearing the end of the story when Le Guin introduces the one sole outcast of the society - a boy locked up in a dark room with no windows. She doesn't really mention the crime or the sin that the boy has committed.

There is just an inference that he did something wrong. " Please let me out. I will be good! " (Le Guin, 1974) The transformation occurs when the residents see the situation of the boy and is shaken into the reality of sorrow, evil, and darkness which is in total contrast to the life in Omelas. The parody and the impact of this contrast occurs when the reader realizes that the Utopian world can only survive at the expense of this boy - his sorrow and pain feeds the happiness of Omelas.

At this realization, some of the residents " walk away from Omelas. " The final story is by T. C. Boyle entitled Greasy Lake.

This story is the transformation from adolescence to manhood when the realization of mortality kicks in. The story is about three 19-year old men who tries to project an image of " bad boys" and are looking for thrills and adventures. We wore torn-up leather jackets, slouched around with toothpicks in our mouths, sniffed glue...we drank gin and grape juice, Tango, Thunderbird, and Bali Hai. We were nineteen. We were bad.

" (Boyle, The story is told by one of the three boys, whose name was never mentioned. The story is also presented as if it were a flashback which gives the reader the idea that something significant will happen that will change the outlook of the narrator. Boyle, was able to make the reader empathize with the series of unfortunate events by creating a pace in the story that <https://assignbuster.com/everyday-use-and-the-ones-who-walk-away-from-omelas-essay/>

would make it seem that every decision made by the boys by the minute resulted in a disaster of some sort. He successfully was able to give the impression of how the youths would feel invincible when things are happening so fast. The realization finally arrived that they are mortals when the narrator hid in the “ greasy lake” and found a dead body of a “ bad boy” biker floating in the lake. The line “ My car was wrecked he was dead” (Boyle, 1974) reflected the relief of the narrator for being alive.

This is alter affirmed when the other boy, named Digby says, “ At least they didn’t slash the tires” (Boyle, 1974) signifying that they still had a chance to “ get out” of the situation that they are in and change their lives. Subtlety is one characteristic that all three writers possess. All three writers drove their points across by leaving the reasons for the transformation of the characters to the reader which created greater impact because by using this method the reader will have to put himself into the situation of the characters to recognize and to fully understand the cause of the metamorphoses. In the case of Alice Walker, she used the metaphor of “ the spirit of God touches me” (Walker, 1994) to indicate the change and yet she didn’t really indicate what the change was.

Ursula K. Le Guin wrote “ They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back,” (Le Guin, 1974) which indicates that a transformation has occurred and yet the exact effect, which was caused by seeing the boy, is never stated. Questions - like did they become unhappy? will definitely make the reader interact with the characters. In T.

C. Boyle's story, he only wrote that he slips the " car in gear...creeping towards the highway" (Boyle, 1974) hinting that they have moved on. The question remains - how? Although the stories, the settings, the characters and their transformation are different, all three authors were able to ingeniously engage the reader into the story by leaving the explanations and the thinking to the discretion of the reader. As the reader questions and rationalizes the causes, the reasons and the effects of the situation the characters are in, the stronger the emotional impact on the reader because in the process of intellectualizing, the reader ends up sympathizing or empathizing. This technique is extremely effective and all three writers have complete mastery of it definitely resulting in memorable stories and fantastic vicarious experiences for the reader.