
The Features Of Utopian Society

Utopia is an imaginary world of ideal perfection ('Utopia Definition'). This definition portrays the societies created by the two authors Ursula Le Guin and N.K Jemisin in 'The ones Who Walk Away from Omelas' and 'The Ones Who Stay and Fight' respectively. Le Guin portrays a utopia made possible by the transference of all misery to a young child who is locked in a cellar. Citizens of Omelas thrive in happiness at the anguish of a young child confined in a building's dark basement. Conversely, Jemisin directly responds and rebukes Le Guin's utopia through. Jemisin portrays a distant world known as the City of Um-Helat that has remodeled itself based on Earth. The citizens of this new world look at what is wrong with Earth, particularly how people tend to fail in helping those in need as they focus on building a better future for themselves. These authors offer their notions of utopia regarding their advanced changes as compared to our world. Nonetheless, they also depict how a utopian society is not always of perfection. In this synthesis paper, the qualities of a utopia, its downsides and solutions, as well as the idea of it not being something to be strived for, will be discussed.

In a utopia, citizens live in a harmonious society. Harmonious refers to things or people that get along well ('Harmonious Dictionary Definition'). In 'The Ones Who Stay and Fight,' the friendly relationship of the Um-Helatians can be depicted in the celebrations of 'The Day of Good Birds.' People of all ages gathered in the streets with everyone helping one another to look good or celebrate them, especially for this joyous day. The relationship between the adults and the children was friendly. The narrator states, 'at the Day's dawning, the children of the city come forth, most wearing wings made for them by the parents and old aunties' (Jemisin 1). In celebrating and supporting another, this harmonious relationship is also shown to the farmers. The narrator states that 'the parade wends through the city, the farmers ducking their gazes or laughing as their fellow citizens also offer salute' (Jemisin 3). Surprisingly, this harmony is achieved at the anguish of a young child confined to a windowless basement of a building. The child is denied food, suitable shelter, clothes, and opportunities to mingle with other children. The narrator states, '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 4). This depicts how the harmonious relationship of the Omelas was based on discrimination, with the majority of the upper class being prioritized while the lower level or minority (the young child) not considered. Similarly, in 'The ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,' harmony can be shown in the Summer Festival. During this festival, the streets are filled with people of all ages. The narrator states, 'old people in long stiff robes of mauve...merry women carrying their babies and chatting as they walked...children dodged in and out' (Le Guin 1). Nonetheless, this harmony is only experienced by those who are not eager to possess knowledge of our world. Those who breached the boundaries of the universe and entered into our society are usually tracked and killed. For instance, the man who managed to breach the two worlds was murdered by the social workers. They believed that he had accessed our knowledge of playing video games, watched television, among others, which is dangerous for their prosperity. They also posit that the information from our world is a disease. The narrator states, 'the disease has taken one poor victim, but it need not claim more' (Jemisin 10). Thus, killing the man as her daughter watches to contain the 'infectious' illness.

Citizens also live in a society that promotes freedom. This applies to all the fundamental human

rights that guide people's way of life (Shestack 27). As John F. Kennedy said, 'The great revolution in the history of man, past, present, and future, is the revolution of those determined to be free' (Quoted from 'Foreign Relations of the United States Office of the Historian'). Thus, it is crucial for a utopia in the future to embrace the freedom of its people. In *Omelas*, Le Guin shows how the Omelas lived in a community where there was freedom. She states, 'I do not know the rules and laws of their society, but I suspect that they were singularly few as they did without monarchy and slavery' (Le Guin 2). Even though the narrator is not sure of the rules of Omelas due to the lack of a monarch, she knows slavery is not practiced. The narrator's portrayal of slavery contradicts with the treatment of the young child locked in a building's basement. By locking him denies him his fundamental rights. Thus, this shows that freedom was not provided to all Omelas, but the majority (the town's people) and not the minority (the young child). Similarly, in *Um-Helat*, the citizens enjoyed boundless freedom by doing whatever they liked. The narrator states, 'But this is no awkward dystopia, where all are forced to conform' (Jemisin 2). This freedom is primarily seen in the festival where everyone participated regardless of their age, color, or religion. Nonetheless, despite the freedom being a significant aspect of *Um-Helat*, the citizens were still denied the right to expression and access to our world's information with harsh punishment being provided. The man who breached the barrier of the universe to obtain our world's knowledge was killed. Thus, this portrays how the *Um-Helatians'* rights were not granted to those who broke the law.

In utopia, citizens also live with no fear. This implies that they should feel safe and protected from social, economic, political, and technological threats. In 'The ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,' the narrator depicts Omelas as a city where people did not get worried about any problems or threats in society. This is in spite of Omelas having no king who could develop laws to promote social order. Le Guin states, 'They did not use swords, or keep slaves. They were not barbarians...As they did without monarchy and slavery, so they also got on without the stock exchange, the advertisement, the secret police, and the bomb' (Le Guin 1). Nonetheless, not every Omelas lived in a safe environment. The young child was locked in the basement, which was dark due to the lack of windows, thus being afraid. Similarly, in 'The Ones Who Stay and Fight,' *Um-Helatians* also live with no fear. In the narrative, the narrator states, 'this is a land where no one hungers, no one is left ill, no one lives in fear, and even war is almost forgotten' (Le Guin 7). This depicts how *Um-Helatians* enjoyed safety with nothing to worry about except helping one another. However, this security came with a heavy burden with those who breached the barriers of the universe felt unsafe. They were tracked and killed.

A utopian society can avoid the downside of being happy at the expense of the minority by promoting equality. Treating others in equal measures fosters the notion of a perfect utopia (Claeys 148). Le Guin points out how the Omelas thrived in harmony and happiness only because a young child was suffering while being locked in the basement of a windowless building. All the Omelas were aware of the situation, but no one took a step in rescuing him. The narrator states, 'They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. Some of them have come to see it. Others are content merely to know it is there... but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city... depend wholly on this child's abominable misery' (Le Guin 3). This depicts how this utopia was occupied by selfish citizens who were not able to help the young boy due to fear of losing happiness and prosperity. However, In spite of the imperfections, this utopia can be made perfect by the Omelas rescuing the boy and treating him as one of their children. A utopian society can also avoid the shortcoming of preventing its citizens from accessing knowledge by not placing a limit on their fundamental human rights. In *Um-Helat*, Jemisin depicts how the citizens were denied freedom of obtaining information and

knowledge of our world. Those who found to have breached the boundaries of the two worlds were heavily punished by death. Freedom to access information should be boundless, and it is up to the citizens to decide whether that knowledge is harmful or not to their perceptions.

A utopian society is not something that people should strive for in reality. This is because the human quest for perfection will only yield dystopian results (Ashcroft 8). The majority of people in authority tend to be greedy, corrupt, and selfish, thus to create a perfect 'utopia,' few individuals tend to suffer for the benefit of the majority. For instance, In Omelas, a young child had to suffer at the expense of the citizens. Also, in Um-Helat, those who accessed the knowledge of our world, which was prohibited, were punished by death. This is the opposite of the perfect Um-helat, where everyone is happy with everyone being able to access their basic needs. These examples from the two short narratives depict how, in the process of building a perfect utopia, the results can, at times, lead to a dystopia.

Conclusion

A utopia is a place where everyone fantasizes. Based on the two short stories by Le Guin and Jemisin, the citizens of utopian societies live in harmony, enjoy limitless freedom, and live with no fear. Le Guin points out how, in Omelas, the local custom 'Day of the Birds' brought people together as they helped one another achieve happiness in the celebrations. Similarly, Jemisin shows how the Summer Festival united the Um-Helatians together as they celebrated this joyous moment. Le Guin and Jemisin also show how Omelas and Um-Helatians lived with no fear due to lack of insecurity. Le Guin also depicts how freedom in Omela was limitless freedom, where there were no rules or slavery to limit their way of life. Similarly, Jemisin also shows how, in Um-Helat, citizens were not forced to conform to any standards. Nevertheless, despite the positives of the two utopian societies, they had their downsides. In Um-Helat, the citizens were denied the freedom to access information regarding our world. The social workers who tracked and punished those who broke the law believed that accessing our worlds' knowledge would destroy the happiness and prosperity of Um-Helat. Also, in Omelas, the citizens lived in joy at the suffering of a young child confined to a basement. For a perfect utopia to be created, every citizen should be treated with equal measures as well as offering them freedom. These narratives depict how a utopian society is not something that should be desired since it yields to dystopian results, which are detrimental to human survival.