

Student C

Mrs. Rohlf

Advanced Placement English

Day Month Year

## Behavior of the Oppressed

Oppression; it is a big word with big history. For this reason it has become a powerful topic for many authors. Two works, Fahrenheit 451 and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, demonstrate oppression in unique ways; however many similarities are observable. Jim (a key character in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn) and Montag (the main character in Fahrenheit 451) were both raised in worlds of ignorance. With limited access to information, both Jim's and Montag's mental and physical independence was hampered. To escape slavery Jim didn't necessarily need education; rather he needed the idea of education, the idea to use his own free will; much like Montag whose imagination was bound by an imaginary boundary itself. Both Montag and Jim exhibit the difficulty of surpassing imaginary boundaries erected by their societies.

**Comment [SR1]:** Parenthesis are not needed here

**Comment [CPS2]:** Interesting connection.

In both worlds power is demonstrated quite accurately. Those in power have a great respect for knowledge, though in Fahrenheit 451 those in power such as Beady hide this respect from the public in order to preserve their long term authority. "If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war." (Bradbury 61). With this censorship officers such as Beady and officials with much greater authority can "run the show" with minimal public interference. Citizens can go on living their lives completely brainwashed and perfectly content. This censorship differs from that of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Jim's sense of being less valuable than a white man is inferred from his slave status. In his world the officials don't regard knowledge as evil or unnecessary. All free men In the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn openly demonstrate the awesome power of knowledge; however the idea of a slave touching this vast aquifer of knowledge and understanding is preposterous. It is not the same form of censorship seen in Montag's world although both of these societal wall building

**Comment [CPS3]:** Provide a bit more context here—what is happening in this quote that makes it significant?

concepts reach a similar goal. They generate ignorance, ignorance within those oppressed. Not the arrogant type of ignorance but innocent ignorance, like a child.

Montag's main struggle is against not only the government but his own fellow people, much like Jim who is fighting to be free while so many slaves sit in acceptance of their oppression. Almost everyone in Montag's world has openly accepted this censorship and in some ways implemented the censorship themselves.

“With school turning out more runners, jumpers, racers, tinkers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative creators, the word ‘intellectual,’ of course, became the swear word it deserved to be. You always dread the unfamiliar.”(Bradbury 56)

**Comment [CPS4]:** Indent entire block quote 10 spaces and no quote marks needed.

Here we can clearly see what is becoming of the society in Montag's world, people don't care for knowledge, they don't see the value of being an intellectual; to most being an intellectual is disgusting and repulsive. This is not unlike Jim's situation. It is common understanding in Jim's world that blacks can't be intellectuals and, consequently, most of the population (slave and master) accept this as a general truth. For example Huck asks Jim: "S'pose a man was to come to you and say Polly-voo-franzy--what would you think?" Jim replies "I wouldn't think nuff'n; I'd take en bust him over de head--dat is, if he warn't white. I wouldn't 'low no \*\*\*\*\* to call me dat." (Twain 196 ["in my book"]). In this quote Jim states that no \*\*\*\*\* is going to speak to him in such a manner. Jim clearly believes that whites, the intellectuals in this situation, are allowed to discriminate against him in such a way that his fellow slaves cannot and should not. That is not to say Jim doesn't want to be free and eventually gain knowledge because he does, and that ultimate goal itself is what puts Jim a step ahead of most other slaves. In other words Jim sees light at the end of the tunnel. We know most other slaves saw only darkness and consequently lived on in contented resignation like the citizens of Fahrenheit 451. This is what sets Jim apart from other slaves on his journey to overcome societal walls. His mentality mirrors that of Montag who is on his way to leave behind the thoughts and actions of his peers.

**Comment [SR5]:** ?

**Comment [SR6]:** I'd either leave in the quote and take this out, or choose your paraphrase; no need to repeat the precise meaning of the quotation.

**Comment [CPS7]:** Really nice job constructing parallel arguments between the two texts here

Amongst all the similarities of Jim and Montag's societies, there are some vital differences to point out in regards to each of **there** journeys. Culture is a key element in character development, which is fairly unique between these **two**.

**Comment [CPS8]:** Introduce block quote first so that it flows more naturally with this sentence.

“Mighty few – an' DEY ain't no use to a body. What you want to know when good luck's a-comin' for? Want to keep it off? Ef you's got hairy arms en a hairy breas', it's a sign dat you's agwyne to be rich. Well, dey's some use in a sign dat, 'kase it's so fur ahead. You see, maybe you's got to be po' a long time fust, en so you might git discourage' en kill yo'sef 'f you didn' know by de sign dat you gwyne to be rich bymeby.” (Twain 147 “in my book”)

Here we see Jim boasting of his good fortune to come. Superstition is culture at its most interesting. **Jims** superstitious beliefs are not his own he doesn't believe in superstition as a result of an evolving mindset on his journey to freedom, rather he believes in it because it has been passed down through the generations as a part of his culture. This is a major aspect of culture that many slaves shared at the time and took much pride in. Throughout the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn we get little snapshots of Jim's culture. Compare this to Montag in Fahrenheit 451 and we can start to see how these two characters have separate walls to **over come**.

“We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against.”  
(Bradbury 57)

In this quote Captain **Beady** is discussing his dream utopia with Montag; **Beady** states that the constitution is quite wrong; we should forget our differences and preferences which one needs to have culture. In Fahrenheit 451 and even our world today, which it is after all modeled from, we see true elements to what **Beady** states here. In Montag's world the people are losing not only knowledge but also culture. In addition to losing these things, the people of Fahrenheit 451 are losing any and all *desire* for culture and knowledge. This zombie-like mindset of the people in Montag's world helps level the playing field, the playing field Montag and Jim are journeying through en route to mental and physical freedom.

The societies of **Montage** and Jim each contain a surfeit of subjugation and oppression - whether it is outright discrimination like Adventures of Huckleberry Finn's slavery and Fahrenheit 451's connotation of all books will evil and foolishness, or timid oppression like Fahrenheit 451's lazy ignorance and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Jim's name calling. Both Jim and Montag had many walls to overcome and were left with walls yet to overcome at the end of their recorded journeys. In many ways they and their journeys were different, but that is how unique characteristics of characters are constructed. More importantly both Montag and Jim had to fight a battle more mental than physical against their seemingly omnipotent societies, i.e., their resistance to even struggle against their all-powerful governments. Jim needed the idea of utilizing free will and education, and Montag needed to shred the imaginary ropes binding his imagination. In these great works both Montag and Jim clearly exhibit the difficulty of surpassing imaginary boundaries erected by their societies.

**Comment [SR9]:** Missing word(s) in here

#### Works Cited

"Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"

"Fahrenheit 451"

**Comment [CPS10]:** This is not proper MLA formatting—you know this!

**Student C,**

**Overall, nice job! I particularly appreciate how you weave meaning between the two texts as their comparison/contrast makes for an intriguing analysis. There are some clunky surface/MLA errors that are a bit distracting, so be sure to proofread thoroughly. Grade: 3.5**

Student D

Mrs. Rohlf's

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#### The Unworkable Victory

The representation of evil in literature has evolved from simplistic and isolated to complex and pervasive. The most demanding struggles that early epic heroes faced were against enemies that were clearly evil, clearly different, clearly defined. In the epic poem Beowulf, the hero Beowulf faces demons and a dragon, creatures that share very few characteristics with the

humans they mercilessly slaughter. Killing these beasts is undeniably the correct course of action, and Beowulf does so to resounding approval. Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 features society as the primary obstacle to the goals of Guy Montag, the protagonist. The secondary antagonist, Captain Beatty, is both a product of this society and a close intellectual relative to Montag. In a text in which battles are internal and the most powerful weapon is the mind, this similarity in knowledge makes the juxtaposition of Montag and Beatty intriguing. As literature progresses, the division between good and evil becomes more subjective and more realistic.

Comment [CPS11]: Nice!

In archetypal literature, especially fairy tales, evil ends at the death of the primary antagonist. Modern authors have complicated this phenomenon by portraying evil more realistically. The antagonists in Beowulf follow the more classic formula: challenging but simple. The most complicated relationship between antagonists was between Grendel and his mother; this single connection was the extent of the demons' malice. Beowulf's final opponent, the dragon, was neither born from a previous conflict nor lead to other independent forces. Eliminating the 'old harrower of the dark' (line 2300) cemented Beowulf's legacy and brought relief to his people.

Already the blade  
of the old king's sharp killing-sword  
had done its worst: the one who had for long  
minded the hoard, hovering over gold,  
unleashing fire, surging forth  
midnight after midnight, had been mown down.  
.....  
So the Geat people, his [Beowulf's] hearth companions,  
sorrowed for the lord who had been laid low.  
they said that of all the kings upon the earth  
he was the man most gracious and fair-minded,  
kindest to his people and keenest to win fame. (Beowulf 2777-2782, 3178-3182)

Comment [CPS12]: Not needed—if no known author, line numbers are fine

In the more complex Fahrenheit 451, Montag achieves very little when he murders Captain Beatty. Not only does the death of the primary villain fail to lead to a direct resolution to Montag's personal problems, the loss of a single member of society does not affect the larger conflict within the text: the apathy of society as a whole. As the book-carrier, Granger says, "...

Comment [CPS13]: good point

you can't *make* people listen. They have to come 'round in their own time..." (Bradbury 153). Because the evil of the dragon was more isolated, destroying the dragon solved the problem. In Fahrenheit, on the other hand, the evil was more realistically spread throughout society; Beatty was evil because of his environment, not because of inborn traits.

The dragon in Beowulf is very different from the protagonist. Beowulf earns his power and reputation through hard work, and though desire for recognition is a motive, his causes are always just. Rather than clinging to power, he dies fighting for his people. The dragon is vile: he is materialistic and jealous, guarding "heathen gold" (Beowulf 2275) because he "happened to find the hoard open," (Beowulf 2270). Not only does he personify greed and jealousy, he does not even work for his beloved hoard, and though only one cup from his enormous store of treasure was stolen, the dragon becomes incensed and delightedly kills hundreds of people in his anger.

The dragon began to belch out flames  
and burn bright homesteads; there was a hot glow  
that scared everyone, for the vile sky-winger  
would leave nothing alive in his wake.  
Everywhere the havoc he wrought was in evidence.  
Far and near, the Geat nation  
bore the brunt of his brutal assaults  
and virulent hate. (Beowulf 2312-2319)

The striking differences between Beowulf and the dragon, and the consensus of the Geats that the dragon is evil, make it clear that the dragon is a force of evil that must be eliminated.

Unlike the dragon and Beowulf, Captain Beatty and Montag are very similar. At the beginning of the text, both of their façade's are embraced by society: they are members of the "happiness boys", as Beatty says (Bradbury 61), the men who ensure the continued 'happiness' of society. They look the same and work together, but more importantly, they both decide to defy society by reading books. Beatty makes frequent references to Shakespeare, Sir Phillip Sydney, the Bible, and others, so he is clearly well-read. In fact, when Beatty is toying with Montag at the firehouse before Montag's house is burned, it is literature, the knowledge they have in common, which Beatty used to confuse the protagonist.

Beatty chuckled. “And you said quoting, ‘Truth will come to light, murder will not be hid long!’ And I cried in good humor, ‘Oh God, he speaks only of his horse!’ And ‘The Devil can cite scripture for his purpose.’ And you yelled, ‘This age thinks better of a gilded fool than of a threadbare saint in wisdom’s school!’ and I whispered gently, ‘The dignity of truth is lost with much protesting’...” (Bradbury 106)

Because individuals often use society as a sounding board for the moral correctness of their actions, an endorsement by society is understood as a cue that the particular action is ‘right’. Society relies on Montag and his colleagues to burn books, so for most of his life he believes that he is doing the right thing. Unlike in Beowulf, in which society was good and the opinions of the Geats often mirrored the opinions of the protagonist, Montag and Beatty live in a society that embraces apathy and oppression; their society’s ‘endorsement’ is misplaced. The combination of a misleading society and the similarity between Montag and Beatty make it difficult for Montag to identify Beatty, and the rest of his society, as malicious.

Captain Beatty uses his knowledge of books to rationalize his hatred of them, and to Montag, books are the catalyst for defiant and theoretically correct action. Both men are afraid of the ramifications of critical thinking, of seeing their lives exposed as a charade, and of being alone with their new knowledge. What causes the difference between the two? While Faber helps Montag move beyond fear, Beatty fails to conquer his. He says:

“Don’t give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy. Any man who can take a TV wall apart and put it back together again, and most men can, nowadays, is happier than any man who tries to slide-rule, measure, and equate the universe, which just won’t be measured or equated without making man feel bestial and lonely. I know, I’ve tried it; to hell with it.” (Bradbury 61)

To hide from his fear, Beatty turns the conflicting opinions of books against each other, as he did while trying to confuse Montag. He attempts to accept society’s emphasis on happiness through total unity of thought. As he tells Montag,

“We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought. We have our fingers in the dike. Hold steady. Don’t let the torrent of melancholy and drear philosophy drown our

**Comment [CPS14]:** Awesome job drawing parallels

world. We depend on you. I don't think you realize how important *you* are, *we* are, to our happy world as it stands now." (Bradbury 61-62)

Beatty's effort to deceive himself fails, and he lives bitterly, for he is angry with his cowardice. To him, Montag is a reflection of what he could be, a reminder that he has failed. To avoid his anger with himself he tries to remove Montag, and does not protect Montag from accusations of housing books. After Montag's house burns, however, Captain Beatty realizes that his self-loathing will not end when Montag leaves. To escape himself, he taunts Montag into murdering him. "*Beatty wanted to die.*" (Bradbury 122).

The tension between Montag and Beatty prompts a closer examination of the text. Because of this, Fahrenheit 451 is more realistic than Beowulf; to identify truth and evil in life, a close examination of society and events is necessary. Beatty, the modern villain, more accurately represents the reality of evil; it does not always appear to be a monster that flagrantly kills and marauds. More often, evil is subtle and difficult to recognize or combat. As Montag learned, the best defense is often independence of thought and of action rather than a shield of iron.

Sources Cited

Comment [SR15]: Works

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Del Rey Book, 1991. Print.

*Beowulf*. n/a: n/a, 0. Print.

**Student D,**

**Nice job bringing thoughtful analysis to these two texts! I really like how you construct your argument and highlight the contrasting features of the ancient and modern antagonist. Remember when citing block quotes—the whole chunk of text is indented 10 spaces, and no quote marks are needed. Be sure if the quote mark is part of a paragraph that you don't indent the text following. Grade: 4**