

Dystopian Places and Their Saviors

Comparative essay of the works *Harrison Bergeron* and *Fahrenheit 451*



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Introduction

Declaration

I, Kevin Varga declare that this is my own intellectual work, created only with using my own ideas, the works which have been cited and the ideas heard during the course Close Reading of 20th Century Literary Texts The structure of the essay is based on Kerry Walk's strategy of comparative analysis writing from the Harvard College Writing Center's strategies for essay writing.

Emendation

During the analysis, I use statements to show my points and believes. It is important to acknowledge that these are my own subjective opinions and should not be treated as facts.

Subject matter

This work is about the comparison of the books called *Harrison Bergeron* written by Kurt Vonnegut and *Fahrenheit 451* written by Ray Bradbury.

Frame of reference

The two works is compared based on their image of a dystopian places and the great heroes they present.

Grounds for comparison

The works have been chosen because of their popularity. Choosing classical literature as the topic of a comparative essay can lead to a better understanding because the people are already familiar with the chosen works.

Citation

The citation is done according to the MLA format.

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Analysis

First, it is important to clarify what do we mean by a dystopian place and how can we connect it to the works chosen for the analysis. According to the Oxford Dictionaries website, the adjective dystopian is “[r]elating to or denoting an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one” (Oxford University Press). In our case, we can say that both the place and the state in which the action takes place is dystopian from the point of view that it is bad for the people living inside it, in the case of *Fahrenheit 451* we can assume that the place is environmentally degraded, because the constant burning causes extreme CO2 emission warms the atmosphere due to the greenhouse effect, which could lead to the death of all people on the planet. However, we cannot say anything with absolute certainty about the system of the societies, whether it is totalitarian or not, because the amount of information is not sufficient for justification.

In the previous paragraph, it has been stated that the place and the state in which people are living is bad, but it hasn't been justified. It would be impossible to prove that the whole world in which the stories take place are dystopian, but it doesn't have to be proven; The definition says that it is an “imagined place or state”, so for clarification, the state will be reduced to the states of the main character or characters and the place will be reduced to the close environment of theirs. And as for justification sentences will be presented. The first sentence is from *Fahrenheit 451*, where the main character talks about his feelings: “He wore his happiness like a mask and the girl had run off across the lawn with the mask and there was no way of going to knock on her door and ask for it back.” (Bradbury). In the case of the *Harrison Bergeron* we see the sadness at the very end of the work from a conversation between the main characters: ““You been crying” he said to Hazel. “Yup,” she said. ... “Forget sad things,” said George. “I always do,” said Hazel.” (Vonnegut). The sentences point out the sadness of the characters, the first asserts that happiness was only a mask, and as it was taken away we can see the true feelings of the character, that is sadness. In the second case, we can see that sadness is often present in the life of Hazel, but she always forgets about it. This paragraph does not only state the standpoint by which the works are going to be looked at, but it also draws a parallel between the stories, which is the sadness of the main characters, that is present in both works.

The broader picture, the ideals of the societies can also be compared. The society of *Harrison Bergeron* consists of normal people, and prominent ones that are handicapped. This act was probably done in order to assure that everyone is equal in the society, and no one has an unfair advantage. This idea also appears in *Fahrenheit 451*, although not completely. Two arguments will be raised to justify this standpoint. The first is that there is no equality yet, the equalization is an ongoing process, while in *Harrison Bergeron* it seems to be done, or at least it seems to be stagnant. Secondly, the equalization is only concerning the mental abilities of people and not physical ones; The firemen are the harbingers of the change, who are burning books in order to assure that everyone can stay on the same level of intelligence.

An interesting aspect is also connecting the two stories, the hypocrisy. As it was pointed out, the aims for the societies are equality; but in both cases, we can assume that they did not stay true to

their ideals. The leaders of the societies seem to break their own rules. In the case of *Harrison Bergeron*, everyone is described as either normal or handicapped, except the only person that appeared in a leading position, Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General. In the case of the *Fahrenheit 451*, Beatty the leader of the firemen group knows a lot about books, and what's in them; It is claimed that this is due to previous mistakes that he committed and probably not an unfair privilege, but we cannot be sure about that.

From the point of hypocrisy, we can continue with the realization of the systems in the societies. In both cases the system was faulty. In the case of *Harrison Bergeron*, the prominent people were able to take off their handicaps, just as Harrison did, which of course the normal people of society could not do; which causes unfair advantage. In the case of *Fahrenheit 451*, scholars and other intelligent people were spread across the country, and were not looked for and dealt with; which, again breaks equality.

As the societies have been analyzed, we inspect the saviors of the worlds present in the analysis. In the case of *Harrison Bergeron*, both Harrison and his parents and in the case of *Fahrenheit 451*, Guy Montag, Professor Faber and other intellectuals will be taken a look at.

Harrison has a lot common with Montag. They both are reckless as we can see through their actions. Harrison goes into a studio, and plays with his ego. He tries to assert that he is better than anyone, and tries to break down society. Guy Montag cannot keep his control either. When it came to the burning of his room he panicked and could not think clearly and escape the situation and at the end he even enjoyed burning down his house and letting in for his desire for destruction. Moreover, he could not deal with Beatty in a peaceful way, he chose the easiest way, and killed him.

However, there is a difference in the outcome of their actions. Harrison died, while Montag lived, because there were aspects in which they differed. Harrison wanted to change the world alone, and form it to his view, while Guy Montag had supporters, like Professor Faber and other intellectuals; who did not let him fall and die, as it happened with Harrison. This raises the attention to an important idea, that we cannot change the world alone.

Even if we cannot change it, it is better to try it and fail than not trying at all. People like the father of Harrison was the source of the problem, who was prompted to take off his handicap devices and refused. This problem was brought up in the case of *Fahrenheit 451* as well; The wife of Guy Montag was prompted to change, and have been offered the possibility, but she refused, just as the other women in the room, when Montag read from one of his stolen books.

But even when it came to the common people (by that I mean, not the characters that are in central position of the work), not everything was black and white. There were ones that tried to make changes in both works. The ballerina, who took off her mask, from *Harrison Bergeron* did take the opportunity and served as a martyr of the better future; and the mother of Harrison, even though she was normal and did not need any handicap, tried to argue with his husband to leave the device behind, despite the fact it would only last as long as he was at home. Even if the intention of the women was only based on emotional basis (she did not want to see her husband suffer), it could have contributed to the welfare of the society and a better future.

In the case of *Fahrenheit 451*, the woman who stayed at her house where she was burnt with her books served as a martyr, just as the ballerina from *Harrison Bergeron*. While we cannot be sure about the changes, that the ballerina caused, due to insufficient information, we can see a positive change in the case of *Fahrenheit 451*, where the burning woman started a change in the mind of the main character, in Guy Montag.

As a conclusion, it is important to take a look at the message of the two works. Do they share the same meaning or do they differ? I believe they would like to raise the attention to the problems of our societies, they hold a mirror that reflects the parts of the system and people that are faulty, placing the people's inability to act reasonably in the center, while keeping the hope alive, leaving an open ending for the reader to think about possible solutions that could be applied both in the imaginary and in the real world, by that they initiate creative thinking and the process of problem solving. They are the gems of literature, that have to be taken seriously.

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