

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
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“9 into 7”

Considerations on ‘*V for Vendetta*’: Book and Film.

Luís Silveiro

MESTRADO EM ESTUDOS INGLESES E AMERICANOS
(Estudos Norte-Americanos: Cinema e Literatura)

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Dissertação orientada por Doutora Teresa Cid
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Abstract

The current work seeks to contrast the book version of Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta* (1981-1988) with its cinematic counterpart produced by the Wachowski brothers and directed by James McTeigue (2005). This dissertation looks at these two forms of the same enunciation and attempts to analyse them both as cultural artifacts that belong to a specific time and place and as pseudo-political manifestos which extemporize to form a plethora of alternative actions and reactions. Whilst the former was written/drawn during the Thatcher years, the film adaptation has claimed the work as a herald for an alternative viewpoint thus pitting the original intent of the book with the sociological events of post 9/11 United States.

Taking the original text as a basis for contrast, I have relied also on Professor James Keller's work *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche* with which to enunciate what I consider to be lacunae in the film interpretation and to understand the reasons for the alterations undertaken from the book to the screen version.

An attempt has also been made to correlate Alan Moore's original influences into the medium of a film made with a completely different political and cultural agenda.

KEYWORDS: Alan Moore, Comics and Movies, Superhero, Anarchy, Fascism.

Resumo

É objectivo do trabalho actual contrastar a versão de *V for Vendetta* (*V de Vingança*) escrita por Alan Moore e David Lloyd (1981-1988) com a obra homónima feita para o cinema em 2005 com realização de James McTeigue e produção dos irmãos Wachowski.

Esta dissertação encara as duas formas do mesmo enunciado, tentando analisar tanto como artefactos culturais que pertencem a momentos e sítios específicos como manifestos pseudo-políticos que formam uma pletora de acções e reacções alternativas. Enquanto a primeira obra foi escrita/desenhada na Grã-Bretanha durante os anos de poder de Margaret Thatcher, a adaptação para o cinema aparece no pós 11 de Setembro nos Estados Unidos e reclama ser um arauto duma ideologia profundamente entrincheirada no seu tempo. A obra original, enquanto ensaio que opõe Fascismo ao Anarquismo numa linha cujo eixo é difícil de definir num mundo pós-modernista desencontra-se com o filme que opõe essencialmente uma conjuntura ideológica neo-liberal a uma neo-conservadora. Estabelece-se assim uma criação que não vai ao encontro da mensagem expressa no original.

Tomando o texto original como ponto de partida, o presente trabalho tenta analisar as lacunas lógicas na reinterpretação da narrativa original sublinhando sempre que possível as razões pela sua presença, bem como fazendo uso do texto de Professor James Keller, *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche*, para formar a sua própria interpretação.

Foi efectuada, ainda, uma tentativa de estabelecer elos específicos com a cultura britânica numa perspectiva de aligeirar e/ou clarificar as divergências extremas das duas versões. Tendo em conta o deserdar do autor do seu próprio trabalho é-nos também interessante olhar para as motivações latentes da forma fílmica se considerarmos certos planos e momentos chave que existem (ou não) numa ou noutra versão. O encosto narrativo e os meandros nitidamente políticos das duas peças entram em colisão tanto artística como culturalmente. Torna-se assim importante compreender a agenda ideológica que prevalece tanto no livro como no filme.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE : Alan Moore, Banda Desenhada e Cinema, Super-Heroi, Anarquia, Fascismo.

António Silveiro
(1931-2006)

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1: Introduction

*"You say you'll change the constitution/ Well, you know/
We all want to change your head / You tell me it's the institution/
Well, you know/ You better free your mind instead"*
Revolution, The Beatles

Less than twenty years ago, one of my lecturers at university questioned my use of the word 'dystopian' in a paper, demanding that I explain its presence as it was not a word in common English usage. I begged to differ, stating categorically that it was an analogical antithesis to Utopian, and that, contrary to his affirmation it *was* in common English usage, simply not extant in his particular lexicon.

This curious moment afforded me an insight into people's mindsets; specifically that of the critic. But it also underlined an eminent point of reflexion: that not everyone in academic circles read, or was aware of, popular culture. It also reminded me of when I first understood the meaning of the word.

My halting, tentative steps into the world of political enlightenment came at what seemed a particularly grey period in British history: race riots, miners strikes, police corruption and brutality, CCTV cameras on every street, mass unemployment, closures of public libraries, privatizations of public sector services, the dismantling of the last bastion of what many considered the left-wing defender of the people of London; the GLC, the poll-tax, the Reagan/Thatcher axis, imminent nuclear war.

Super-hero comics were a panacea which temporarily repaired the world, and made reality into a full four-colour wonderland where right was might and the good always won the battle in the end.

Then, one day, I read *V for Vendetta*. The hero, if we could call him that, had a cape and a mask, but was unable to fly and had no great powers to speak of yet he did have something special that all the other two-dimensional superheroes seemed to lack: he had a political ideology, an agenda as culturally vast as his war. His grand gestures came from defiance of a specific tyranny. The analogy, which spoke volumes of Thatcher's Britain, came at exactly the right juncture and, very plausibly, conditioned my outlook, to quote through Adolf Hitler, my *Weltanschauung*. Today, comic books

are increasingly sought after as subjects of academic analysis, not many people would bother to question the use of the word 'dystopian' and the people of the world, despite the global sigh that heralded the end of the Cold War, search for new and innovative ways to destroy themselves.

To this end, *V for Vendetta* remains as important a cultural artifact today as it was at the time of its writing, yet the spin it has been given in its film avatar has revealed ideological pressures which, despite being equally valid for analysis, are composed of elements which belong to a different culture and most certainly a different *Weltanschauung*.

The objective of the present work is not to catalogue the multifold cultural references of the book and the film, nor to analyse exhaustively and compendiously every element of every panel that comprises the opus. It is meant, rather, to identify wherever possible a suitable socio-political analogy which prevails in the two versions. The settings, whilst ostensibly identical, are politicized to reflect ongoing concerns; the former in Margaret Thatcher's Britain of the 80s and the latter George W. Bush's post 9/11 United States.

A further, more dissimulated objective is to underline and, partly, to question the aesthetic validity of the argumentation used in the work of Professor James Keller whose *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche* is, to my knowledge, the only freely available academic study of the book and, specifically, the film version.

The final goal of the present work is to prepare the ground for further argumentation in literary analysis and hopefully to open wider vistas both for myself and for the reader.

2: The Anarchist and the Grocer's Daughter.

"The barriers are coming down. In another ten years, we're going to have scholarly monographs on the films of Elisha Cook Jr. What we've got to start doing is sorting out the good junk from the bad. Because the good junk is just the art that the mandarins wouldn't pay attention to. Like Shakespeare, once upon a time. He worked the wrong side of the river where the pimps and the whores and the groundlings hung out. He was good junk. So was Chaplin. And Keaton. And Groucho and Garbo."
'Clare' in Theodor Roszak's 'Flicker'

V for Vendetta is a comic book¹ written by Alan Moore and drawn by David Lloyd. It saw its first release not in the molds today recognized as a 'graphic novel', but as a monthly feature in the independent comic anthology magazine *Warrior* from 1981 to 1983. When the comic folded after 26 issues, it would be a further five years before the final part could be published. This would take place in another country, under another series of external circumstances and with another format. It is therefore, an oddity, being a story that one would have to wait almost 8 years to be able to read in its entirety².

V for Vendetta (hereafter referred to as *VforV*) stands out in the world of comics not only because it belongs to a transitional period in panel art but also due to the circumstances of its publishing. At a time when the 'graphic novel' was just beginning to appear, *VforV* marked a difference in theme, structure, image and philosophy³. Its

¹ Many researchers and critics refer to a closed (limited run) work of comic art as a graphic novel. Many artists and writers however, prefer to use the term comic book. Alan Moore stated in a recent interview that the term graphic novel is an elitist label created by companies to sell comic art to a greater and supposedly more sophisticated audience. I have opted for the term comic book accordingly.

² The publishing rights to *VforV* were bought by DC Comics in 1988 and the 3rd (unpublished) volume was released in standard US comic format in a 10 issue miniseries; in colorized form rather than the original stark black and white. *VforV* is divided into three volumes; I (no sub-title) with 11 chapters followed by a 'musical interlude' as prologue to book II (This Vicious Cabaret) containing 14 chapters. The third volume, also prologued by a musical interlude is entitled 'The Land of Do-As-You-Please and is composed of 11 chapters.

³ *VforV* was intentionally written without thought balloons or sound effects. The idea being that the context and the storytelling would not require them. Also, panels would not seep into each other in a variety of colourful forms. The panels would be self-enclosed and minimalist in form. The art would be intentionally chiaroscuro, as if white had been imprinted on black to give the idea of prison walls and an

effectiveness as a political statement lies in the use of instantly recognizable symbols and references, being physically ensconced in the political and social atmosphere of Thatcher's Britain⁴.

Simply put, Alan Moore tells the story of England under a fascist dictatorship. It is 1997 and the state is run by Chancellor Adam Susan. It is into this totalitarian landscape that a 'terrorist' codenamed V appears⁵. His sole objective being to tear down state structure using the system both from within and without. V wears a Guy Fawkes mask (popular in Britain at the time) and appears to be psychotic⁶. His actions are guided entirely by an almost romantic adherence to Anarchism. In fact, the entire story can be seen as a long allegory of Fascism versus Anarchism, of what Robert Anton Wilson refers to as the opposition between 'logogram' and 'biogram' which basically stated divides and defines the elemental nature of our beings and the state-controlled construct that human kind seems to be moving towards and, indeed, has already become under specific conjunctions of circumstances⁷. V wears a Guy Fawkes mask, ostensibly, to remind the audience that certain spiritual freedoms should never die and that it takes one powerful ideology to confront another.⁸ V takes under his wing a young girl called Evey whom he saves from government secret police at the beginning of the story⁹. His eventual aim is to bring down the government and to restore to the British people a sense

overall ambience of oppressiveness. There would be long series of panels showing movement as well as thought, designed to resemble a cinematic storyboard.

⁴ The political background behind the scripting of *VforV* is essential for its understanding as an Anarchist document.

⁵ The term 'terrorist' is used according to pre-established norms. Moore defends V as being a freedom fighter. As a fundamental point of analysis, this idea should form the subject for future clarification and debate.

⁶ Since we cannot hear V's voice and V is never seen unmasked, Moore and Lloyd have deliberately left it to the audience to imprint its own gender (and racial) bias. My own interpretation is based on the casting of Hugo Weaving as V in the film version.

⁷ The word 'logogram' is used here in opposition to 'biogram' and not in its standard dictionary definition. For a more extensive definition of this dichotomy, I strongly recommend www.rawilson.com and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Anton_Wilson first.

⁸ In the seventies it was common in the fortnight before bonfire night (5th of November) for children's comics to print a cut-out mask with a stylized face of Guy Fawkes.

⁹ The police in question are referred to as 'Fingermen' since they work for the 'Finger', the interventive government forces. The state is seen as a biological construct made up of organic parts lead naturally by the 'Head' in the form of the Chancellor and having various departments: 'The Ears' for audio-visual recording and surveillance; the 'Eye' which constantly monitors every aspect of public life through the use of clearly visible CCTV cameras; The 'Nose' which is the Norsefire version of C.I.D. (Criminal investigation Department); and the 'Voice', represented by the 'Fate' computer and the state broadcasting services which serve to distribute propaganda and maintain a continuum of stability in the realm. The function of state as a biological construct is at the heart of conflicting socio-political viewpoints.

of independence, freedom and individuality, whether they are prepared for it or not. In this sense, *VforV* leaves many questions open; unanswered on purpose. Moore has often been cited as saying that he does not wish people to think as he does, simply to think. The element of perpetual doubt as to the political machinations of state is a recurrent theme in Moore's work and here they are exposed directly for the first time. Given its background and pedigree, *VforV* can be analyzed both according to its dichotomy of Fascism versus Anarchism or as an indictment of the governmental policies applied in Margaret Thatcher's Britain.

In issue number 17 of *Warrior*, an article entitled "Behind the Painted Smile" appeared for the first time outlining the inspiration, basic ideas and visual concepts for the comic strip. This article has served as the starting point for every analysis of *VforVendetta* ever since. In one paragraph, Alan Moore lists his influences¹⁰:

"The list was something as follows: Orwell. Huxley. Thomas Disch. **Judge Dredd**. Harlan Ellison's "Repent Harlequin! Said the Ticktockman." "Catman" and "Prowler in the City at the Edge of the World" by the same author. Vincent Price's **Dr. Phibes** and **Theatre of Blood**. David Bowie. The Shadow. Nightraven. Batman. **Fahrenheit 451**. The writings of the **New Worlds** school of science fiction. Max Ernst's painting [sic] "Europe After the Rains." Thomas Pynchon. The atmosphere of British Second World War films. **The Prisoner**. Robin Hood. Dick Turpin... (Warrior # 17. pp 18-25)

This interview affords us a rare insight into the work of the author as written by the author but is deceptively enlightening and succeeds in posing more questions than it answers. The use of bold to emphasize specific and more salient inspirations does not help in the long run given that it provides a palpable limit within which to formulate our ideas about *VforV*. One should bear in mind that these ideas are laden with variables which accord to a specific moment; not that of the work's conception but that of the reflexion of the work and which, given the scope of the opus, outlasts their validity. Even at the time of writing the article, it would seem that Moore was clutching at straws somewhat, attempting to categorize his influences in a way which would make some sort

¹⁰ Oddly enough, Robert Anton Wilson is not on this list possibly due to an oversight or plausibly because Moore had not yet 'discovered' him. I have attempted wherever possible to identify moments in the original text where these influences soak through.

of sense to the reader (ostensibly to himself). Note that in the following paragraph he states:

There was some element on all of these that I could use, but try as I might I couldn't come up with a coherent whole from such disjointed parts. I'm sure that it's a feeling that all artists and writers are familiar with... (Warrior # 17. pp 18-25)

Since its writing, it has been the harrying and elusive goal of those researching *VforV* to find that 'coherent whole', and in fact, what seems a frustrating objective at a certain moment in time, turns out some startling conclusions in the long run. When we hold up to the light parallel narratives that reinterpret old critique and old angst into new contexts, we are forming a new set of hypotheses. And, setting aside the realms of taste, these can prove to be enlightening, frustrating and surprising at the same time.

The academic, being almost duty-bound to refrain from critiques of taste, finds him or herself in the unlovable position of having to defend both vectors of a contrasting story. The only possibility of the writer's redemption is to fathom and filter the levels of quality through which the interpreter's resources have been passed. To wit, it is an effort-laden manner of style to find why we prefer one version of narrative over another and, avoiding *touchés* of bias, render their subtexts meaningful or meaningless to the reader.

Five years after the release of the film version of *VforV* and, at a time when Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *magnum opus* 'Watchmen' has just been released in film, it is synchronically expedient to look at the ways in which his writings have been sculpted by screenplay writers and directors. It is equally important to ascertain why Alan Moore has relinquished all property over *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *From Hell* and *VforV* to the extent that he refuses to have his name associated with any of these comic books any more. After a long process of corporative maneuvering, Moore found himself in a position in which he had essentially given away any rights he had to his own work and as is usually the case, the original writer either accepts the money and withdraws to

work on something else or folds his arms and stoically says ‘no’. The latter being the case, it would seem odd to be ‘throwing the baby out with the bath water’¹¹

The baby [*VforV*] is one I put a great deal of love into, a great deal of passion and then during a drunken night it turned out that I’d sold it to the gypsies and they had turned out my baby into a life of prostitution...This may sound melodramatic, but I’ve been writing for 25 years and I think that the passion with which I write is probably evident – It’s not faked. I really do feel intensely passionate about everything I write. (The Beat Magazine)

In the same interview, Moore goes on to expound his aggravation at the use of his name for sales purposes and goes into the political background that stands at the heart of the plot in *VforV*.

At the time when I wrote it...Margaret Thatcher had been in power for two or three years. She was facing the first crisis of her, by then, very unpopular government. There were riots all over Britain in places that hadn’t seen riots in hundreds of years. There were fascist groups, the National Front, The British National Party, who were flexing their muscles and sort of trying to make political capital out of what were fairly depressed and jobless times. It seemed to me that with the kind of Reagan/Thatcher axis that existed across the Atlantic, it looked like Western society was taking somewhat a turn for the worse. There were ugly fascist stains starting to reassert themselves that we might have thought had been eradicated back in the ‘30s. But they were reasserting themselves with a different spin. They were talking less about annihilating whichever minority they happened to find disfavour with and talking more about free market forces and market choice and all of these other kinds of glib terms, which tended to have the same results as an awful lot of the Fascist causes backing the ‘30s but with a bit more spin put upon them. The friendly face of Fascism. (idem)

Moore has always had a clear stance as to the essential messages contained in *VforV*. As a parable which opposes Fascism and Anarchy on a very different political to scale to the linear (or circular) left-right opposition to which we are accustomed, he was producing an enunciation which not only prophesizes the end of the said extremes of political ideology, but adds a third dimension to a two-dimensional model. In placing Anarchism as the logical antithesis to Fascism, Moore is providing a textual reference which reconstructs traditional views of the State and its systems of governance. This point is of extreme import when facing any analysis of *VforV* because without it, further

¹¹ To paraphrase the interview ‘A for Alan: The Alan Moore interview’ first published in The Beat magazine in November 2005, reproduced here:
http://www.comicon.com/thebeat/2006/03/a_for_alan_pt_1_the_alan_moore.html

means become redundant to our understanding of the narrative as a whole, and to our collaboration as readers with all of the subtleties and texts that are woven into the panels of the comic book. For this reason, Moore explains after having read the screenplay to the film version that: “[the] words, “fascism” and “anarchy”, occur nowhere in the film”.¹² He goes on to protest that:

It’s been turned into a Bush-era parable by people too timid to set a political satire in their own country. In my original story there had been a limited nuclear war, which had isolated Britain, caused a lot of chaos and a collapse of government, and a fascist totalitarian dictatorship had sprung up. Now, in the film, you’ve got a sinister group of right-wing figures – not fascists, but you know they’re bad guys – and what they have done is manufactured a bio-terror weapon in secret, so that they can pursue their right-wing agenda. It’s a thwarted and frustrated and perhaps largely impotent American liberal fantasy of someone with American liberal values [standing up] against a state run by neo-conservatives – which is not what “v for vendetta” was about. It was about fascism, it was about anarchy, it was about [England]. The intent of the film is nothing like the intent of the book as I wrote it. And if the Wachowski brothers had felt moved to protest the way things were going in America, then wouldn’t it have been more direct to do what I’d done and set a risky political narrative sometime in the near future that was obviously talking about the things going on today?
(MTV Interview)

Questioning the validity of reinterpreting the essential oppositions which take place in the comic and rerouting them into a playing ground for a new public stands as a key element in the dissection of many film interpretations of literary work. But, as I have previously stated, the translation here is more akin to an extension conversion on a computer file than to a redressing and reimagining on a much grander scale. Adapting any work of art into a new medium operates on a shift not only in the metaphysical spectrum but also in the physical. The technological construct implicit in the science of cinema seems, at first light, not to be so far from the comic book: images with words which are simply given motion. Taken at its most fundamental, this is the general agreement when comic books are reworked into film and it would seem to anyone with even a modicum of knowledge of Alan Moore’s work that he does in fact have what could eventually be called a ‘cinematic’ style. However,

¹² From the MTV interview at http://www.mtv.com/shared/interviews/m/moore_alan_060315/

In comics the reader is in complete control of the experience. They can read it at their own pace, and if there's a piece of dialogue that seems to echo something a few pages back, they can flip back and check it out, whereas the audience for a film is being dragged through the experience at the speed of 24 frames per second. So even for a director like Terry Gilliam, who delights in cramming background details into his movies, there's no way he'd be able to duplicate what Dave Gibbons was able to do in *Watchmen*. (idem)

Whilst only history will be able to bear a claim as to whether the film adaptation of *Watchmen* is in fact the most faithful rendition of Moore's work to date, it can be said that on a relative scale of symbols per panel of art, *VforV* appears less cluttered and therefore, eminently, more cinematographic. And yet, the general consensus seems to be that a better film has been made from what is ostensibly much more difficult material, whilst a comic which reads almost like a screenplay has been rewritten into a notoriously fragmented and contrived propaganda statement. The ramifications of this appreciation will hopefully be made clear in the process of a one to one analysis of certain key scenes from both comic and film.

On the subject of adaptation, Moore goes on to say:

My position used to be: If the film is a masterpiece, that has nothing to do with my book. If the film is a disaster, that has nothing to do with my book. They're two separate entities, and people will understand that. That was very naïve because most people are not bothered with whether it's adapted from book or not. And if they do know, they assume it was faithful adaptation. There's no need to read the book if you've seen the film, right? And how many of the audience went to see "O Brother, Where Art Thou? And thought, "Hmmm, I've really got to go and read 'The Odyssey'"? (idem).

As to the politically revisionist reinterpretation of *VforV*, he expresses himself equally clearly. Questioned as to how his generation had lived under the shadow of nuclear war, whilst Western society now seems to be living in the shadow of an Islamic Jihad, he retorts: "Well, they think they're growing up under the threat of an Islamic Jihad. They're in fact growing up under the threat of nuclear winter, just like we were."¹³

¹³ http://www.comicon.com/thebeat/2006/03/a_for_alan_pt_2_the_alan_moore.html

Moore is, by his own admission, both visceral and vitriolic when it comes to defending his work. His protectiveness derives not from a typified hoarding of his words for himself, but rather because of repeated examples of misuse and misinterpretation. Since his own lifestyle is so clearly antagonistic to the processes of corporatism, mainstream liberalist politics and the world of mass-cinema production in general, we should not rule out the reactionary quality of the author's attitude. Indeed, many of the people with whom I have spoken on the subject of *VforV* clearly enjoyed the film but had not read the book. This said, is there a redeeming element to the Wachowski brothers' adaptation? How does it reflect, if at all, a substratum of political mindsets in the United States of George W. Bush?

Whether the film does 'justice' to the book is not a part of its appreciation that we can easily set aside. It would shatter our reading of the narrative if we were to judge them by what they are *in contrast* to each other. But reading them as isolated wholes creates an untidy parallel which cannot justify the existence of either. Therefore, we return to the basic question which underlies the corpus of the present text, in which way is *VforV*, film and book, a coherent and cogent ideological representation of its placement in a specific society? Has there been an appropriation and if so, how does it redefine itself in the face of current political and philosophical values?

3: Versions.

“Art, like truth, is in the eye of the beholder. You believe what you choose, and I’ll believe what I know.”

Kevin Spacey as Jim Williams in Clint Eastwood’s ‘Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil’

In his informed and honest appreciation of the film and book versions of *VforV*, Professor James R. Keller¹⁴ introduces us to the idea of reinterpretation of narratives through the use of scientific discovery; he speaks of string theories, alternative universes and narratives rolling off of each other into the chaos of interpretation. This approach cleverly intertwines the need for retelling a story by changing its original structure with the idea that continuity between forms no longer seems to be essential because, at any given time, an author may easily say that ‘that past’ happened in an alternate reality.¹⁵

Oddly enough, the same approach was taken up by DC comics in the 80s to streamline the pantheon of characters that had been haphazardly chronicled since the late 1930s and which seemed, at least then, to have no causal logic between them. The Batman of the 1930s must logically have been at least 80 years-old at the time. To clarify this obvious continuity error, the idea that various universes, multiple realities, separated only by a different vibratory wavelength, existed with sometimes slight and sometimes enormous differences between them¹⁶. This notion allowed for an all time high in creativity. One could easily kill off the ‘unkillable’ characters like Superman, only to bring them back by stating that all this happened in a universe very different to our own. Also, for the first time, it was established that there would be an ‘Earth Prime’,

¹⁴ To my knowledge, the only extant academic analysis of *VforV* is Professor Keller’s work. For this reason, I use it as a contrastive control for my own analysis.

¹⁵ For a clear, objective and above all, satisfying read of all of these theories and how they are applied to our society and to mankind as a construct, I recommend Ronald Mallet and Bruce Henderson’s ‘The Time Traveller’ (non-fiction) and Robert Anton Wilson’s ‘Quantum Psychology’ (pseudo-fiction?).

¹⁶ A notable example is the cataloguing of parallel universes through the exploration of Earth’s history and the richness of the ‘What if’ causality based on historical possibility. For example: on the planet denominated as ‘Earth X’ the Nazis win World War II; a common dystopian scenario found notably in Robert Harris’ book *Fatherland* (1992) and its subsequent film version in 1994, and in Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo’s *It Happened Here* (1966). On ‘Earth 3’, there are no superheroes, only super villains. On yet another, the American colonies not only win their war of independence but actually invade England etc.

a universe that had no Nosferatus, or Aliens, or Green Lanterns; ostensibly this is the earth outside of the fictional narrative form: our own reality. The ramifications of this stand of course on the solid ground of reason and logic: the moment one uses a universe in a narrative, it fuses with that narrative into a rational tautology. The ‘Crisis on Infinite Earths’ succeeded (to an extent) in rewriting the illogical nature of children’s comics into the chic adult-oriented formats of the ‘graphic novels’ that began to appear in the 80s, most notably in works such as Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight* and in Moore’s own re-version of *Marvelman* (later titled *Miracleman*)¹⁷.

The precedent was set by science and then by writers who had to find a solid logical reason for the existence of a super hero rabbit called *Captain Carrot*. How do we fit this into a universe that is filled with the solidity of growing audience sophistication? Also, how do we pass off laughably childish stories on an increasingly demanding readership? To state that *VforV* is valid in both of its artistic forms because one spirals off from the other, seems not only to be a palpably liberal conception as an apology for the existence of one or the other in some sense.

Whilst Keller’s work does profess some remarkably insightful observations, it is by its own admission, a study of the film rather than the book. For this reason, and in accordance with Douglas Adams’ theory of indeterminacy, one may agree with some of it, disagree with some of it, and be totally mystified by some of it.¹⁸ The ministrations that the film exists in a continuum of its own does not entirely salvage criticism aimed at it.

At the beginning of the film, Evey, played by Natalie Portman, seems to be a relatively coordinated young woman. Working at the BTN (British Television Network), she has access to a world of broadcast materials; works with creative and liberal-minded people, and is invited to dinner with Gordon Dietrich (played by Stephen Fry). She is

¹⁷ *Marvelman* was a British superhero created by Mick Anglo in 1954 based heavily on the character of Captain Marvel. Due to copyright loss, Marvel comics forced the change of the character’s name to *Miracleman*. After many years in limbo, Alan Moore restarted the superhero in *Warrior* magazine, alongside *VforV*.

¹⁸ Douglas Adams (1952-2001) was the author of the immensely successful *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*’ series. His work sits comfortably alongside writers as disparate as Stephen Hawking and Wilhelm Reich in that it explodes science, politics, religion and academia into a holistic realm of the comically absurd. He is also a household name in Britain and was at the height of his popularity in the years between 1980 and 1986.

willing to risk curfew to go to dinner with a man with whom she does not readily identify as being a future lover. The fact that Dietrich is gay is only revealed later when he explains that his invitations to young women on the staff are simply to keep up appearances.¹⁹ Although the rampant homophobia of the Thatcherite era is in part revealed here, the question still stands: why would Evey place her life in jeopardy to visit Dietrich? In the book version, Evey is 16 years-old, works in a factory, has lost both her parents and to patch up the holes in a meager existence decides to prostitute herself. The conservatism behind characterization would be understandable within a United States context were it not for the logic of the impulse. In the book, from the first page, there is a feeling of desperation, fear and an all-encompassing oppression. The state (seen as the logogram gone insane) is a perpetually regenerating organic construct whose eyes and ears are everywhere. The use of the omnipresent CCTV cameras serves as constant reminder of the futility of insurrection or civil disobedience. These images serve to remind the reader of the paradox of state protection. In relinquishing certain personal freedoms, the right to assembly and legal representation, freedom of speech and the ability to criticize our government when we see that it is not serving our needs are seconded to a realm called dystopia, the vision of which is very deeply grounded into the artistic sentiment of the British, especially after the second world war. This same sentiment has been appropriated into the arts *en masse* by the United States after the World Trade Center tragedy²⁰.

Keller goes on at length to admonish the Bush administration for its incessant and inexorable encroachment on civil liberties following 9/11 and rightfully so. The film acts as an agit-prop *tour de force* that would make many liberals extremely emotional. Yet, the determinate nature of the acts of the lone terrorist (V) are more akin to the 19th

¹⁹ The homosexuality trope is extremely important to the storyline of *VforV*. Whilst 'V's sexuality is never made clear, there are subtle elements throughout the text that would suggest his homosexuality. Not only his adoration of 'Valerie' the lesbian actress imprisoned in the cell next to his at Larkhill, but also in his general choice of aesthetics and his references to the rounding up of the homosexuals during what the Norsefire government calls the 'reclamation'. The demonization of homosexuals in both the UK and the US following the discovery of the AIDS virus only added to the already rabid bigotry aimed at this sector of the two respective communities.

²⁰ A clear relation between post-war malaise, the Suez Canal crisis and the progressive loss of its Empire whilst the rest of the world took arms in a bilateral race towards weapons of mass destruction as well as the loss of political innocence toward socialism, provided fertile ground for the post-modernists. This concept of 'loss of empire' is a valuable component in the understanding of the meta-textual value of the written *VforV* narrative.

century bomb-wielding, bearded anarchist stereotype than to the depiction that James McTeigue and the Wachowskis make him out to be in the film version.²¹ V is an instructed, articulate psychopath and not simply a ‘terrorist seeking revenge’. Indeed, the revenge trope as read by Professor Keller stands up to the light of analysis inasmuch as it follows a line of thought set out from the beginning of his thesis. The inclusion of the 1934 version of *The Count of Monte Cristo* to parallel sentiments held and withheld between V and Evey betray a complex interpersonal narrative that is entirely absent from the original text. From the ground structure of the relationship between V and Evey, we can begin to analyse with some depth the disparities in the two media.²² Equally, the presence or absence of artworks in both versions can be seen as a conspiracy to reenact, and to reevaluate the validity of cultural artifacts within the framework of the opus *in toto* and the relevance of their existence as a poetic reflection of the two main characters.²³

²¹ The political differences between Proudhonian, Kropotkinite and Bakunian anarchist forms are related in depth in Richard Porton’s compendious analysis of anarchists in and behind the movies; *Film and the Anarchist Imagination*. Summarily, V does not represent any typified anarchist type. As a superhero/villain he is closer to the symbolic hooded avenger trope than to the hyper-politically motivated anarchist of the late 19th century. However, there are essential tenets of all anarchist forms in V’s actions which would seem to reinforce the idea that he is, in essence, the revolutionary extension of ‘everyman’. Additionally, the repeated inference to his Vendetta as an artistic construct (elements of art and culture being constantly cited throughout film and book), would place him within the ranks of both the individual direct action-motivated anarchists, and the intelligentsia grouping of late 20th century pseudo anarchists. To quote Porton: “Bakunin is often caricatured as an apostle of violence, and a sentiment from his pre-anarchist essay *The Reaction in Germany* (1842) – ‘the passion for destruction is a creative passion’ – is too often cited as an anarchist tenet, rather than as a prolegomenon to a more constructive vision of decentralized federalism”. Let us compare this to V’s own words: “Anarchy must embrace the din of bombs and cannon-fire yet must it always love sweet music more and Anarchy wears two faces, both creator and destroyer. Thus destroyers topple empires; make a canvas of clean rubble where creators can then build a better world. Rubble once achieved makes further ruins’ means irrelevant. Away with our explosives, then! Away with our destroyers! They have no place within our better world. But let us raise a toast to all our bombers, all our bastards, most unlovely and unforgivable. Let’s drink their health... then meet with them no more” (III:5 ‘The Valediction’).

²² My contention is that the romantic relationship that seems to arise between V and Evey in the film version is so strained and incongruous with the general message and tone of the film that it serves to reinforce the symbolic and literary strength of the original in which there is resolutely no hypothesis leading to romantic inclusion between the two protagonists. It would seem that for the sake of expedience and audience expectation, the homosexuality reference (in V’s case) has to be surgically removed from the narrative, as does the rewriting of Evey’s apprenticeship with ‘V’ and the Fascism/Anarchism duality.

²³ According to McTeigue, the replacement of many of the film posters in the Shadow Gallery as well as select works of art (including music) was due to copyright restrictions (Lamm & Bray 195).

4: “Bullet-Proof Faces”²⁴.

*“There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected.
Not who, but what: what is she.”
Thomas Pynchon, ‘V’*

Much has been made on the subject of the identity of V. The presence of a scene at the end of the book in which Evey looking at the masked body of the dead V runs a series of alternative endings through her mind in which she unmask the character first to find a black man (victim of the government ‘reclamation’ and concentration camps), her lover Gordon Harper (transformed into a composite character in the film), her father and finally, herself, is the culmination of a process of enlightenment that could only have this end²⁵. What Evey understands at the end of her trials is that the face is not important; there is no name to attach to the character. It is the ideal, the symbol which lives and survives beyond the death of the ‘man’. At the end of the film version as Finch asks Evey who V was, she states: “He was Edmund Dantes...and he was my father, and my mother. My brother and my friend. He was you and me. He was all of us” (Lamm & Bray 168). Whilst the film version seems to revel somewhat in a hyper-poetic rhetoric, the book clearly makes it understood that V is none of the above. V’s dying question to Evey is a typically elusive conundrum “First, you must discover whose face lies behind this mask. But you must never know my face” (III.9 ‘The Vigil’). This message, for Evey alone, is the final task that leads to her solid identification as the new V. It is not a romanticized promise of freedom; it is the incumbent burden of responsibility to which V has been preparing Evey since the beginning. If *anyone* could be V, then the same does not scan logically to the contrary: V cannot be everyone in the sense that he is a specific construct (with all that the word implies) created to represent an ideal. The second V; E-Vey, is a new construct, without the psychosis and violence necessary to

²⁴ In 1973, David Bowie approached George Orwell’s widow to gain the rights to performing a rock opera version of *1984*. He was refused but wrote three songs which were later included on his apocalyptic post-glam album ‘Diamond Dogs’; *1984*, *Big Brother* and *We Are the Dead*. The reference to ‘Bullet-proof faces’ from the song *Sweet Thing* would suggest the eternalizing of ‘image’ rather than the ‘man’ and tidily adjusts itself to the ‘mask’ line of thought.

²⁵ In III:9 ‘The Vigil’

combat the body politik of fascism. She becomes V but still continues being Evey in this sense; she is both ideal and human, a new figure standing at the dawn of a new era. The parallels between *VforV* and the Batman comics do not end here. Just as Batman seems to embody the necessary force of justice in his Gotham City, exercising extreme force with an excessive sobriety against those elements which he considers as damaging to his city, so too does V stop at no ends to achieve his ultimate goal. Batman takes under his wing an innocent apprentice figure in the guise of Robin. He metes out justice from the cultural and physical sanctuary of his bat-cave. To this and other extents there are clear representations of the doer of good working outside of the system, often in direct and open confrontation with whichever system of law is in power²⁶. If anything, Batman's greatest enemy seems to be the dissociative process of distinguishing ego from alter-ego. This is not the case with V who does not seem to possess any surviving elements of a previous life. In fact, it is left to us as readers to attempt to piece together a whole so as to understand who V may have been before he was a masked avenger.

This analysis of Batman as psychotic is as much in keeping with the symbolic idea that we are our own worst enemies as it is with Kafka's 'Before the Law' conundrum in *The Trial*, and with the frustratingly surreal outcome of the 17 episode television series *The Prisoner* which is a constant point of reference in the book²⁷. The

²⁶ In Frank Miller's *Batman: the Dark Knight*, the clear distinction between the oft-contradictory workings of 'law' and 'justice' are brought to light as Batman metes out justice with increasing violence just as the criminal element escalates beyond all possibility of control. Since the government is incapable of restoring order to Gotham City they regard the Batman's actions as that of an out-of-control vigilante and send 'Superman' (essentially the government's own righter of wrongs) to deal with his one-time companion and friend. The fight between them (a typically testosterone filled blood-splatterer which Frank Miller draws and writes with verve), is emblematic of the power struggle between what is labelled as 'terrorist' action in the case of the Batman and government sponsored terrorism through Superman; total hegemonic control being the order. Ironically, this story begets a new slant on the Batman figure that has often been regarded as almost fascistic in his actions. Here, he seems closer to the direct action anarchist than to his soft-sell alter-ego.

²⁷ *The Prisoner*, an ABC production made by Patrick McGoohan's 'Everyman' company is a surreal political thriller with strong Kafkaesque overtones. An important government agent resigns without explaining why and is taken against his will to a place called 'the Village' where he is attributed the Number 6. The organizer of the Village, Number 2, is in charge of developing increasingly complex psychological tortures so as to extract information from Number 6. The latter refuses the nomination stating that he is not a number but a free man. His struggle to find escape from the Village and discover who number 1 is culminates in a surreal symbol-laden trial. The nature of the series can best be summed up by the initial confrontation between 2 and 6 - Number 6: I will not make any deals with you. I've resigned. I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed or numbered. My life is my own. I resign!

Number 6: Where am I?

human being that inhabits the graphic shape of the V character has as much become fused symbiotically to its value as a construct as does the deadly suffocating mask in David Bowie's mime of the same name²⁸. Yet, this mask, represents not only a rigid, organized vendetta that leaves no holes or loops in its makeup, as it also stands for an unresolved and fundamental point in the history and group of folkloric values of the British people. In choosing a stylized mask of Guy Fawkes, V has opted to create a series of *a priori* references that have a pre-determined set of cultural references among British audiences. These both explain the reason for the prologue in the movie version and the constant Fawkesian explanation throughout the narrative of the film²⁹.

During their first encounter at the beginning of the film Evey asks V *who* he is (as opposed to *what he is*):

V: Who? Who is but the form following function of what, and what I am is a man in a mask.

EVEY: I can see that.

V: Of course you can. I am not questioning your powers of observation, I am merely remarking upon the paradox of asking a masked man who he is.

Number 2: In the Village.

Number 6: What do you want?

Number 2: We want information.

Number 6: Whose side are you on?

Number 2: That would be telling, we want information, information, information.

Number 6: You won't get it.

Number 2: By hook or by crook, we will.

Number 6: Who are you?

Number 2: The new Number 2.

Number 6: Who is Number 1?

Number 2: You are Number 6.

Number 6: I am not a Number, I am a free man!

Number 6: Who is Number 1?

Number 2: You are Number 6.

Number 6: I am not a Number. I am a person.

Ironically the answer to who is number 1 is revealed in the very first episode, with only a comma to obscure the message: You are, number 6.

²⁸ David Bowie performs a mime in his 1968 film 'Love You 'Till Tuesday' in which a young man seeking fame and attention finds such in the form of a mask. His ego is lost to the addictive character of fame that the mask provides until he is physically incapable of removing it and dies of suffocation. This offers a plausible analogy with the messianic self-annihilation of the Ziggy Stardust character (also created by Bowie) four years later.

²⁹ A lengthy but elucidative historical background to the Gunpowder treason and to the anti-catholic feeling at the beginning of the 17th century in England can be found in Keller (17-35) as well as <http://www.gunpowder-plot.org/> and http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/gunpowder_plot_of_1605.htm.

During V's final confrontation in the film with the head of the 'finger-men', Creedy demands (Lamm & Bray 160):

CREEDY: Why won't you die?

V: Beneath this mask there is more than flesh. Beneath this mask there is an idea, Mr. Creedy. And ideas are bullet-proof.

In the book version, V is confronted by Inspector Finch, the policeman designated to hunt him out. The narratives differ vastly in terms of 'how' the story gets to this juncture, but the script is, with a few divergences, essentially the same:

(Finch shoots V and waits in abject fear, for V to fall. V looks at Finch)

V: There, did you think to *kill* me? There's no flesh or blood within this cloak to kill. There's only an idea. Ideas are bullet-proof. Farewell. (III.7 'Vindication')

In the latter sequence, devoid of a spectacular 'Matrix-style' armed confrontation, V maintains his mask firmly in place, speaking in the strange, nerve-jangling psychotic archaic English of either a Jacobean or an over the top Shakespearean actor similar in tone to Vincent Price's outrageous portrayal in the Dr Phibes films³⁰. The parataxis of his speech forms which are a constant in V's dialogue are both intended to intensify the distance from reality (as it is in the dystopian state), but also to reify the implication that we are all indeed 'but players' on the stage of the world. In the film version V often lapses into a more rhetorically poetic line of verse structure. At times, especially to Evey in private, he seems almost condescendingly romantic. In the book, the format of their relationship borders on the dreamlike without nuances of romantic interplay. This reinforces the fact that V has no face at all. Not just physically - it was burnt away during at fire that he set whilst escaping from a government concentration camp – but also psychologically. If we accept the premise that there really are no

³⁰ *The Abominable Dr Phibes* (1970) and *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972), both directed by Robert Fuest concern the meticulously planned revenge of an actor against his harsh critics. The deaths are planned to be as gruesome as possible, but not without the sense of justice (right or wrong) as felt by Phibes who operates from his hidden lair with the help of his young apprentice, his daughter. The films are laden with black humour and heavily influenced by Fuest's surreal work on the television series *The Avengers* (1961-1969).

vestiges of humanity left in V, we could go so far as to state that as an embodied concept, V is similar in many respects to the homonymous entity in Pynchon's book: "V. was merely a scholarly quest after all, an adventure of the mind" (Pynchon 61), as a composite figure representing freedom against oppression: "assumed into the fabric of any of a thousand Great Paintings," (155) and as an actor to whom the staged quality of his actions is everything: "[a] grand Gothic pile of inferences," (226).³¹

V plays the 'Villain' not just in a vaudevillian sense full of *grand guignol* and extravagant panache, but concurrently, he adds the dimension of insanity to his actions both in speech and *modus operandi*.

More importantly in the confrontation scene between V and Finch is the fact that it is necessarily a one-to-one moment and not a bullet-time slaughter as in the film. Finch has been following V's tracks throughout the narrative, to the point that he decides to take L.S.D. whilst in Larkhill Concentration camp – to think as would V – to understand what created the 'terrorist' in the hope of finding him. At the cost of his own sanity, he eventually makes the exact voyage that once led V to his underground lair: the 'Shadow Gallery'. It is understood from the outset that V has programmed a particular detective to hunt him down; the right person³². Even his discovery and confrontation have already been planned, it is a necessary part of the narrative and of the grand plan that Finch finds and shoots him. To understand V more fully requires an interlocutor, Finch for this specific situation, and Evey as the instructional foil that makes us take sides as the narrative progresses. In this sense, Evey, and the name is purely intentional, behaves as our eyes and senses as the drama unfurls.

To return briefly to the Batman / hooded avenger trope, it becomes clear that the mask as message has taken on new dimensions since the reworking of the costumed heroic comic books into their current general style. In Batman's case, the use of a costume with full mask serves (so we are told) to hide the identity of the wearer as well as to defend the integrity of the wearer's friends and family. Batman hides behind a mask not only to

³¹ V lives underground both in the physical and cultural sense. There is more than a little of Gaston Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera* in his vendetta just as there is a subjunctive quality which relates *VforV* to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.

³² In II:14 'Vignettes', Finch is reading Arthur Koestler's *The Roots of Coincidence* which is an *a propos* piece of literature given that nothing has been left to chance by V. What appears at first as a coincidence is only the illusion of such.

frighten the criminal element through the use of a primordial fear symbol, but also to dissociate two entirely incompatible forms of existence; as avenger and as playboy. This dualism has led to heated debates among comic book fans as to the psychological machinations and ramifications upon the character of the Batman *et al.* This typified form of superhero representation has been exploded into mainstream psychology through the fetishistic interplay of repressed sexuality and role-playing prevalent in narratives such as Moore and Gibson's *Watchmen*.

In the case of Superman, we have a startling about-face. Here, the hero is not trying to hide from humanity by adopting an alter-ego but, being an alien, trying to recreate his image as a regular human being, the glasses actually come off to reveal the hero and not the other way around.³³ As part of the reversal of such contradictory superhero stereotypes, V is never revealed simply because the information is not actually required within the grand aim of the narrative. At the moment of denouement, the shroud is not cast aside and the essential message we, as readers or cinemagoers, have been trying to decipher, is withheld. There is no catering to the audience expectation of ending. If Patrick McGoochan's final combat with the mysterious number 1 had not revealed what was behind the mask we would have been equally mystified, but the essence of humanity lies, in great part, in the palpable. We are, so to speak, creatures that require the immediate senses to validate the existence of a thing. It is not enough that we know it to exist; we have to see it also. For this reason, an essential moment in the book has Evey sitting on the stairs in the Shadow Gallery looking down at the body of V envisaging different hypotheses as to who V could, should, or may have been. And in each the mask has fallen away and we are permitted to see the alternate realities that the comic book has given us. In a very serious sense, this scene is not wholly dissimilar to the current gimmick of marketing a film with several endings. Yet here the ending has no closure because the message is greater than the sum of the values of its protagonist. We are forsaken such a moment in the film as it dashes toward a suitably climactic ending. The Wachowski narrative could have been forgiven this oversight had it not been for the Hollywood ending that is avoided at all cost in the original.

³³ A cursory overview of superheroes in movies can be found in Liam Burke's light-hearted *The Pocket Essential Guide to Superhero Movies*.

The almost anti-climactic feeling that predominates the book form does not allow for a sense of closure inasmuch as the villain/hero is fully aware of the foibles of mankind, of how history has taught us of the rise of oppression despite humanity's supposed sophistication; an interesting play on the idea that for evil to succeed, good men need but do nothing. V is only too aware that the people of England are not yet ready to take the step towards total revolution; he is playing out his promise as symbol of both past and future. To this end, he has prepared Evey and to this end he has entrusted her with the keys to the realm. Whilst there is no disquieting implosion of action in the movie version one should question the entirely different ending chosen by McTeigue to formalize the conclusion of the film. Whereas in the book we are left with a sense of reopening, that the three volumes which compose *VforV* are, for all intents, a plausible prologue to an even greater story: that of reeducating the English people so that they may find a voice for themselves that was denied for so long. In the movie, a thronging mass of people dressed as Guy Fawkes (as V's) storm the Houses of Parliament which is completely surrounded by a defensive perimeter of armed forces. The conclusion is suspenseful only insofar as previous police brutality has been explored in other moments of the film. What the film version fails to deliver is compromising and not inconsequent.

In the book, V has somehow gained access to the government's mega computer 'Fate'. It is the voice and eyes of 'Fate' that the English listen to in their dark hour³⁴. The mechanisms of state surveillance reproduce the idea of panopticism through the use of this computer³⁵. V may have plausibly gained access through the assassination of one of the Larkhill staff. There are a series of events in the set up to the vendetta which involve the murders of many high ranking party members. Therefore, V is the ghost in

³⁴ This is not dissimilar to the feeling of the ubiquitous presence of the BBC until the advent of commercial television.

³⁵ In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), French philosopher Michel Foucault introduces a functioning model of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon applied to the architectural layout of a prison. A tower located in the centre of the prison can see directly into all of the cells around it. The cell's inhabitants never know when or if they are being observed given that bilateral observation is not possible. This makes contact between the cells undesirable or even impossible. By segregating those under surveillance, those in power are guaranteed obedience thereby maximizing efficiency inasmuch as there need not even be a guard present in the tower. The system functions simply because there is no communication among equals (see annex) and the victims of the system live in constant fear of reprisal from authority. By extension, the prison analogy can be applied or interpreted to any social grouping. The grotesque numbers of CCTV cameras in London and other cities are testament to this form of dystopia.

the machine (a reference that is *not* coincidental), and his actions are carefully thought through³⁶. The narrative does not seem to present loopholes or lacks in continuity. Yet, in the film version, many thousands of V costumes are ordered, made, shipped and received all over the country. How V could have done this secretly is beyond all comprehension, and, what seems at first a spectacular allusion to revolutionary uprising does not stand up to the light of logic in any true sense. The image of orderly ranks of ‘common folk’ storming the Palace of Westminster, whilst spectacular, is both unlikely and fantastic. The stark, bitter and oppressive realism of the book is turned on its head by a message of unifying optimism which is too far displaced from the original intent to be brooked casually.

Furthermore, since in a totalitarian state there is no need for the apparatus of democratic process, what possible good would attacking the Houses of Parliament do? Certainly, to an audience in the United States, the image of Big Ben is a strong cultural and historic representation of the idea of ‘England’ as a whole, and to this end we can begin to understand how the reinterpretation of narrative into a cogent series of easily interpretable symbols in the United States may have annoyed Alan Moore and the more ardent fans of the book.

In addition, the appearance of so many V’s at the end of the film is a contradiction to the ideology of the original: there is only one V, because there is only one enemy: the state. In a more mundane, fiction-less trope, the uprising would have been succeeded through guerilla tactics over a long period of time. To revert to an ever more redundant cliché: the freedom fighters of some would become the demonized faces of terrorists to others. In allegorizing that all people are capable of becoming Vs given the right stimulus, one is relegating the essence of human experience throughout its entire history. Nowhere can we see more clearly this willingness to complacency and subservience than in Orwell’s *1984* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*, two intensely prevalent influences in the book. The power upon the will of the people created by the V representation, and most specifically, the mask, is canonized both through its originality

³⁶ This is the title of Arthur Koestler’s 1967 book which refers to humanity’s inexorable march towards nuclear self-destruction, its central motif being an analysis of Burrhus Skinner’s behaviourist theory. It is also the homonymous title of the ‘Police’s’ 1981 album whilst ‘Synchronicity’ (the phenomenon that provides, in part, the illusion of coincidence, is the title to their following album (1983)). Both are direct references to Koestler’s work. (q.v.: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Koestler).

and through its relationships with past history. But it is also given power as a symbol because of its uniqueness. Allied with the fact that V's personality does not contemplate the creation of an army of V's to revolt, this act in itself is as contradictory to the narrative as it is to the dimensions of motivation of the man behind the mask.

5: The Elected Leader and the Un-elected President.

"The authority of a state can never be an end in itself; for, if that were so, any kind of tyranny would be inviolable and sacred. If a government uses the instruments of power in its hands for the purposes of leading a people to ruin, then rebellion is not only right but also the duty of every individual citizen".

Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf

Whilst one might argue that the Wachowski/McTeigue take on *VforV* has its own values which are not only more socially relevant today in a specific context than they would have been if the original had been respected, we may gather from the presence of certain key elements in the movie which are entirely absent from the book, that the central motif of the cinematic version is an indictment of George W. Bush's administration and certain elements of United States society and politics (especially external policy) that have come to the fore since the beginning of the 21st century. The subtlety with which this indictment is achieved is avoided by Keller but will be looked at in this text.

Perhaps the most obvious note where one may begin would be the verbal register. The choice of typical and recurrent U.S. English expressions, exclamations and expletives reveal a singular lack of background study as to British culture and speech forms.³⁷ Although the criticism implicit in this approach may seem contrived, it stands

³⁷ As an example, the word 'bollocks' is repeated at length throughout the film as if it were a constant and normative U.K. English expletive. In fact, expletives are rare and restricted to create specific character depth. The use of the afore-mentioned word comes at a precise moment not as an expletive but as an expression of personal freedom. In III:1 'Vox Populi', V has just destroyed the GPO Tower and Jordan Tower; the 'eyes' and 'ears' of the Norsefire regime. He has given the people of England back their freedom of speech. They can no longer be observed or heard. A schoolgirl in glasses understands this and, looking up at a CCTV camera, decides to risk saying 'bollocks'. Since nothing seems to happen, she repeats the word several times before spraying the stylized 'V within a circle' symbol on the wall. It is ironic that, what is obviously a moment of liberation, the first freedom (that of speech) should be a swearword aimed at a symbol of the state monitoring apparatus. It is also reminiscent of the final confrontation between the antagonistic forces in Harlan Ellison's *Repent! Harlequin!*, *Said the Tick Tock Man* which begins with a quote from Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*.

Other more obvious examples can be found throughout the film script: Lamm and Bray; (p.13) Prothero: "God-damned...God-fearing", (p.13) Evey: "...that'll suck...", (p.15) Willy: "Oh yeah, *real sick. Bad case of the blues...*", (p.16) Tweed Coat: "By *sun up* if you're not the *sorriest piece of ass...*", (p.36) V: "I think we could mark this *November 5th*", (p.37) Dascombe: "*Goddammit*", (p.47) V: "...I am

alone in its defense exactly because of the power that Alan Moore (through V) posits in words. Their phrasing, selection and careful enunciation are part both of the illusion of being in a play (in a cosmic grand design so aptly stated by Shakespeare) as well as in the arena of politics. Whilst V is undoubtedly a staunch believer in the anarchist principle of ‘Propaganda by the Deed’³⁸, he also seems to have a wider lexicon than is normal. This would suggest a heightened intellect, and at the very least, an above-average education. Whilst in the book, most of the characters are imbued with a depth of personality that allows us to believe in them, or, at the very least, to believe that *they believe*, the film version seems to side almost integrally with the supposed ‘good guys’. In ennobling the protagonist with a superior eloquence, remitting his opposition into becoming spitting fascistic morons, the writers undermine the strength of all characters in play and certainly weaken the original premise of two equal but opposite social forms; Anarchy and Fascism. Since the film does not seem to accept this dualism as a narrative focus, we must accede to the demands of the script *per se* and read the intention as a contest between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism³⁹.

Perhaps the perfect example of this attitudinal shift in perspective comes in the form of party leader, Chancellor Adam Sutler, in the movie, portrayed by John Hurt who had already been the protagonist of another dystopian feature: Michael Anderson’s 1956 film version of Orwell’s *1984*. The name Sutler stands as a none-too-subtle allusion to another well-known despotic chancellor and seems to have been placed in the film necessarily to nail home the analogy even harder. Sutler’s portrayal in the movie is nothing short of neurotic and psychotic. He appears in person only at the end to be killed

rather astonished by *London’s finest*. I hadn’t expected you to be so *Johnny-on-the-spot*”, (p.47) Dominic: “Bad luck, *chummy*” etc etc.

³⁸ ‘Propaganda of the Deed’ is a concept that promotes physical violence against political enemies as a way of inspiring the masses and catalyzing revolution. [It] may take many forms, but in many cases utilizes violence against people seen as threats to the working class. It also refers to the use of symbolic acts of violence against structural targets, in which the act is intended to evoke a broader meaning.” From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda_of_the_deed.

³⁹ The rough and ready attack on human rights violations by the US military are brought to light in a series of clear examples: the repeated mentioning of Muslims as undesirables that were rounded up into Larkhill camp; the discovery of an antique Qur’an in Dietrich’s cellar leading to his hooding, arrest, and, in all probability, execution; the repeated reference to people disappearing into one of Creedy’s ‘black bags’, the sickening Guantanamo-like depiction of the interior of Larkhill camp (shot in a washed-out almost green hue), the SWAT intervention raids on homes in the middle of the night. All of these elements fall into a propagandistic pattern in the film and would seem to create in the viewer a series of negative reinforcement images which a United States audience (specifically but not exclusively) would find easy to identify.

by his henchman Creedy. All of his other appearances are as a huge snarling face on a screen, obviously another allusion to the Big Brother icon of *1984*. Sutler (called Adam Susan in the book) is inevitably seen as an abstract symbol of a human being; quite plausibly the boot stamping on a human face forever. He screams shouts and appears a haggard loathsome demagogue at the end of his tether. In sum, there are little, if any, redeeming qualities on any scale in this character. In fact, if it were not for the charisma of the actor, Sutler as he is presented in the film version would be nothing if not a series of pre-formed stereotypes catering to an almost minimalist personality model.

The Adam Susan of the book is, on the contrary, a deeply spiritual man, usually soft-spoken. So much so, that when he does lash out, it comes as a terrifying surprise. The violence of the repressive system that he lovingly defends is equally level with the violence and repression of his own personality. In stark contrast to the over the top Sutler, Susan strongly believes that he is the saviour of his kingdom. ‘England Prevails’ is not only an iconic reminder of ‘Seig Heil’ but also a permanent social stamp that reflects the feeling that England, above all others, has succeeded in living on despite the incredible difficulties caused by a limited nuclear war. The ‘godlessness’, which is referred to in the film version is the downfall of all that is not purely English. This would infer that the ‘Aryan’ and ‘racial purity’ contexts of Nazi Germany are very much alive in the book version. The emphasis on the purification of England ‘after the rains’⁴⁰ carries on a dynamic system of increasing nationalism that has been a part of Britain’s

⁴⁰ Max Ernst’s surrealist paintings ‘Europe after the Rains’ (1940-1942) observe a nightmarish post-apocalyptic landscape filled with what are plausibly architectural remnants of any great European city stalked by almost inhuman creatures. Pieces of pillars and rubble seem almost totemic covered in the sickly greens and oranges that fill the canvas. The paintings rank among Moore’s inspirational references.

<http://www.abcgallery.com/E/ernst/ernst27.html>

They are also the inspiration behind Alan Burns’ strange parataxis styled novel of the same name. “Set in the unspecified future in a Europe devastated by internecine strife within "the party," it deals with ruined figures in a ruined landscape, purposelessly dedicated to "the work" which is the only thing the party will reward with the food necessary to keep alive. The unnamed narrator alone possesses any genuine purpose. His quest to find and take care of the daughter of the Trotskyite leader of the rebel forces is inspired by something like love, doubtfully implicit in his actions, later developed into a statement of hope which comes as the one redeeming human fact in a world blasted beyond the usual trappings of humanity, but arrived at only after much violence: a woman is flogged, a dog stabbed and its legs dislocated, people fight over corpses for the gold fillings in the teeth, a leg is wrenched off a corpse and eaten by a woman, other women pursue and stone and half-crucify and eventually beat to death the commander of the forces who are in power at the book’s beginning. To this nightmarish action Burns applies a style which may be described as burnt-out. His sentences are mostly short, or built up of short phrases resting on commas where one might have expected full-stops, the total effect being slipped, stripped, and abrupt”.

<http://biography.jrank.org/pages/4193/Burns-Alan.html>

culture since Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, through to the National Front's hyper-political machinations of the 80s, coming up to date with the British National Party⁴¹. Whilst Fascism has a certain aesthetic appeal (as can be seen in the Nazi Chic obsession with uniforms and certain striking colours and symbols), it has never really gained a substantial foothold in British society, yet the idea of dalliance with extreme rightwing forms of political representation are both a constant threat and an accepted possibility⁴².

Adam Susan is a fascinating character *exactly* because he does not follow the insane stereotype of the typified fascist leader. His strength as a character lies not in his playing the arch-nemesis role to V but in his quiet introspection as to the events played out in his very singular personal history. His party 'Norsefire' is as much a reference to Nordic/Aryan mythology as is to the National Front whose initials NF could be seen as permanent architectural décor all over England in the 80s. The black and red symbols, banners and badges of the party which hang glaringly in both public and private spaces throughout the film, reintroduce the feeling of ubiquitous unity that was a staple part of the aesthetics of Nazi Germany.

As a man, Susan is the absolute leader⁴³ whose sense of purity leads him into a world of personal alienation, but one which allows us to view the man as more than simply a leader; whether he is insane or not in any pathological sense he is partially redeemed by moments of clear and paternal thought during several passages in the book. Shortly before his assassination, we are privy to his interior monologue:

Laughing, cheering: they [the people] at least have not forsaken me...but why can't I feel anything for them? There's only me here, isn't there? I've known since childhood no one

⁴¹For more on Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists, see Robert Knights' 1998 miniseries *Mosley* and *My Life*, Mosley's autobiography. The National Front's own site proves most interesting from a socio-political viewpoint, especially in regards to the 80s. <http://www.natfront.co.uk/>. However, at the time of writing (July 2009), Britain has just successfully and democratically elected its first neo-fascist Members of the European Parliament through the NF splinter group, the BNP (British National Party). <http://bnp.org.uk/>.

⁴² The movie is cluttered with all of the typical state propaganda messages, borrowing directly from Nazi iconography. The chief difference lies in the choice of police uniforms. The standard and instantly recognizable dome helmet of the British police is replaced in the film version with uniforms somewhat akin to the NYPD (New York Police Department) of the 70s and 80s, whilst the book version prefers a sleek S.S. style uniform with a French Kepi.

⁴³ "A martinet" to quote directly from David Lloyd.

else is real. Just me and God [...] I'd talk to my creator about nigger boys on the estates; and men, naked in bed, rubbing together, rubbing, pushing. When I grew weak, we'd talk. I talked to God, while colleagues laughed...but I was vindicated: *God* was real, embodied in a form that I could love. When I first saw her screens, her smooth unyielding lines...not as a woman with strange sweat and ugly body hair, but something cold; hard; sensual. We loved, my God and I. (III:7, Vindication)

Besides the biblical implication of Adam Susan's name and as part of the binomial dichotomy between he (the first and last alpha male) and Evey (the first vindicator and last Larkhill victim *per se*), there is also a depth of spiritual rectitude which is beyond any standard religious form. The Anglican Church represented by the paedophile bishop Lilliman is the standard church and state fellowship designed to reinforce strict ultra-conservative mores in what could have been a godless land. For all intents it serves as a placebo that reinforces the fact that belief in church (and state) is the correct way for moral living. Virtue lies in the acceptance and defense of the religious godhead as the shepherd of our spiritual lives whilst equally defending the state as the shepherd of our more direct physical needs. In a fascist dictatorship, church and state are almost coerced into functioning symbiotically. Within this framework is it interesting to consider that whilst Susan is obviously not a religious man, he has an unswerving love of the 'Fate' computer, in whom he posits the role of 'saviour machine'⁴⁴. It is the pure logogrammatical constant as provided by a machine that has no feelings that is his ironic undoing. Since all information provided to the state ('the head' as it is known in the book) is run through 'Fate', it takes but one virus in the machine to literally bring all systems to a standstill.

An interesting twist in the film and book narratives that conjunct to form these two very different images of Susan/Sutler presents itself in I:2 'The Voice'. Whilst in the film, our first view of Sutler is from the meeting room of the various heads of department. Our gaze is directed upwards at the omnipresent and menacing chancellor. In the book, the position is completely inverted. We see Susan from behind and above

⁴⁴ *Saviour Machine* is the title of a song from David Bowie's *The Man Who Sold the World* album (1970). It describes a supercomputer created by a society to do everything for it. As it develops consciousness, it realizes it no longer needs human beings to function. The idea for the song may have come from Joseph Sargent's film *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970). A similar turn on the insane godlike supercomputer genre appears in John Badham's 1983 film *WarGames*.

sitting in his chair at ‘the head’ looking down at the various departments on the view screens provided by ‘Fate’. Our immediate impression is that of calm order and of recognition: the state has a face, and its face is as human and as dispassionately rational as our own⁴⁵. In the following panels we see Susan’s face in the typical chiaroscuro of David Lloyd’s artwork. In this half-light, Susan’s eyes vanish into two black holes, as if it were ‘Fate’ which possesses his ‘true’ eyes, and, ostensibly, as if it is ‘Fate’ that does all the sensorial work of the leader. Susan’s imposed solitude, just as with many autocratic leaders, relies on a forced equidistance from the people he leads and from those who work for him directly.

In the sequence that follows, Susan accuses Derek Almond (head of the ‘Finger’) of incompetence: “someone did the unthinkable. Someone hurt us”. In a few panels, Susan has been transformed from his calm, pondered self to an almost animalistic fury. The eyes that were once black holes now seem to reflect pinpoints of hateful light revealing a deeper, almost lycanthropic primordial hatred. The use of the royal ‘we’ underlines the deep belief of England as both a political body and as a biological construct not dissociable from ‘state’. Susan believes that purity of thought and deed will prevail. So much so, that one of the most referred to party slogans is “Strength through Purity, Purity through Faith”.

The film Sutler, either due to time restrictions or to simply avoid having a three dimensional figure who is so obviously villainous given a chance to explain *why* he is so despicable, prefers the use of a slightly altered slogan: Strength through Unity, Unity through Faith. Whilst both essentially underline the religious category that pushes totalitarianism forwards, the replacement of ‘Purity’ for ‘Unity’ seems to be a

⁴⁵ Lamentably, the film does not borrow much depth of character definition from the book even in a broad sense. I:5 ‘Versions’ is divided into two distinct parts; one is narrated in an interior monologue by Adam Susan and the other by ‘V’. Whilst Susan is in his limousine passing the statue of justice atop the Old Bailey, looking up, ‘V’ is on the rooftops proclaiming her infidelity. Since Susan (for the most part) caused that change in the first place, it is only logical and just that ‘V’ should then pervert Susan’s abstract love interest; the ‘Fate’ computer. The scene reveals a key element in the motivations of both characters: passion. The mirror imaging of character is completely absent from the film but serves in the book to show clearly the will to right that exists in both men and, more specifically, in the dichotomy of the original intent; anarchy versus fascism. It also gives us a greater insight into the workings of the political ideals that are held up to each other.

biographical appropriation by the Wachowskis/McTeigue⁴⁶. Whilst the ‘Purity’ of the book version makes no mistakes as to its application, coming at a time when little if anything was known about AIDS and its association through fear with homosexuality (and hence the obsession with godlessness), the ‘Unity’ message seems to read closer to the post 9/11 paranoia mentality that has prevailed for so long in the United States. The Bush administration’s call to unity, as a covert propaganda umbrella under which the ‘Coalition of the Willing’ could be set in motion, was, initially at least, successful in uniting many of the people of the United States, with personal problems and social demands on a grand scale taking second stage to the outrage caused by attacking the United States on its home soil. Not since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had any one administration been so universally supported. Clearly, if a political regime is to perpetuate itself, it must make clear that it is the great protector of the people. In creating a visible, palpable enemy figure, the state can proceed, always under the guise that right is on ‘our’ side, with the curtailing of certain civil freedoms. Perpetuating the air of fear requires a propaganda campaign on a grand scale and, whilst many historians and scholars are wont to warn of history repeating, most regular citizens prefer to abdicate some of their rights in order to feel protected from an enemy or enemies which they see both as threatening to their persons as to their ways of life. The ramifications of the terrorist phenomenon at this point serve to explain, in great part, one of the essential divergences between the narrative slant of the book and the Bush allusions of the film.

In 1982, what may have been essentially one of the least popular governments that Britain had ever had, suddenly gained immediate approval from almost all quarters, especially certain sectors of the mass media, chiefly the tabloid press which, something akin to Newspeak Bulletins and Big Brother’s pornographic literature, suddenly rained sulphur on the Argentine, the visible face of the enemy. The concrete truths, if ever they be found out, as to the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan will shine a new and inquisitive light on the corporatist molds of political warfare. Suffice to say, for the time being, that Unity through Faith as building precepts in power appropriation seems to be a more likely candidate as a slogan for Bush-era politics.

⁴⁶ As well as being an obvious reference to the reality of the people living in the United States. ‘Unity’ rather than ‘Purity’ would seem to work on a stronger linguistic, nominal and cultural level.

6: Narrative Vistas.

*"War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength".
Big Brother in George Orwell's '1984'.*

In both book and film, the opening sequence is of vital import to the enactment of the play. The book opens with a panel featuring Jordan Tower, head of the British telecommunications system set against the deep black background of night as we hear the omnipresent voice of the 'Fate' computer who we later learn is really that of Lewis Prothero, ex-camp commander of Larkhill, and one of V's future victims. The radio broadcast seems to be inescapable; an unavoidable part of citizenry is that of the forced assimilation of repeated government propaganda. The reference to '275 and 285 in the medium wave' (the wavelength of the very popular Capital Radio in London) serves as a reminder that this England is not so different to the one known then (1981). Since government control of mass communications is absolute, we understand that editorializing is impossible. The film opens after a 17th century prologue to show us Prothero (another hate-spitting lunatic) on his nightly show telling us 'what he thinks'. His language register is closer to United States than to British English and as a caricature he proceeds to give voice to his tabloid interpretation of the day's news. Whilst the book Prothero is a typified English bumbler, brought up in the army and very probably at a public school, his voice propelling him to the unseen glory of being 'the voice of Fate', the film Prothero wastes no time in hatemongering at the most insipid level. Furthermore, the state of the nation, which is an important part of establishing the vivid fascist context of the book, Britain is supplanted by immediate scorn heaped upon the United States:

So I read that the former United States is so desperate for medical supplies, that they have allegedly sent several containers filled with wheat and tobacco [...] I think it's high time to let the colonies know what we really think of them: I think it's payback for a little tea party they threw for us a few hundred years ago. I say we go down to those docks tonight and dump that crap where everything from the Ulcered Sphincter of Asserica belongs! (Lamm and Bray 11)

In the book version, there is every care to maintain the stodginess of post-war BBC neutrality so as not to stir the emotions of the people unduly. In fact, any broadcaster caught asking people to uprising, even in the name of the state, would be ostracized at the very least. In the film we have an egomaniacal chat show host ranting with a misbegotten use of language that would never have been permitted on television in this social context. In fact the register stands closer to mirroring terrorist videos. Perhaps the most onanistic self-flagellation and the most revelatory condemnation within the Wachowski narrative come in the next lines:

Did you like that? The USA? [...] Here was a country that had everything, absolutely everything, and now [...] is what? The world's biggest leper colony. Why? Godlessness. It wasn't the plague they created. It was judgement. No one escapes their past. No one escapes judgement. You think he is not up there? You think he is not watching over this country? How else can you explain it? He tested us but we came through. We did what we had to do Islington, Enfield. I was there. Muslims. Homosexuals. Terrorists. Disease-ridden degenerates. They had to go! Strength through Unity, Unity through Faith! I am a God-fearing Englishman and I am God-damned proud of it! (Lamm and Bray 12-13)

The hyperbolic U.S. English expletives aside, the emphasis on purity that seems to have saved Britain from the worst serves to condemn many facets of U.S. intervention in the middle-east today. The reference to Muslims and terrorists, veiled in the book, is a basic tenet (and a logical one) in the film. Demonization of specific social groups is essential in creating a palpable sense of Unity among those who consider themselves as God's chosen, in this case, the English. By extension we can read George W. Bush's call to arms at the commencement of his war against terrorism.

An even greater condemnation of that state of play in the United States today is the reference to material growth. The 'country that had everything' is a deeper and more insidious punch at the vitals of the anatomy of the United States' socio-economic mindset. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, this blatant duality between the haves and the have-nots seems to have taken on biblical proportions which reemphasize the idea of godlessness. The idea that judgement is not from human hands but from divine

damnation speaks to both right and left wing and delivers from a firm soapbox a statement of no-confidence to both republicans and democrats.

Prothero's rhetoric also serves to highlight the question of terrorism which Dr Keller crystallizes through the binomial observation of the differences between governmental and individual or group terrorism. It would seem that the people of the United States have been conditioned by the media to 'fear all the wrong dangers'. Rather than worry about obesity, road deaths, gun control and drug consumption (both legal and otherwise), they prefer to turn their attention and paranoia to anthrax attacks, the possibility of domestic terrorist cells and even of world-killing asteroids falling to earth. In essence, it is media speculation that overflows the public imagination. And governments are not innocent to the power that these items of news can have. In offering themselves as a shield to the potential threat of the 'not-we', state terrorism acts within the limits of a strong continuum; that of public acceptance, and eventually, of public gullibility⁴⁷.

Prothero appears as a bully, but one to whom we can look up. As the angry voice of the party, he breathes and carries the messages that the people want to hear. And they want to hear it because, in a totalitarian continuum, hatred of the non-conformity is essential in the assertion of the powerbase. Whilst the book version has Prothero on a much more insidious and subtle level of narrative structure, the film Prothero exemplifies the populist right-wing spin that seems to be reaching ever-greater heights in both the United States and Europe. It is no surprise that it has taken a worldwide economic crisis for Britain to democratically elect its first neo-fascist member into the European Parliament.

Whilst Prothero speaks, two very different people are preparing themselves to go out. In the book version, we see Evey and V sitting before their respective mirrors.

⁴⁷ It would seem that Prothero's embittered rhetoric caricaturizes any number of extreme rightwing US orators and quasi-religious demagogues. Notably characters such as the Reverend George Grant who states in his book *The Changing of the Guard: Biblical Principles for Political Action* (1987) that: "Christians have an obligation, a mandate, a commission, a holy responsibility to reclaim the land for Jesus Christ – to have dominion in civil structures, just as in every other aspect of life and *godliness*. [My italics] But it is dominion we are after. Not just influence. It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time. It is dominion we are after. World conquest, that's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish".

Evey's mirror reflects the psycho-traumatic reality of her suffering in a totalitarian land, as an orphan of the storm so to speak; her mirror shows her as she perceives herself from a mental viewpoint; she feels ugly, useless, at her wit's end, and her anguish is later revealed by her option to become a prostitute at age 16. The Spartan décor of her room commences a revealing a threefold movement from public space, above ground, to a 'supposed' private space indoors and finally to V's *Shadow Gallery* underground. This cinematic series of establishing shots take us from the government to the people: the workers exiting a factory which suggests the topography of a labour camp provokes a cinematic reference that is reinforced by the single obtrusive eyes of the CCTV cameras which purportedly are there 'For [Y]our Protection'. The movement through these various personal spaces is designed to contrast the bleak over ground life with the richness of the cultural artifacts in V's subworld. It is understood by the panels that just like Evey, V is listening to the voice of Fate/Prothero in his lair. It is also through the use of a wide-angled view of V's dressing table that we have our first glimpse of popular and 'high' culture that has supposedly been eradicated by a state intent on dissecting human artistic endeavour so as to further its restrictions on thinking and learning. V's *Shadow Gallery* is more than a typified superhero refuge. It is cluttered with items from all of the arts and is meant to represent not only the importance the protagonist attributes to these items, but also to show that, as an aesthete, he is eclectic and unlimited by a single critical view of art and culture as a whole. V is, in this sense, a kind of artistic 'Everyman', representative of a humanity whose artistic expression has been taken away. The mask, wig and gloves on the table are as symbolic as Evey's own fumbling make-up. Two players preparing to meet their first act. In the film we are saved the general view of the Shadow Gallery for later on, but essentially both actors are going about their business in accordance with the idea of stage direction. There are however two differences. Firstly, Evey is not about to become a prostitute in the film version (the objective of which I have already mentioned) and secondly, in the cross-cutting to V's preparation, we have an interesting alteration. Our first view of V is not from an interlocutor's perspective but the camera is actually placed within the mask as Hugo Weaving places it on his face. Our first sight of V is therefore his own reflection in the mirror *through* the mask. The theatrical flair demonstrated in the donning of the Guy

Fawkes guise is placed in direct contrast by means of a cut travelling shot through the wall showing Evey facing him on the opposite side. As Prothero announces the United States fall due to godlessness, V nonchalantly brushes off the dust from his boot, a sign that propaganda does not cut any slack with someone who is culturally and intellectually aware, and, seen from a more psychotic perspective, someone who regards Prothero as one would regard an ant. The insect analogy is repeated with the Delia Surrige episode later⁴⁸.

In both versions V's meeting with Evey follows her interception by the secret police; 'Fingermen', whose plan is to physically abuse and then, possibly, arrest their prisoner. In the film, for risking being out after curfew, in the book because being ignorant as to the vice stake-out operation, she stumbles directly into a group of government thugs. In both cases, the idea of summary execution, abuse of civil rights and denial of due process in law are positively indicative of a police state gone horribly wrong⁴⁹. As V rescues Evey, he applies a time-worn superhero panel art tradition, that of philosophizing whilst indulging in swordplay. Here however the protagonist relies on Shakespeare to make his moral viewpoint understood. The fact that the intervening characters probably have no idea of what he is talking about serves to reinforce the insanity which belies V's actions and to complement the afore-mentioned cultural ignorance imposed by the government⁵⁰. It further serves to cater to our understanding of the totality of V as a symbol. "The multiplying villainies of nature do swarm upon him" (Macbeth, I.ii. 13-14) not only defines the scene taking place but places a bookmark in a long English cultural past – a ligature between the terrorist motif and the Catholic struggle of the early 17th century - "Disdaining fortune with his brandished steel, which smoked with bloody execution" (Macbeth, I, ii, 19-20). The words accompany the actions and their inter-textual references are not without value (q.v:

⁴⁸ Surrige's diary reports her activities whilst experimenting on the victims at Larkhill camp. At one point she states that the man in room 5 (V) looks at her 'as if [she] were an insect'. In some ways, this reverses the victim / oppressor relationship elevating V to another degree of human enlightenment.

⁴⁹ The banning of cultural artifacts considered seditious or dangerous to the regime is carried out in the film by the aptly named Ministry of Objectionable Materials (MOM). In itself this is also a reference to the ironically titled Ministries in Orwell's *1984*.

⁵⁰ Another popular dystopic vision of a post-apocalyptic future appears in the British comic book *2000AD*. A long running strip entitled 'Judge Dredd' features the policing of insanely huge mega-cities which is performed by 'Judges' who not only intervene viciously against every crime imaginable but are also empowered to be judge and jury on the spot.

Keller 125) but it would be amiss not to refer to the iambic pentameter which V frequently uses and which contains 5 syllabic feet, simply one of the many references to the number 5 in collusion with its Latin representation V⁵¹.

The resort to Shakespeare does not only set up a string of antecedents and literary associations, it also provides us with a counterpoint to the use of violence in the film. As Keller rightfully conjectures

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* includes a debate between two contrasting constructions of masculinity: one defined by the witches' imperative, "be boldly bold and resolute" (IV.i.79), which is the ideal of manhood to which Lady Macbeth would have her husband conform; the second [...] embodied in Duncan, King Edward of England and Macduff, includes traditionally feminine virtues, such as "mercy, lowliness/devotion, patience" (IV.iii.93-94). The idealized man within Shakespeare's tragedy must be more well rounded. [...] V's conformity to a less reductive notion of masculinity, in contrast to the Norsefire party's hyper-gender-consciousness, makes him more likely to succeed. Norsefire is limited in its responses always opting for the most violent and obtrusive solutions to social unrest. V, on the other hand has a vast repertoire of literary and artistic precedent from which to draw for his dissimulations; he uses these to the detriment of his more heavy-handed and less imaginative antagonists. (Keller 128-129).

An enlightening example of brain and brawn comes in the following introduction between Evey and V. In the film version, V's reply is an amalgam of the titles of the chapters in the original comic book (all of which begin with a V and are adequated to the narrative) and reads as a loquacious and satirical embodiment of his basic plan:

Voilà! In view, a humble vaudevillian veteran, cast vicariously as both victim and villain by the vicissitudes of Fate. This visage, no mere veneer of vanity, it is the vestige of the vox

⁵¹ The name and symbol 'V' are open to a multitude of cultural and historic references: Visually, the red V inside a circle suggests the iconic A of the Anarchist symbol inverted. It also suggests the wartime 'victory' gesture (resurrected for the Iraq war) which is reused in Radford's *1984*. V in Morse code is represented by (...-) three dots and a dash, the beginning of Beethoven's 5th symphony. This was used as the BBC's call sign during WWII and Beethoven is quoted as having stated that those 4 first notes are 'Fate knocking on the door'. The V/5 binomial also suggest the 5th of November, the name 'Valerie', Pope Pius V who excommunicated Elizabeth I thereby effectively releasing the Catholics of England from their duty to the crown. The number 5 when converted into binary code is 101; used both in the Wachowski's *Matrix* as a reference to the United States' academic nomenclature for 'introduction to...' as well as the infamous torture room in Orwell's *1984*. The prisoner's main character is number '6' whose alter ego is his own prison guard in the form of number '1': 6-1=5. The list goes on.

populi, now vacant, vanished, as the once vital voice of the verisimilitude now venerates what once they vilified. However, this valorous visitation of a by-gone vexation, stands vivified, and has vowed to vanquish these venal and virulent vermin vanguarding vice and vouchsafing the violently vicious and voracious violation of volition. The only verdict is vengeance, a vendetta, held as votive, not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and the virtuous. Verily, this vichyssoise of verbiage veers most verbose, so let me simply add that it is my very good honour to meet you and you may call me V. (Lamm & Bray 18-19)

The comic book version reads:

Me? I'm the king of the twentieth century. I'm the bogeyman. The villain. The black sheep of the family. (I.1 'The Villain')

Both versions reveal the creative and editorial slant that forms the character's attitude to its sense of self. Whilst Weaving's V seems more gallant, kind and willing to change over the course of events, eventually falling in love with Evey, the Moore/Lloyd version is more in keeping with the strict code of symbolic love for freedom through anarchy. The chief contradiction between the two narratives lies in this event. The approach to the motivation of the protagonist from a self-vilified abstract to a more traditional superhero figure, underscores the political interpretations of the two versions. Whilst it is arguable that the alliterative discourse both clarifies and confounds, the references to 'Fate' and 'vaudeville' as well as 'victim' and 'villain' clearly form a back-drop from which the texts of the book version seep through⁵². V's description of himself in the book asks more questions than it provides answers, yet it is as descriptive of his constant silent interior monologue that goes on throughout the book as it is of our interpretation of his role in the piece as saviour and/or terrorist. The king of the twentieth century reminds us of a dominion of mind (time) rather than of space; of an Albion of spirit represented by the anarchist ideal; one which would be almost impracticable today. It also conjures up the idea of the extreme political despotism in all its forms that arose in the 20s and 30s, the centralized power blocs of the cold war and

⁵² Once again it cannot be a 'coincidence' that 'Fate' is the name of the government's super-computer and is referred to constantly. In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler constantly refers to the word 'Fate' almost mystically as an apology for his master race thesis.

the rise of violent corporatism into which is born the black sheep who refuses to conform like all the protagonists of dystopian literature. In the film version of *From Hell* (Alan Moore's compendious comic book about Jack the Ripper) Ian Holm as Jack the Ripper says "One day men will look back and say I gave birth to the twentieth century." The Ripper trope allows us an introspective perception of the human fascination with the *eros/thanatos* duality. It also allows us to understand the English obsession with villains in art and literature. These are mentioned in part by Alan Moore in his article "Behind the Painted Smile". Quite often the imperfect, the outlaw, the demon is the one to be understood⁵³. Not only on a political scale such as Robin Hood and Dick Turpin but also on a cultural scale that goes into the deepest recesses of inhumanity. The 90s singular obsession with serial killers, the panache of the villain both in the vaudeville sense and as arch-rival to goodness, provide a cathartic stimulus. We are aware of our passion for the villain because we instinctively understand, in our knowledge of narrative continuum that evil will never prevail. For this reason characters, real or fictional such as Judge Dredd, Dr Phibes and Dick Turpin, provide a necessary stimulus. Although he only appeared in one of the canonical Sherlock Holmes stories, Professor Moriarty stands out with panache as an oft-cited archenemy, just as the Joker, for all of his psychoses, is a striking inimical figure, constantly associated to the Batman.

In creating a character that is, indeed, simultaneously a villain and a victim, Alan Moore is breaking down the convention of the Manichean good guy/bad guy duality. Not only is this essential to the telling of *VforV*, but it is clearly an attempt to equate superhero narratives with reality as we perceive it.

⁵³ In I:7 'Virtue Victorious', 'V' presents himself to Bishop Lilliman, the paedophile, with a quote from the Rolling Stones' *Sympathy for the Devil*: "Please allow me to introduce myself...I am a man of wealth.... and taste". The final verse is drawn into a panel in which the light reflecting from 'V's wig seems to outline two horns. Since the church is considered as equally abusive to personal freedom as the state, a reading of 'the Devil' as perceived in the dogmatized Christian belief structure would plausibly make him the first anarchist in the demonized sense. For this reason, and because of the popular and literary misconceptions that surround the arch nemesis of the Christian godhead, it seems likely that 'V' would more often than not side with the one who questions the order of creation. Whilst the Satan analogy is questionable, it does read in to the biblical meta-text as subscribed to by the *VforV* narrative. The hypocritical nature of Lilliman's sins are also cleverly symbolized by an overhead view of his bedroom; in the panel in question, just before he is introduced to Evey dressed as a preteen, we see that the seams and stitching on his bedspread form an inverted pentagram. This creates an even more complex array of narrative duality which places the church, centrally, as an ally of the adversary it declares to abhor.

7: We Interrupt this Broadcast...

"TV is the closest thing to our own mythology, a tradition of shared tales reflecting our values. Yea, just as chaos doth follow when gods lie with mortals, so doth woe betide the Bradys when Marcia gets a crush on Davy Jones".
A Tale Told by an Idiot Box, James Poniewosik⁵⁴

"Television! Teacher, mother, secret lover".
Homer Simpson, The Simpsons

The power of television as a mass-medium is indisputable. So much so, that it violently divides appreciators and detractors. It pervades our academic, professional and social lives. It molds us through suggestion and through its very omnipresence. It has become in fact, so ubiquitous in nature that we often feel disconcertion when it is taken away from us. Its influence is such that it is, to this date, the perfect communications medium. It can create, perpetuate, destroy, and *make believe*.

In the *VforV* narrative, television takes on an almost god-like role, through its constant presence, it caters, at least psychologically, to an elemental function in mankind's societal imprint; the need for protection and security. Because, technologically, television seems to give the idea that typified family structure is rescindable, it would seem to fall into the patrist molds of those needs which are not instantly maternal in nature. Briefly: the physical presence of a television set is, in itself uncomfortable; a cold hard black or dark grey piece of glass usually occupying a place of focus in a living room. Since it does not feed us in any biological sense, its influence would seem to function on the level of what Gurdjieff would term the 'False Emotion Centre'. That is, it does not ask us to reason, simply to accept. Editorial funneling of emotions is one of the true great arts of the 20th century and has been at the heart of maintaining propaganda control over masses. Even the idea of democracy is a one-sided causal construct created by the society that we are born into and share. For this reason, as a social reality, we cannot escape editorializing even *to* ourselves. The burden of morality imposed by society is equal to the self-criticism that we impose on our senses. Because of this, Gurdjieff favours, above all, a negative labeling of the neurological

⁵⁴ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,997029,00.html>

evolution that has taken place in the hominid brain since the appearance of ‘mankind’. That Homer Simpson would call television his ‘mother’ and ‘secret lover’ would actually be revealing his relationship to it on a lower imprint level, that of the ‘maternal, oral circuit’ (Freud), of ‘sensation’ (Jung), of Sagan’s ‘Reptile Brain’ or of Gurdjieff’s ‘Movement Centre’⁵⁵. In other words, through a paradoxically intelligent use of sarcasm, Homer Simpson is reflecting upon the idiotizing influence inherent in television; how we succumb to its influence on a grand ‘opinion-maker’ scale and how we are more than willing to accept it as a nipple from which we can gain a form of alimentary sensation. In any totalitarian system of government, the ‘prole’ Simpson would be the perfect citizen. Television, alcohol and machine-written pornography would more than cater for his immediate affective needs whilst the territorial defense imprint would be served by sports. Whilst it is not the purpose of this study to enter at depth into this area of neuro-biology, it is of some import to realize the strength derived from television to perpetuate stereotypes, social mores and opinions. It is also an essential part of the narrative of *VforV*.

The government, being on the other end of what is essentially a unilateral form of communication, is so far removed from the people it influences and observes that it perpetuates itself in the forms and moulds that it desires its people to become; it creates the perfect image of the perfect citizen and *sells* this notion in much the same way that companies sell their image through advertising. Perhaps the greatest condemnation of the distortion of truth both in narrative and as a criticism of current editorial tensions in major news producers comes when, in the control booth of the news department, Patricia, to Dascombe, says of the rewriting of the Old Bailey demolition: ‘You think people will buy this?’ to which the reply is: “Why not? This is the BTN. Our job is to report the news, not fabricate it. That’s the government’s job” (Lamm & Bray 26).

The ephemeral asides that occur throughout the film regarding editorial misdirection and the implicit covert actions of the government are spoken aloud. Even Dietrich, the evening show’s favourite host, is outspoken and treads on very unstable ground. It is not enough that he is a well-known celebrity, but that he has a cache of

⁵⁵ These juxtapositions of neuro-biological phenomena are in accordance with Robert Anton Wilson’s analysis of said concepts in his book *Prometheus Rising* (1983).

illicit cultural artifacts hidden away in his house and is a homosexual only adds to the incongruity of the reality continuum within the film. In a truly totalitarian society, no-one, especially anyone working within a broadcasting system, would feel free to air their opinions on government actions. We have history to validate this fact. That the director and/or screenplay writers should have wanted to air this distortion of the original narrative is indicative of an editorial slant that is equally biased and questionable.

In both the film and the book, V invades the broadcasting system that acts as the 'giver' of sensation to the people of England. It is the friendly face of the government and serves both to entertain and to subliminally induce ideological catatonia in its citizenry. For this reason, fallen into the wrong hands, it can also become the most powerful of weapons.

In the film version, Evey works at the BTN (British Television Network), and it is to her that V returns during his access to Jordan Tower, its headquarters. This would seem to counter the previous scene in which, having introduced himself to Evey, he chances on the similarity between their names and states categorically "It means that I like God, do not play with dice, and do not believe in coincidence" (Lamm & Bray 19). This Einstein paraphrase explains that V has a plan; one which is orchestrated not only in a very real sense, but also artistically. His demolition of the old Bailey, for example, is preceded by his conducting an invisible orchestra (the public address system) to the strains of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. It also means that chance is not part of the plan. In the same way that inspector Finch is eventually led to V and puts an end to his life so that the abstract can be reborn into Evey, then so does V give us the indication that there is no fortuitous encounter that he has with Evey. If we are to take into consideration that the V in the book has unlimited access to the 'Fate' computer and thereby to all government records and surveillance systems, then we can justly affirm that he may have spent months or years finding the exact accomplice for his future actions. In the film, this is not the case, despite evidence to the contrary. This would also seem to validate considerations on Koestler's and Moore's feelings on conjunctions and coincidence.

V's entrance to the BTN is as dramatic as it is symbolic and is maintained in both versions with one critical exception. In the book V has had more time in which to

spread his 'terror' and permit his name to enter everyday conversation. There has been time for people to become accustomed to the face of their enemy and for V to both enact essential parts of his vendetta (the assassinations of Prothero, Lilliman and Surridge, as well as destroy the Old Bailey) and to allow his hunters a chance to find a plausible reason behind the vendetta. The time factor also permits for a more important social phenomenon: the growth of public paranoia and uncertainty. It is during these 3 months (in the book) that V has had time in which to make the government sufficiently aware and 'afraid'; it is also due to the period of time chosen in which to conduct his actions (2 years in the book, 1 in the film) that we are witnesses to the gradual transformation of that sense of fear, perpetuated by the government, into one of rebellion instigated by V. His eventual appearance on television, occurs already well into volume 2 whilst in the film, it happens directly after the demolition of the Old Bailey. This would hint at a more modern preoccupation with terrorist strategy: that of claiming and immediately vindicating the attack for propaganda purposes. The film V seems to be much more preoccupied with an unsated and visceral revenge than with the fine details of planning that we know to have started a full 10 years before the first panel of art.

In the book, V arrives at NTV (Norsefire Television), where guards are observing the outgoing signals from both NTV1 and NTV2 (another obvious reference to the BBC channels available at the time). The first channel is showing an episode of a series called 'Storm Saxon', a science-fiction thriller set in a dystopian future England run by savage blacks. Saxon's side-kick 'Heidi' is about to be ravaged by 'black cannibal filth' and Saxon, a square jawed blonde hero, fights back (II:3 'Video'). 'Storm Saxon', whilst being abjectly reactionary racist propaganda that caters to the lowest possible viewing expectation, serves its purpose inasmuch as it programs its viewers into observing the unobservable, the representation of people of different colours. Given that the concentration camps destroyed all evidence of there once having been other races in England, this is the perfect form in which to revise history and establish psychological precedents for newer generations. The fact that the programme is going out at what is considered peak time would seem to support this theory. Perhaps more insidious however, is the programme that follows: a typified pun-ridden sex sitcom called 'You Have to Laugh'. This is a reversion to the BBC and ITV creations of the late 60s and

early 70s. Hugely successful and long-running series revolving around a comedy of errors where words are perverted semantically and, whilst there is never any real nudity, entire narratives seem to centre on one basic premiss: the sexual (and often sexist) overtones of the writing. Concurrently, on NTV2, 'Interface' is a serious documentary about the trouble in Scotland with the SNA (Scottish Nationalist Army), an analogy with Northern Ireland's IRA, then as now a tremendous problem area in British politics. Not only does this allow us a wider view of Britain - it would seem that power *is* finite after all - but also demonstrates the insidious form in which television processes information for us. The cross-cutting technique used in the panel art allows us to be privy to the schizoid forms in which sexuality, violence and social decay are juxtaposed to create a sense of alienation and emotional detachment. The cutaway to V's entrance to NTV is done with the audio feed from both channels coming through. The violence in apposition to the incongruous sexual remarks claim a parallel between the fictional violence of the V narrative, the supposed 'real' violence of the documentary and the socially-established 'sexual' violence (against women) of the sitcom. The same conceptualization is used at the end of Patrick McGoochan's *The Prisoner* in which a climactic gun battle is powerfully overdubbed by the Beatle's *All You Need Is Love*.

Despite all of these possibilities of interpretation there is no doubt as to the quality of the following scene. Full of dramatic symbolism, V opens his cape to reveal that he is holding a detonator with a belt of explosives strapped to his chest. The smiling, emotionless mask of the most typified of 'terrorist' symbol-images (that of the suicide bomber) is used in startling contrast with the dispassionate incongruity of the material being shown on the television screens. This is a symbol which is dramatic because of its visual associations with news reports, but also because of the immediate, if subconscious, association with the 'bearded bomb-wielding anarchist' stereotype that the 20th century tried so hard to perpetuate. The greatest fear of the rational primate is embedded in the subconscious through a systemic appropriation of the 'not-we'. Our own systems of material values make us face the suicide-bomber with an abject fear that leaves us, for the most part *sans* reaction. This was as true in 1981 as it is today, perhaps even more so. The primal instinct for survival forces us into contemplating the bomber as being so alien that he or she is subjectively dehumanized. These people are not human

in any sense that we can explain, simply because they live in a reality tunnel so completely different to ours that we can only look at them with loathing or fear⁵⁶.

In the following sequence V addresses the people of England. In both versions there is a clear attempt to see V through the eyes of the audience. In the book version, we have cutaways to two different family homes, but also a direct feed to the Chancellor's view screens. In the film version, the emphasis is shifted from the political power head to a more public sphere. In rapid succession we see the large outdoor electronic display in Piccadilly Circus (another fixed cultural landmark reference to London), an 'average' family home, the interior of a pub, the T.V. lounge of a retirement home and what is, ostensibly, the home of a middle-class family. In the space of a few seconds, we have been able to take in what we can only conjecture in our relationship with the nature of television, that is, its effect on others living in our (or another) continuum. The choice was not casual; a glimpse that traverses class, age, sex and social spheres, of what could plausibly be considered a demographic representation of the English. The Norsefire paraphernalia which adorns the wall above the television set in the retirement home is especially condemning inasmuch as it serves a reminder to those whose memory of other times may still be fresher than the most. The portrait of the chancellor nestled among the red and black flags of the party not only to reassure but *remind* the elderly that this is the saviour and that anything that came before him is subject to historical revision. It is as important to see who is speaking as it is to see whom is being spoken to.

We are equally reminded of the ever-pervasive presence of television in our public and private lives. The fact that so many conversations make reference to something that we may have seen on television is a constant in many social spheres. In this sense, television does in fact create a new folkloric continuity. Our heroes are no longer those of literature and oral tradition but those set down by screenplay writers and comic book artists. Whilst they drink equally from the well of historic and cultural reference, their interplay on the television screen is no longer necessarily a *personal* or *intimate* one. Television has the art of sharing as would an audience and, to an extent, is

⁵⁶ A good example in which the act of suicide bombing is 'humanized' to some extent is focused on in Julia Loctev's hauntingly disturbing film *Day Night Day Night* (2006).

subject to the psychology of the masses. Constant image or word repetition, exemplification and clarification through instantly recognizable signals both bolster the economy and perpetuate state authority. It is for this reason that the moment V interrupts the programming schedule he is diverting, for a few necessary moments, the continuum into which the audience has been programmed; he is interrupting the ritual of 'everyday routine' and in so doing providing the audience with a shock value to which it is unaccustomed.

Whilst the means to transmission are similar, the tone and message of the book and film version differ in accordance with the ideological slant of present historical analysis.

In the movie version V apologizes for the interruption as would any continuity announcer and goes on to profess that he, like any other 'bloke' enjoys the 'security of the familiar' and the 'tranquility of repetition'. This is a clear underlining of the necessity that the people feel for the protective quality of the routine, what Anton Wilson would term 'neophobia': fear of anything new. Restricted practice in both private and public spaces maintains public order and perpetuates the feeling of government panopticism as has already been referred. However, whilst the film V underscores his proximity to the public by using the vernacular through the word 'bloke', the book version prefers to sublimate the introductions through a fluently superlative and haughty discourse: that of a godlike corporate president or factory owner to his employee. The understanding of the reasons behind this very deliberate choice of register become clear as V continues. In the book version the rhetorical question 'Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin' is a nostalgic tip of the hat to a bygone era. The well-known phrase from the beginning of the 50s radio series 'Listen with Mother' which transferred to television and ran until 1982 is a cultural as well as a psychological reference. Just as the BBC set standards of decency and official use of linguistic forms for many decades, so too does V intend to use the 'system' and its apparatus, both cultural and historical to make clear his view. Since the death of Lewis Prothero, the voice of 'Fate' has already taken place in the book; it is safe to assume that people's routines have equally been altered to the possibility of a new reality. The tone therefore is as condescending as it is instantly recognizable. Other references to children's stories

and British folklore have also been removed from the film version for obvious cultural reasons.⁵⁷

Another major difference lies in the organization of the frame. Whilst V speaks, a plethora of related yet patently sarcastic images are shown in the background to sublimate his viewpoint. He also stands, paces, sits on the ‘news desk’ and uses body gesture. His posture whilst defiant is never aggressive or violent. His speech is disturbingly *dispassionate* and the use of a constant unified analogy to demonstrate his intentions can be interpreted as problematic for a modern audience, specifically one in the United States who has become accustomed to the impassioned ravings of extremist Islamic spokesmen. To a nation that is consistently pounded by images of flag-burning in the middle-east, of tribesman chanting and dancing to the sound of AK-47s being shot into the air, it would not be politically or ideologically convenient to have a ‘terrorist’ speak with calm eloquence. Such a deviation from stereotype would be too frightening to contemplate. To this end, it is understandable that the Wachowskis/McTeigue would have been reticent to air a paternalistic, self-absorbed character speaking ‘down’ at his audience. Furthermore, in the speech of the reactionary demagogue in the corporatist present, it would seem to be more expedient to have a *passionate* freedom fighter, one whom we can feel is *correct* in his anti-governmental actions speaking in our own language and using a rhetoric that is both aligned with the sense of temporal continuity of our political present, and who can seem to air ‘our own voices’ through his particular eloquence. Whilst Hugo Weaving’s V does not lose his eloquence when it comes to a call to rally, he has been deliberately toned down in terms of linguistic verbosity when compared with the book. This leaves a purposeful space in the interpretation of the written word; whereas V speaks as would a god to his creation, the movie has a motivated rebel using careful repetition of terms and key words to strike home particular images with greater intensity.

The chapter title ‘A Vocational Viewpoint’ would seem to suggest a political time frame preoccupied with the shadow of mass unemployment, one of the key

⁵⁷ Most notably is the repeated reference to Enid Blyton’s *The Magic Faraway Tree* (1943) in the original.

preoccupations during the Thatcher years.⁵⁸ A further interpretation of the chapter title would also seem appropriate to the definition of ideological stance in the two forms: whilst in the book V carries along a lengthy diatribe in which he lists mankind's accomplishments and misdemeanours throughout human history, standoffishly enumerating the collective feats and fallacies of various societal structures, in the film he prefers a direct hands-on approach devoid of vague or interpretative metaphor. With a few cuts we can read the editorial constraints of the film narrative:

BOOK	FILM
Good evening, London. I thought it time we had a little talk. Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll Begin.	Good evening, London. Allow me first to apologize for this little interruption.
I suppose you're wondering why I've called you here this evening. Well, you see, I'm not entirely satisfied with your performance lately... I'm afraid your work's been slipping, and well, I'm afraid we've been thinking about letting you go.	I do, like many of you appreciate the comforts of everyday routine. The security of the familiar. The tranquility of repetition. I enjoy them as much as any bloke.
Oh I know, I know. You've been with the company A long time now. Almost... let me see. Almost ten thousand years! My word, doesn't time fly? It seems like only yesterday... I remember the day you commenced your employment, swinging down from the trees, fresh-faced and nervous, a bone clasped in your bristling fist... "Where do I start, sir?" you asked, plaintively. I recall my exact words: "There's a pile of dinosaur eggs over there, youngster". I said paternally the while. "Get sucking".	There are, of course, those who do not want us to speak [...] Why? Because while the truncheon may be used in lieu of conversation, words will always retain their power. Words offer the means to meaning and for those who will listen, the enunciation of truth.
Well done, thou good and faithful servant. [...] To be frank, we've had our problems, too. Do you know what I think a lot of it stems from? I'll tell you.	The truth is there is something terribly wrong with this country, isn't there?

⁵⁸ An example that may seem strange today was the weekly Unemployment Forecast. Shown after ITV's News at Ten on Friday nights. the presenter would stand in front of a map of Britain somewhat akin to a weather map and point out job losses and gains in hundreds and thousands for the coming week.

<p>It's your basic unwillingness to <i>get on</i> within the company. You don't seem to want to face up to any real responsibility, or to be your own boss.</p>	<p>Cruelty and injustice, intolerance and oppression.</p>
<p>The constant bickering on the factory floor has not escaped my attention, nor the recent bouts of rowdiness in the staff canteen.</p>	<p>And where once you had the freedom to object, to think and speak as you saw fit...</p>
<p>I understand that you are unable to get on with your spouse. Violence has been mentioned. I am reliably informed that you always hurt the one you love... The one you shouldn't hurt at all.</p>	<p>You now have sensors and systems of surveillance, coercing your conformity and soliciting your submission.</p>
<p>And what about the children? [...] What are they to make of your bullying, your despair, your cowardice and all your fondly nurtured bigotries?</p>	<p>How did this happen? Who is to blame? Certainly there are those who are more responsible than others, and they will be held accountable, but again, truth be told...</p>
<p>And it's no good blaming the drop in work standards upon bad management, either. Though to be sure, the management is <i>very</i> bad. In fact, let us not mince words... The management is <i>terrible!</i> We've had a string of embezzlers, frauds, liars and lunatics making a string of catastrophic decisions. This is plain fact. But who elected them?</p>	<p>If you are looking for the guilty, you need only look in the mirror.</p>
<p>It was you. You who appointed these people! You who gave them the power to make your decisions for you!</p>	<p>I know why you did it.</p>
<p>While I admit that anyone can make a mistake once, to go on making the same lethal errors century after century seems to me nothing short of deliberate.</p>	<p>I know you were afraid. Who wouldn't be?</p>
<p>You have encouraged these malicious incompetents, who have made your working life a shambles. You have accepted without question their senseless orders.</p>	<p>War. Terror. Disease. Food and water shortages. there were a myriad of problems which conspired to rob you of your common sense.</p>
<p>You have allowed them to fill your workspace with dangerous and unproven machines. You could have stopped them.</p>	<p>Fear got the best of you and in your panic you turned to now High Chancellor Adam Sutler, with his gleaming boots of polished leather and his garrison of goons. He promised you order. He promised you peace.</p>
<p>All you had to say was 'NO'. You have no spine, you have no pride. You are no longer an asset to the company.</p>	<p>And all he demanded in return was your silent, obedient, consent.</p>

I will, however, be generous. You will be granted two years to show some improvement in your work. If at the end of that time you are still unwilling to make a go of it...	So, if you see nothing, if the crimes of this government remain unknown to you, then I suggest you allow this fifth of November to pass unmarked.
..you're fired.	But if you see what I see...
That will be all: you may return to your labours.	If you feel as I feel...
Normal service will be resumed as soon as possible.	And if you would seek as I seek freedom from this tyranny and an end to this oppression. Then I ask you too stand beside me, one year from tonight outside the gates of Parliament. And together, we shall give them a fifth of November that shall never, ever be forgot.

The demonizing simplicity of the film script, which makes a clear reference to the government in power through its head of state, is entirely missing from the original, as is the trans-historic application of a mass guilt complex. It is of note that the film V clearly undersigns that he understands that fear and the need to be lead is the fulcrum of modern democracy. It is also understood that *not all governments are bad*, just misleading or, themselves, misguided. In the book version the focus is clearly on the audience, on the people and on the singular incapacity of mankind to take a stance when it comes to ‘too much responsibility’. The ‘thou’ language register employed by the book V reinforces the creative power complex of the character as an anarchist abstract, so too does it enable the functioning of V not as a human in a mask, but as something greater or, in Nietzschean terms, *beyond human*.

Once we read this into the two narratives, our understanding of their social backgrounds becomes evident. Whilst the book V condescends almost brutally, indicting humanity with all the suffering it has brought upon itself through selfishness and bad leadership, the film V allows for human fallacy, and more so, accepts it on a closed timeline. Given Horace Greely’s observation that ‘common sense is a very uncommon thing’, it is difficult to accept a V who admits that mankind has had at some past time ‘a common sense’. This rereading into a Bush era critique caters to a United States audience duly accustomed to the rhetorical banter in eternal equilibrium that transcends the liberal-conservative power structure of U.S. politics. If one can glibly assume that

the spectrum of powerful ideological representation in the USA is so centripetal and functional in a social continuum that it shows steady signs of never changing then, it is, at once, a positive outlook on political stability as well as the most self-deprecating neophobic constructs known to democracy. *VforV* argues that diversity is productive. In social systems where there is little political diversion, there can be little productive freedom. In this way, anarchy exemplifies the forms in which humankind can rise up, accept its responsibilities even if only on a small scale and face its leaders as equals thereby stripping them of that title. Modern democracy, seen on a media scale, cannot tolerate this principle. Essentially because it is impracticable, but also because it would mean the end of communication forms as we understand them. V comprehends this and frees people first of their voice of 'Fate' and then of their routine TV viewing. A society devoid of popular cultural artifacts is somewhat akin to taking a mobile phone away from a teenager. In this respect we can amplify the ideal of anarchy as creator and destroyer. What it gives it can also take away, or, as Frank Herbert would put it 'he who can destroy a thing, controls a thing'⁵⁹.

Control! Mr Almond! Control! The world around us is a changing directionless, amoral morass and it is up to man alone to set things right. Without control, man is nothing more than any other stinking, sweating, brute animal. Control...⁶⁰

Since absolute hegemonic control is the heart of all authoritarian societies, any attack on its apparatus cannot be tolerated. The film version of *VforV* decides to dispose of Gordon Dietrich's services after he broadcasts the unthinkable: a Benny Hill style pastiche which ridicules Chancellor Sutler. The entire scene is carried out on Deitrich's kitsch nighttime chat show with a fake Sutler assuring the people of England that the terrorist has been 'neutralised'; what then follows is a typical undercranked chase with according musical accompaniment. As Sutler finally grabs 'V', he removes his mask to find another Sutler beneath. Whilst the allusion to the original is not subtle, it does serve as a reminder of an eternal quality: the cliché of the 'enemy within' brought forward to

⁵⁹ From *Dune* (1965).

⁶⁰ From the Leader's speech to Almond about the role of the 'Fate' computer in the original Andy and Larry Wachowski screenplay. <http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/V-for-Vendetta.html>

demonstrate that whilst the Leader is revered due to fear and submission, he or she shall always inevitably have to face the consequences of their actions on a grander scale. Equally, and inversely, it allows us to understand that notoriety and fame do not always protect us from those we seek to undermine.

As a footnote to this notion, one may ostensibly borrow from stand-up comedian Eddie Izzard, who, in an observation of the history of despotism states, the general consensus seems to be: *as long as you do it to your own people, that's all right.*⁶¹ He goes on to give the examples of Stalin and, more recently, of Pol Pot who died under house arrest after ordering the murder of 21% of the population of Cambodia. The clear analogy being that Hitler should have remained in Germany. Since Sutler has no extra-territorial disputes in mind, it would reaffirm the desperation of a people so isolated from the rest of the world that they have no resort other than to turn to their elected leader for spiritual guidance and material succor. It is of consequence that the opening scene of the film should have Prothero speaking about the 'civil war in America' and, in the book, we are well aware of a limited nuclear war occurring which would have eradicated most of Africa. In either case, it seems that an abhorrently extreme 'worldwide' situation would have stimulated the need for an authoritarian system of government in England. Such events, perpetuated by the media in vast crescendos, seem to revolve around basic common human fears: terrorism (domestic and external), religious extremism, disease (new and unknown pathogens) and an unstable economic factor that leads to mass unemployment and a sharp rise in crime.

It should be noted that these fears, real or imagined, have been fed into people's minds by constant verbal repetition and image reiteration. They are, were and will continue to be, the arms of the despot under which we, as a society, face our daily lives.

⁶¹ From Eddie Izzard's stand-up comedy recording *Dress to Kill* (1999)

8: V for Valerie.

"This is why they are afraid and the reason that I am here; to remind you that it is individuals who always hold the power. The real power. Individuals like me. And individuals like you".
V in 'V for Vendetta' (Original film script)

During the insane race into Berlin to defeat the Third Reich, the allies discovered the truth about the Nazi's 'Final Solution' and decided to reveal this to a world which, despite knowledge of the many terrors of war, was in no manner ready to receive the full impact of the mediaeval atrocities which a technologically and culturally advanced nation could inflict on other human beings. Rather than hold back; the allies were determined to seal the end of the war with a stamp that would demonize the German nation for generations to come. It is a stamp that is still felt today despite our supposed European sense of unity and sophistication. The terror of war became a full sanguine horror when newsreels with titles such as *Nazi Murder Mills* (26 April 1945) were shown not only to audiences in the allied countries but *especially* to Germans who, for the most part had no idea of what was happening in these so-called death camps. The phenomenon of induced denial bolstered the feeling of 'unity', 'purity' and 'strength' both morally and physically. For a truth so awful to be hidden for so long from so many, one had to take the red pill of suspension of belief. It would not be long before newsreel compilations such as the U.S. Army's *Nazi Concentration Camps* (1945) set the world alight with the blaze of indignation. It would also cause a deeply entrenched national guilt complex so great that many today cannot consider the Holocaust as having occurred, on the simple grounds that a truth so horrible and alien to mankind is easier to dismiss. This is an ironic underlining on the fact that the bigger the lie, the more people will believe it.

The British, it is historically established, had to fight the Nazi powers singlehandedly for some considerable time. The Empire stretched to its limits, strove to combat the adversary since the capitulation of France in 1940 until the entry of the United States after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor towards the end of 1941. As a fact, this makes clear that the people of Britain have had to deal with Germany in a very different light. The British sensitivity towards Germany as a whole is still a delicate

subject in some quarters and is not the object of this dissertation although it is clearly, as Alan Moore himself stated it, a creative inspiration for the writing of *VforV*.

What *is* important is the role of the individual standing before an inflexible and monolithic state apparatus designed to force submission and allegiance. This notion is at the heart of both narratives and drinks heavily from dystopian fiction in any format.

In Book II, Evey is taken prisoner after the death of her lover Gordon Harper; in the film, she is hiding out with Gordon Dietrich who, after his televised faux-pas, has been selected for black bagging and subsequent execution. As the 'Eveys' attempt to escape from the two 'Gordons' respective dwellings, they are intercepted by what they, and the audience, believe to be a fingerman. Subsequently she is transferred to a holding cell, her bag removed from her head; she is formally accused by nameless, faceless government agents and eventually her head is shaved and she is daily interrogated to reveal the whereabouts of codename V. Her cell, a tiny dirty claustrophobic dungeon becomes her home.

This entire sequence is central to Evey's conversion from a state of innocence to one of 'enlightenment'. Human suffering on an individual scale can completely rewrite the social programming to which one is daily subjected. Torturers, policemen and governments have always been aware of this factor. By stripping away the mechanical nature of the bio-survival circuit, one can then create a new imprint. To do this, the victim must be reduced to an infantile state of helplessness. In much the same way as an army drill officer instructs (reprogrammes) a soldier, so too can the torturer force you to believe, firstly that you *belong* to whatever system has placed you in this situation, and secondly, to show you that only by relinquishing the programming that has lead you here in the first place and accepting the new imprint can you possibly be given your freedom. This freedom is of course simply another prison created to house the identity generated by those in authority. It is of note that only after Winston Smith says that he *believes* he sees 5 fingers instead of 4, that he is, in the eyes of the state, free. Freedom is therefore a construct inasmuch as it is a series of apparent choices strung together by the perception of Aristotelian space / time. Beyond this three dimensional concept of reality, the barriers of our mindsets give way to new models of perception and, for the most part, we are left confused and lost. It should be noted that many individuals that have forced

or found themselves outside of the ‘freedom’ that we understand are either considered saints or lunatics.

All brainwashers empirically know [...] that the oral bio-survival circuit seeks bonding with a mothering figure. To increase panic and imprint vulnerability, then, the subject after being seized by the brainwashers [...] is isolated from all those to whom bonding had previously been established [...] The first human being who appears to this subject after this isolation can easily become bonded as the mother-substitute [...] This explains why people held prisoner by terrorists often develop ‘paradoxical’ sympathy for those who are threatening to kill them. It also explains why the draftee begins to look on his kidnappers as protectors as well as captors, and why the brainwash victim begins to please, gratify and eventually ‘respect’ the brainwasher. In all cases, since the bio-survival circuit is keyed to nourishment, those who bring food become possible subjects for bonding. (Anton Wilson, 1983, 163-164)

In both versions of *VforV*, Evey’s capture, torture and treatment are treated with the same minimal, grey detachment that permits us to empathize and feel horrified by the transformation from individual to a quasi-animalistic dependent. The film permits us an updated view of the human hell of political imprisonment through a series of shots taken inside Larkhill. The focus in the film with its black bagging sequences, people put into glass cases for constant observation, being taken away for interrogation, are closer to video footage of Guantanamo than to the book version, which deliberately compares Larkhill to the Nazi concentration camps.

Both maintain the interrogation sequence almost intact. First with its isolation of the victim; the prolonged period of solitude enforced by the aggressor amplifies the need to bond, followed by the resignation to worthlessness of the individual both in its cell (confinement area) and in the world as a whole:

Whether the subject has voluntarily, as in these [Charles Manson type] communes, or has been kidnapped or arrested (as in police states), the next stage is to break down the second-circuit emotional-territorial imprints. That means that the subject continues to be fed (maintaining first-circuit oral dependence) while the second-circuit ego is attacked in every manner possible [...] The basic message is dozens and dozens of variations on “you are all *wrong*. We are all *right*. It is extremely unlikely that somebody as *wrong* as you will

become *right*, ever, but we will try to teach you”. The anal vocabulary or territorial status is, of course, employed extensively. The ideal subject may almost forget his or her name and become conditioned to answering to “You asshole. Come here”. (idem)

All of the essential processes required to demean and reduce the human being to a non-entity are employed almost in textbook fashion first by the regime to create V and later by V to recreate Evey into his possible replacement. The shaving of Evey’s head (done necessarily in a single take) is typical of the defacement of self and vision of self, and relies heavily on previously constructed visual references. From the newsreels and televised footage of draftees sent to Vietnam, becoming as it were units rather than young men; through to more filmic references such as the remarkable close-up of Maria Falconetti in Dreyer’s *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (1928). The removal of hair from a woman has even deeper connotations which conjoin aesthetics to personality. French women known to have collaborated with Nazi were publically shaved as a form of severe open humiliation. Equally, the need for the individual to stop thinking as such is imperative for the new ideological imprint to take hold and to erase all possible traces of individuality; the forceful removal of hair and clothes is only the first step towards the destruction of the ego. Even when the victim is innocent, enough force exerted by the state will make the individual eventually agree that he is in some way culpable of any wrongs attributed him such as the case of Kafka’s Joseph K.

It is clear that the victim is even considered guilty by association: Evey has not done anything that could possibly warrant her treatment and yet V seems to have beaten the regime in his abduction of Evey. The progressive and systematized infringement on civil rights in post 9/11 United States has already acted in the area of ‘terrorism by association’ and detention without formal accusation, cornerstones of the ideal of United States’ democracy⁶². Whilst the film bases itself strongly around demonizing ‘terrorists’, ‘degenerates’ and ‘Muslims’, the book reenacts the same culling of unwanted demographic groups as was undertaken by the Nazis. Whilst these are obviously

⁶² For a clear, acid and humorous revelation of the infringements applied on the peoples of the United States post-9/11, I strongly recommend Michael Moore’s books: *Stupid White Men* (2001) and *Dude, Where’s My Country?*(2003).

directorial decisions taken to drive home the writers/producers' message, they do not seem to consciously undermine the overall effect of the narrative.

Both versions are powerfully represented by specific trigger symbols which underline the shift in reality structures that take place in the subject. Just as we are party to the terror implicit in the Big Brother regime (from which there is no respite), so too are we a captive audience stunned by a stark revelation: that Evey has not been captured by the government but by V himself. Her subsequent torture and alteration of mental state not only allow us to understand the mechanisms of state terror but also to condemn the so-called hero of the piece. The absolutes join making Evey's mind and body the ideological battleground that 'deprogrammes' the naïve 16 year-old and 'reprogrammes' the entity that will eventually become the new V. Since this is the plan from the start, it cannot come as a surprise that to 'know thyself is to know thy worst enemy'. For V, the destruction of the psycho-social construct called Evey is a necessary move to sustain his plan. Since he is already convinced that his death has a specified time and place, he needs to reconstruct in part those events which transformed him from the subservient member of society under the power of the Norsefire regime, into the anarchic abstract that he has imposed upon himself. To this end, V will stop at nothing to assure continuity of his plan, moreover, any apprenticeship ideals as heretofore created by typified super-hero clichés are torn asunder. There is no passion except that of 'creating' a new monster, a human being who has nothing left to live for and who, through psychological torture, accepts death rather than reveal anything to her interrogators.

It is clear that this could easily backfire had it not been for a specific catalyst which both changed V (releasing him from the virtual 'freedom') and, which, also changes Evey. This catalyst, in the form of a letter from 'Valerie', is in itself laden with irony, for its very essence, that of a human being freed of its bonds, into absolute rather than relative liberty, is ensconced with the passion and kindness of a spiritual epiphany. To this end, V's vendetta is explained. Since Evey is still a construct of the insidious freedom from which *he* has already been deprogrammed, he is, in a sense, fighting against the state apparatus at the individual level. Whilst in the film version, V is clearly struggling with an internal battle due to what he has done to Evey, in the book, the calm which permeates the outcome as Evey stumbles out of her prison to realize that she is in

the Shadow Gallery and in V's presence makes it clear once again that we are not dealing with a human being that is capable of loving in any standard, romanticized sense:

EVEY: You. You did this. To me. You did this to me. You did this to me. Yuh – you...yuh – you hit me and cut off my hair... It was all just you all this time... You... tortured... me... Oh, you tortured me. Oh. God, why?

V: Because I love you. Because I want to set you free.

EVEY: Don't you realize what you did to me? You nearly drove me mad, V!

V: If that's what it takes Evey.

EVEY: I hate you. I hate you because you just talk junk and you think you're so good you don't have to make any sense! Nothing you say means *anything*! You say you love me and you *don't* because you just frighten me and torture me for a joke... you say you want to set me free and you put me in a prison...

V: You were already in a prison. You've been in a prison all your life.

EVEY: Shut up! I don't want to hear it! I wasn't in a prison. I was happy. I was happy here until you threw me out.

V: Happiness is a prison, Evey. Happiness is the most insidious prison of all. (II.13 Values)

A major difference between Evey's conversion in book and film is the first person narrative which describes the feeling of isolation, fear and injustice as felt by the protagonist. Evey's interior monologue is substituted by a voiceover narration of Valerie's letter by the writer. The entire scene is possibly the most faithful part of *VforV* as adapted for the screen, not only because of its essential narrative elements but because of the sentiments which it sets out to inspire. If up to this point, the classic revenge story has been amply dilated and adhered to, this sudden reversal goes contrary to audience expectation and permits us an alternative and highly post-modern understanding of motivation: not strictly of typified revenge, but of the strongly positioned dichotomy of fascism and anarchy. Once again evincing that Anarchism is creator and destroyer, V sees all those who have not been 'enlightened' as happy idiots living inside an invisible cage. Ostensibly, he would have done exactly the same had Evey been anyone else. The closing scene of the book even has Evey dressed as V, tending the wounded Finch in a posture that intimates a new apprenticeship forming. Even as V explains to Evey his reasons for imprisoning her, he remains stoically in a

prosaic register, considering all the unenlightened as ‘convicts’ thus taking the prison allegory even further:

EVEY: How did you know what happened to Gordon?

V: It’s not an uncommon story, Evey. Many convicts meet with miserable ends. Your mother, your father, your lover. One by one taken out behind the chemical sheds... and shot. All convicts, hunched and deformed by the smallness of their cells; the weight of their chains; the unfairness of their sentences... I didn’t put you in a prison, Evey. I just showed you the bars.

EVEY: You’re wrong! It’s just life, that’s all. It’s how life is. It’s what we’ve got to put up with. It’s all we’ve got. What gives you the right to decide it’s not good enough?

V: You’re in a prison, Evey. You were born on a prison. You’ve been in a prison so long, you no longer believe there’s a world outside.

EVEY: Shut up! You’re mad. I don’t want to hear it!

V: That’s because you’re afraid, Evey. You’re afraid because you can feel freedom closing in upon you. You’re afraid because freedom is terrifying. Don’t back away, Evey. Part of you understands the truth even as part pretends not to. (II.13 Values)

Just as Evey is about to accept or relinquish the ominous possibility of freedom, the division between the two forms of programming within her are on par. The same change which transformed the pre-V entity into V is occurring here. It is likened elementally through fire in the case of V (as he steps naked and burned from the ruins of Larkhill), and through water in the case of Evey (as she climbs out naked into the rain atop a building). None of this psychological expansion towards a holistic notion of freedom is present in the film version. Rather, V attempts to console Evey by admitting to having seen himself in her as he interrogated her. V refers to a past filled with hate which would seem to circumvent the narrative logic aiming at the pre-V as already being an activist of some kind. This is not the case in the book. The pre-V is redundant inasmuch as it is not a clear ‘human’ construct *per se*. Despite the agonizing desperation of humanity caught in a world distorted by hyper-logogrammatical functioning, V must have felt something whilst torturing Evey, but the film V and the book counterpart are on extreme limits of a psychological scale. If we are to take into consideration that the film V is much more ‘human’ in our generalized semantic sense, then we must follow the strict continuity of the film narrative: it would be acceptable (and perhaps preferable)

to have a V with whom we could more readily identify. If, however, we follow the crystalline machinery of the book narrative, we come across an emotionally antithetical V. To wit, “all I have is my love of Love, and love is not loving”⁶³.

The Wachowski/McTeigue V is a neo-classical reinvention of the typified revenge tragedy protagonist, a peculiar anti-hero with whom we can share specific sympathies especially in the current political context of world power equilibrium. The book V – allow me to refer to him as Alan Moore and David Lloyd’s V – compounds a reflexion on the nature of power as an absolute, and as such, must himself be an absolute. Since we are dealing with absolute ideological notions on an absolute scale, the ‘human’ element of compound emotion and ‘falling in love’ must rationally belong to a different scale. It is conceivable that the ‘love’ which the book V shows toward Evey is ‘purer’ in an ideological sense than that represented by Hugo Weaving’s interpretation. However, does that make either any the more human? Or is either form of love, more sharply a release of humanity’s better nature? It is clear that to accept V’s actions on a neo-liberal/neo-conservative axis, one has space for leverage in terms of human affection, but since the initial conception was an anarchism/fascism axis, what then of the motivational forces that propel the protagonist?

Evey’s questioning of V as to why he has treated her in this way could not plausibly have a human answer; only an oblique one, seen from an abstract consideration of the human condition as a whole. Any human being capable of inflicting torture on another is as inhuman as the apparatus which created him and this is referred to in the film:

EVEY: And that’s what all this is about. You’re getting back at them for what they did to her. And to you.

V: What was done to me, created me. It is a basic principle of the universe that every action will create an equal and opposing reaction.

EVEY: Is that how you see it? Like an equation?

V: What they did was monstrous.

EVEY: And they created a monster. (Lamm and Bray 124-125)

⁶³ From the song ‘Soul Love’ on David Bowie’s quasi-messianic album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972)

The somewhat glib reference to thermodynamics as the answer to the vendetta does not stipulate or seem to be commensurate with the previous developments. Evey is seen here as taking a moral high ground even after her ‘conversion’ as it were. If that were the case, there would be no more V; the vendetta would end with an Evey exactly as she was at the beginning of the film. Since V is clearly a morally ambiguous character, it seems out of place for Evey to question his dysfunction in this way. Even if V does in fact see his actions as a grand equation, it would be unsubtle of him to fall into the silence of guilt after his actions. It would seem equally incomprehensible for Evey not to have learnt from her enlightenment. In fact, Natalie Portman behaves and speaks in a fashion that seems wholly unmodified from her perspective at the beginning of the narrative. The book version:

(Evey kisses ‘V’).

EVEY: Thank you. Thank you for what you did for me.

V: You did it all yourself. I simply provided the backdrop. The drama was all your own.

EVEY: It was a good backdrop. I really believed I was in prison. It’s still hard for me to accept that it was all just me and you... no guards, no interrogators... no Valerie. It’s strange. I realize now that you must have composed this letter, Valerie’s whole story, but it’s so convincing... I believed in her without seeing her... and she was never really there.

V: I didn’t write that letter [...] Valerie wrote the letter, in her own hand while she lived. I delivered it to you as it was delivered to me. The words you wept over were those that transformed me, five years earlier [...] she was the woman in room four. (II.14 Vignettes)

Ostensibly; Evey’s transformation whilst reading Valerie’s letter may be seen as the crux of the ideology that surrounds the original narrative. The stoic resistance of the individual, isolated from society, brutalized by the oppression inherent in state terrorism, reduced to a subservient nothing but still remaining free enough to claim that she would prefer death to changing her way of thought to theirs, is the central tenet of the anarchist freedom.

Valerie’s letter serves as a narrative binder inasmuch as it gives the audience background information of how Sutler and Norsefire achieved power, of how they used this power to create a sustainable tyranny through fear and repression and, specifically, how V came into being. As such, it stands alone as a literary and visual artifact, which

conceptualizes the alternate reality in which V exists. Whilst the essence of the letter remains a personal experience both for the character and for the audience, there are certain subtle yet vital alterations in the letters that reveal a great deal about the political slant intended by Alan Moore and by the Wachowskis/McTeigue:

I remember how the meaning of words began to change. How unfamiliar words like “collateral” and “extraordinary rendition” became frightening while things like “Norsefire” and “The Articles of allegiance” became powerful. And I remember how “different” became “dangerous”. I still don’t understand it. Why they hate us so much (Lamm and Bray 216).

There is no subtle allusion in Valerie’s remonstrance; the basic tenets which compose the vitriolic attacks on George W. Bush’s system of governance are present in many moments in the narrative. These are forcefully interwoven with the original to create a new parable, easily accessible to the public of the United States. The demagogic re-creation of words into new semantic contexts, such as used by U.S. military spokesmen *et al.* to justify civilian casualties and to serve as apology for the invasion of Iraq, is applied in full in the film text. A notable parallel lies in scene 104 when V is making breakfast for Evey⁶⁴:

V: People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people.

EVEY: And you’re going to make that happen by blowing up a building?

V: The building is a symbol, as is the act of destroying it. Symbols are given power by people. Alone a symbol is meaningless, but with enough people, blowing up a building can change the world. (Lamm and Bray 53-56)

References to ‘articles of allegiance’ echo the United States rigidly nationalistic pledge of allegiance just as the Bush rally to power was determined and given a slogan in the

⁶⁴ The ‘Eggy-in-the-Basket’ scene is completely absent from the book for obvious reasons. Since the Wachowskis/McTeigue wanted a more agreeable ‘terrorist’ to work with, they had to tone down the terrorist element in V’s personality thereby transforming him into their neo-liberal superhero. The additional prop of V wearing a pinny as he makes this so-called typical English breakfast, demeans and belittles the protagonist from his state as an abstract, making him more human, vulnerable, above all, viable to a society that has no time or stomach for the creation of a terrorist as a hero.

form of the ‘coalition of the willing’ (again echoed in the movie through a subversive poster found in Dietrich’s basement: ‘coalition of the willing to power’). The constant emphasis on the recent history of the United States succeeds in undermining any latent quality of the struggle of ‘anarchy’ against ‘fascism’ that is so evident in the original. Perhaps, though, the most succinct form of narrative defense comes from Valerie’s letter. In the film version she pleads rhetorically why they hate us [homosexuals] so much. The book version reads: ‘Why are they so frightened of us?’(II.11: Valerie). The shift in attitude is, at first, innocent. Yet it reveals a constant equation in the human relationship to state, one that is reinforced by the film V when he says that governments should be afraid of their people. The emphasis here belies the general attitude to extreme political forms prevalent in the two parallel narratives. In other words, whilst the book Valerie is *aware* that people hate homosexuals due to an imposed and systemized policy of fear and demonization, the film centres on people already having delegated their rights to whatever system of government prevails. Since hatred and fear derive very much from the same basic human fallacies, they can be distinguished only by the quality of ignorance toward a person or demographic group. Fear would logically arrive first, followed by hatred of a group. The film shows us that the battle has already begun even at a time when Norsefire is still starting its purge of undesirables; this would seem to reflect a more common ethical ground from which to preach. Equally, it would place the book Valerie on a lower platform of victimization. The ignorance of ‘why’ someone should fear us reveals a soul-suffering even deeper than the understanding of a hatred. It is, in essence, the same quality of fear that led so many Jews into misunderstanding the machinations of the Nazis. Since logic and reason are so clearly perverted, no rational person could be convinced into believing that he or she could possibly belong to a group of people that would cause so much fear in others. When a demographic group suddenly finds itself as the target of a concerted government attack, it can fight or flee, just as would a single individual. Oddly though, group psychology tends to weigh out these basic responses, allowing time for the powers that be to act. Furthermore, the instigation of a collective fear response towards any social group, be they Jewish, Muslim, Irish or Basque, permits the state apparatus to control public opinion and slowly corrode the pillars of democracy that it so subtly invoked to achieve

power. The basic human fear of difference is central to the reading of *VforV* exactly because it is eternal. The justification of the use of a narrative to bind it to a specific political showdown, ensconced in a moment of space / time reduces the function and strength of the original intent. As a 'bush-era parable' it succeeds, to some extent, in releasing social pressure, but as a parable which conjoins two extreme ideologies, it would seem to be more lasting and greater in its general outlook on the condition of humanity.

Conclusions

It has not been the function of the present work to catalogue the complexity of the *VforV* narratives in their totality. Rather, it has been an undertaking in contrasting parallel visions in two artistic fields which has, one would hope, revealed some of the socio-political leanings in which the contrasts lie. Questions such as how *VforV* stands in relation to the main philosophies of current and historical anarchist understandings, how the state works as a biological political ‘body’ both artistically and as a ‘real’ event have been made secondary to the prime directive of this text. Equally, other vistas may be opened to future intervention and analysis: references to the works of Robert Anton Wilson, the loss of empire syndrome depicted by the narrowing of international influence by the British after 1956, mythological and literary allusions to Orpheus and Eurydice as well as to Leroux’s *Phantom of the Opera*, connections with the work of Arthur Koestler in the realms of perceived coincidence (considering V as an *ex machina* force). *VforV* should also be seen from the viewpoint of the artist, David Lloyd’s remarkably original work, and, notably, the use of musical references both from classical and popular culture.

It is certain that, whilst the present object of analysis creates and fundamentals new and original lines of thinking, it also defines itself as a literary ouroboros: showing that political and social continuity is forever on a wheel leading to *Verwirrung* and renewal. Moore’s choice of inspirations draws upon much that has yet to be commented upon and unfolds into an endless carousel of the senses especially when held up to the light of subsequent works such as *Watchmen*, *From Hell*, *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Voice of the Fire et al.*

At a time when serious analysis of comic books and the 9th art in general is gathering momentum, it is conceivable that a reorientation of critical strategies may become necessary. It is also possible that, in a very post-modern sense, the nature of panel art is being constantly reinterpreted to suit an exceedingly demanding and seemingly more sophisticated audience. As with television and film, which were created essentially out of a desire to entertain, comic books are increasingly enticing their

audience to new levels of literary thinking. Whether they are better or worse than canonically classical literature is debatable. What we cannot deny is that an art form which conjoins image with text has flown well beyond the realm of children's entertainment and is carving a niche of its own in the world of the arts. Similarly, with a growing number of artists and writers in the comic book industry, one finds constant allusions and references to classical works; not subverting their power but acting as a reminder of their presence in the stories retold today. What this dissertation has set out to enunciate is the notion that the 9th art cannot easily be cast aside as a mere child's distraction, nor is it a parallel universe of comic collector's and convention seeking aficionados. *VforV* stands out in this field inasmuch as it attempts to tackle issues on a grand political scale whilst underscoring the essential humanity involved with the struggle for freedom at its most essential and, ultimately, at its most poetic level. Equally, the broadening of an original theme to serve the generalized worldview of another society creates a new imprint on the former. Recreating *VforV* as a film using a guise which makes it more accessible to a greater audience through the medium of a clear statement of intent, intermingled with a narrower political agenda, seems to have had consequences on the narrative unity of the work. Whether or not we *prefer* the film or the book becomes irrelevant when we attempt to understand the multifold messages and images which are subliminally transmitted to the audience. In editorializing a narrative we are essentially rewriting its imperative but that does not preclude its fundamental effect. What we are left with at the end of analysis must inevitably be seen as the leftovers of our own cultural imprint.

A Personal Note: The Number 3 Bus.

London, 1981. The number 3 bus was extended from its normal route of Crystal Palace in the South of the city to Oxford Circus in the centre of London, to the Parliament Hill Fields terminus just half a mile from the upper-class suburb of Highgate in the North of that metropolis. A mile away at the northern limit of Hampstead Heath sits the Spaniard's Inn, the once meeting place of smugglers, highwaymen and other undesirables; amongst them the infamous Dick Turpin. The singer and songwriter Sting, who wrote *Synchronicity* and *The Ghost in the Machine* with his band The Police, lived not one mile from my house.

The Wachowski/McTeigue re-version of *VforV* resorts to the 1934 version of the classic revenge story *The Count of Monte Cristo* as an inter-textual analogy. Its protagonist, Edmond Dantés, was played by English heart throb actor Robert Donat whose grandson sat next to me in maths class.

In another light, sheer improbability becomes indefinite possibility and the fact that a bus route is able to combine so many elements of a story and, at the same time be a personal landmark in this writer's life, is not only notable, but revealing.

Alan Moore would consider this a *conjunction*. The use of this word stands firmly within the mindset of this author, who, few would doubt, seems to view the world around him through the light folds of a vastly different prism. This same *conjunction* is one which intermarries personal beliefs with the discharge of information that sublimates his *opus* on a very general level. In retrospect, it would seem that Koestler's 'illusion of coincidence' that Alan Moore refers to in *VforV* is in reality a causal event in the space/time continuum *as well as* a spiritual achievement. The physical conjunct with the metaphysical and an event is born. This holistic approach is applicable both to the present work and to the nascent narratives which congregate to form *VforV*.

If we look at the world and see not coincidences but *conjunctions*, our understanding of the structures of faith and belief shifts radically from a partial perception of our role in this continuum and illumines us the path to a greater view of

self; we begin to find emergent patterns not just at specific moments which seem to take us by surprise, but in everything that we, and others around us, say and do.

The number 3 bus is an example of this phenomenon.

At this time, the writer of this document lived approximately 150 yards from the terminus of the number 3 bus. The route was only extended to that area for the period of April 1981 to October 1984: the exact period during which the first run of *V for Vendetta* was originally published. Parliament Hill Fields are so called because they were once the gathering locale for roundheads during the English Civil War, although its previous name of Traitor's Hill alludes to the meeting place of the Gunpowder conspirators of 1604 to watch the Houses of Parliament burn.

If we were to follow the route of the bus, we shortly go passed Parliament Hill mansions, home to poet laureate Sir John Betjeman, whose love of all things English and particular interest in trains and the London Underground once prompted him to write a short story about an abandoned tube station called South Kentish Town. He also wrote about North London and the shunting yards of Gospel Oak, the location of my primary school. Betjeman shared the same date of birth as the current writer and lived 300 yards away.

The number 3 entered Kentish Town and before arriving at the aforementioned abandoned tube station, it passed the *Circle in the Square* record shop, next door to which was a non-descript building which housed the London offices of Marvel Comics UK, a chaotic workshop piled high with unsold magazines, original artwork and a mountain of indefinable paperwork covering floors and plastered on every piece of virgin wall. Alan Moore and John Lloyd would most certainly have been here on various occasions during this period. Approximately one mile away, the Comic Market for the fledgling community of comic collectors in London would host its monthly venue.

The bus would continue down into Camden Town, at the time beginning to flourish with the then beat of all things alternative, before making its way into central London proper. Passing the University of London, it would arrive at Centre Point, the then tallest building in the city and round the corner from the Forbidden Planet bookstore in Denmark Street. In a tiny alleyway a few yards away one could find the

London Trading Store (LTS), a den for comic collectors offering the best comics at the cheapest prices.

The number 3 would then wind its way into the busiest streets of London, Oxford Street, Regent Street, Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square. From there it would trundle along places which are specifically referred to in *V for Vendetta*: Whitehall, Downing Street, and into Parliament Square (where one could alight to attend the bimonthly ‘mother’ of all comic collectors’ events: the Central Hall Comic Mart). The same Square appears in the opening sequence of Patrick McGoochan’s ‘The Prisoner’ and stands as a clear representation of the administrative power of the English State.

Thence across Westminster Bridge onto the Lambeth Road before making its way into the riot striven areas of Streatham and Brixton and finally to the Victorian *ex-libris* of the great exhibition: the Crystal Palace.

With one single bus ride, one could innocently take in an impressive overview of political and social history, and understand how the topology of a city could be represented in that of a narrative. How stories and names, and moments in time can *conjunct* to form a mindset, a series of experiences and a story that finds its way into the analysis of a literary form.

The events that occur in the revealing of the plot features in *V for Vendetta* have elements of all of the aforementioned so that, taken in its entirety, we should not perceive the narrative without collocating it into its basic scenario. It is a London story; it is a story of the 1980s; it is a story of the Underworld of London as well as an artistic pastiche which drinks from many other wells to formulate its hypothesis. And, above all, it is an affirmation of sentiment based strongly on a given *zeitgeist*. As a counterpoint, I could plausibly affirm as much of the film version. But, has this form shifted the political emphasis by distorting the vision of the original or has it added new dimensions? Does it validate the ‘Londonness’ of the comic book or perpetuate its own ideology by throwing away key elements of the first version? Does the polemic fact that the writer, Alan Moore, having disinherited his firstborn opus, affect our judgment of whether the film is ‘good’ or ‘bad’? How does the film version live up to the expectation of those who grew up with the panel version?

The challenge of the present work has been to take a closer inspection of the revisionist forms in which the comic book was reworked into the Wachowski Brothers'/James McTeigue film of the same name; to observe and catalogue wherever possible: differences in tone, subject matter and reference and to draw parallel conclusions as to the *intent* of the sub-textual messages in both pieces; essentially to reify those places where the construct of the book narrative falls apart from its originally holistic intent.

As a broad analysis, I have relied on key moments which exist in both text and film and try to understand how the 9th art has been reinterpreted into the 7th 20 years after the publishing of the original story in a form which is both compatible and, which for many, seems to provides the ligature between literature and film: the comic book.

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