



Available online at <http://proceedings.sriweb.org>

The First International Scientific Conference
Iraqi Academic Union / Center for Strategic and Academic Development
Under the Title "Humanities and Pure Sciences: Vision towards Contemporary
Education"

11-12 February 2019, University of Duhok - Iraq

المؤتمر العلمي الدولي الأول تحت شعار

نقابة الاكاديميين العراقيين / مركز التطور الاستراتيجي الاكاديمي

تحت عنوان "العلوم الانسانية والصرافة رؤية نحو التربية والتعليم المعاصرة"

11-12 شباط 2019م ، جامعة دهوك - العراق

<http://conference.iraqiacademics.iq>

Disintegration of Gender Equality in Alan Moore and David Lloyd's V for Vendetta

Shaymaa AbdulAali Jasim

English language Dept.

College of Arts

University of Mosul

Shayma.ab.jasim@gmail.com

Abstract:

This research paper will be discussing the role of women characters in V for Vendetta. How these characters are presented in terms of gender equality. The paper will investigate whether this equality is present or not. There will be a section dealing with how the authors present their novel as a socio/political novel shedding light on feminism. There will also be a section defining the graphic novel in general. The research will also mention the adapted version of the novel and whether it differs from the original text in terms of gender equality.

Keywords: V for Vendetta, gender equality, feminism, graphic novel.



1 .Introduction:

Truly great works of literature are able to analyze and dissect cultural and political occurrences in a way that is palatable for a larger spectrum of society while breaking with and following various criteria of aesthetic interpretation and thematic sequencing. *V for Vendetta* is a graphic novel that started as a serial published in black and white by Warrior in 1982. Then DC. Comics (an American publishing house) published the novel as a ten series edition in 1988 that gave it an American touch. In 2005 DC. Comics published a new edition of the novel in that same year Warner Bros. released the film adaptation of the novel in the case of Lloyd & Moore (2005), the authors touch on many themes that are politically and socially relevant in the realm of feminist philosophy by portraying characters who are suffering under a patriarchal system of government-led social oppression that attempts to subvert the free will of the characters. The characters of V and Evey are at odds to the traditional gender roles of their environment, which increases in scope and emphasis, especially in the case of Evey's character development, as the story continues. Evey becoming increasingly empowered through her interactions with V and ultimately takes on his mission to fight fascist oppression within the country, showing how her transition from victim to hero is adequately realized throughout the arc of the story.

2 *V for Vendetta*: Differing Interpretations

There are many obvious differences between the graphic novel and the movie (2005). Most of these differences make a great change according to the themes and ideas presented by the author. This research does not aim to analyze or detect these changes. Rather it focuses only on those that concern the main core of the research. The original graphic novel has a markedly different interpretation regarding the themes discussed in this research, and it is worthy to note the differences and similarities of these interpretations before analyzing the material. In the film adaptation, the character of Evey is not as entrenched in the notion of social femininity that is apparent in her portrayal in the graphic novel. In the novel, Evey is much more entrenched in the societal notion of feminine behavior and uses her female allure in the novel's outset as a method of sustaining her livelihood by working as a prostitute.

The film's portrayal of Evey is much more in line with what would be considered a more modern working woman, although she is still largely subservient in her role as an assistant to the government's news organization. The film adaptation also does not present other female characters and their interactions within the story, such as Helen Heyer and Rosemary Almond, who also exhibit actions that counteract the status quo concerning feminine behavior.



The novel's portrayal of Evey initially is that of a naïve, young girl who must work as a prostitute in order to survive as a coping mechanism of existing within a male-dominated society. The character is more actively breaking out of the system of oppression by her mentorship under V, who takes her out of this world of victimization and leads her toward the enlightenment that is found later in the novel, realized through the destruction and abdication of these social norms. This makes the film's portrayal of Evey much less dynamic, as the character's development is not as drastic in its scope of change. One of the most consequential changes in the film adaptation is that Evey does not wear V's mask at the end of the story, as is portrayed in the novel (McTeigue et al., 2006), thousands of people do. This is a particularly fitting symbol for the research presented here, and this makes the film adaptation less impactful regarding themes of feminism and gender overall.

3 Patriarchy & State Oppression

Lloyd & Moore (2005) contains prevalent themes concerning the nature of oppression through government control over the free will of the public at large, which is presented as the primary motivations for the titular character V who is continually planning ways to destabilize the openly fascist government within the novel. V's vendetta actually starts as a result of the bad conditions he faced in prison. He escaped by blowing up the building while he was within it. After his escape he insisted on revenge upon those behind his collapse who later held high governmental positions i.e.; Adam Susan who holds the country with an iron fist. The novel itself is a critique of government oppression during the time of its publication 1982 which Moore noted that Thatcher's Conservative party would lose against the Labour party in the governmental elections of 1983. (Gray, 2010). Regarding the female characters, this oppression through authority figures often takes the forms of sexual intimidation and violence, as they are often subjected to the advances of men who wield a sense of power over their lives through their roles as protectors or government officials (Lorrinan, 2017).

The anarchist aims expressed in the novel have fitting parallels with the tenets of feminism, in that the aims of the anarchist system are to implement equality amongst the masses with a lack of definite, authoritative figures having power over you within society (MacFarlane). This goal of achieving social equity is the driving motivation for V as he attempts to undermine the government and reduce their ability to implement the structural barriers they have developed within the society. Often the characters are actively combatting these misogynist figures who are authorities within society, which reveals fitting symbolism that is reflective of feminist philosophy; the anarchic appeal of V's mission objective mirrors similar practices.



Ironically, a recurring hypocrisy within asserted in the research is that V's manipulation of Evey is what ultimately leads to her transitioning from a victim of society to a hero who is campaigning against the forces seeking to oppress her and others (Greenblatt, 2009), which affirms the patriarchal ideals that Lloyd & Moore (2005) are attempting to deconstruct in the novel. V's actions toward Evey which lead to her self-enlightenment concerning her role in society are often very extreme and deceitful, a prime example being when V kidnaps Evey and imposes a regime of routine torture in order to challenge her physiological and psychological standing which results in her throwing off previously held societal status and gender roles to become a heroic figure who is able to exercise free will.

4 Subversion of Gender Roles

Both the characters of V and Evey as they are presented in Lloyd & Moore (2005) ultimately enter into open opposition with the concept of gender roles within the society they find themselves in. There are many theories surrounding the actual gender of V, as in the graphic novel there are no defining physical characteristics that give away his identity, and some researchers theorize that the character of V could possibly be female (Hutchinson, 2017). The attire that the character wears make their specific physical features uncertain, and this allusion to ambiguous gender identity is a recurring theme throughout the novel. V's personality characteristic further this concept of undefined gender, as they do not portray the socially accepted qualities of a man in the society, which ultimately means misogyny and sexual promiscuity. This instance of breaking with social norms of gender correlate with feminist principles which also attempt to re-establish the gender hierarchy by eliminating the observance of gender roles in society (Lindsey, 2016).



The transformation of Evey is a prime example of the gender-bending and largely gender-neutral motif that is present within the novel. Evey's character changes throughout the novel unexpectedly. She appears as a prostitute at the beginning of the novel. She plays the role of a weak female being dependent on man to gain her living. She is found to be a weak female being exposed to male vulgarity in the rape scenes when later was saved by V and fell under his protection. Once again, she is under male custody when she chose to inform the priest about V's plan of killing him. She chose to be with the authoritative male rather than being with V. Her character changes from that of an overtly feminized being who caters to the male gaze into a short-haired, feminist hero who has been liberated from her social responsibilities in a way that allows her to now control her own destiny (Toller, Suter, & Trautmann, 2004). This scene is particularly eventful and largely the result of her mentor V, who tortures her relentlessly in order to shed her of the previous manifestations of her feminized role in society (All Sides, 2016). This sense of gaining control of her existence through forsaking her gender identity is shown symbolically when she dons V's attire after his death, taking on his campaign to rid the country of the fascist government that attempts to control the lives of the citizens.

Evey suffers from confusion. As she cannot define her relationship with V., he is neither her lover nor is he her father, but she wishes that he takes one of these roles. So, he does not fit his gender stereotype and neither does she. Therefore, this confusion is reflected in her relationship with Gordon. For Evey, Gordon fulfills the gap of a father then a lover. He takes different roles in her life also in her dream, she saw herself as a little girl with her father, who later turns into Gordon then back to being her father again. The significance of this dream is to present Evey as a child, in reality, being weak, small and in need of male guidance and defense. In prison, Evey loses her gender identity. After prison a new Evey is born; bold and muscly a masculine like figure. She becomes free of her gender. She leaves V but then returns on the date of V's final act. After he dies in her arms, she courageously changes her ideas of V's terrorist acts. Finally, she decides to proceed with V's plan to blow up the parliament.

There are other female characters in the novel which are not found in the movie. They fill their gender role of being a female dependent on masculine figures. Rosemary uses her lusty dancing abilities to show her feminine figure to the society after Mr. Almond's death. She tries to leave her gender role by shooting a governmental officer, but this courageous act ended when she was caught by officials. Helen is the other character that also sticks to her gender role. She uses her body to manipulate an official. She is dependent on Conrad, therefore she will not possess any authority



This idea of gender equality is very prevalent in the novel, and there seems to be an assertion that gender is merely a social construct used to control and give power to individuals depending on biological factors (Lindsey, 2016). Again, the idea of equality amongst people is present in this theme, which refers to the feminist themes which have been discussed previously. In many ways, the leading characters oppose their innate gender label, largely through the influence of outside forces. V came to his current state through the oppression of the government who held him captive and tortured him, and Evey likewise through her kidnapping by V, who coincidentally uses the same methods to shed her of her social identification. This asserts the idea that hardship leads to freedom by actively breaking from cultural customs, such as gender identity.

Male characters in the novel become a stereotype of aggressive and sexually dominant figures, they represent gendered violence. For instance, Mr. Almond beats his wife Rosemary after yelling at her and accusing her of being sexually careless. He is abusing his wife and justifying his gendered violence against her. These incidents prove that socially use force to gain their sexual pleasure. V's character is ambiguous in all ways. One of the main issues of this paper is gender, but when it comes to exposing V's character, gender is lost. The protagonist of the novel is hinted to be a male but he has long hair which is not a stereotypical man's hair. His covered painted face is also not a masculine feature. In the film adaptation, his voice is another weak masculine trait. Also, we find V at the beginning of the novel getting prepared for his big night. Yet at the same time, Evey was also getting dressed and ready for her night as a prostitute. They were both dressing for their gender role to be. They also shared feminine features as explained later.

Conclusion:

V for Vendetta touches on many ideas, both abstract and concrete, concerning the concepts of gender and feminist philosophy through the characters and their interactions with each other. These relationships are based on societal customs that are largely normalized by the characters within the novel, and these customs are what is being protested through V's campaign against the fascist state. V is fighting for a sense of egalitarianism amongst the population, no matter what gender an individual may be, and this is a very empowering of all strata of citizens finds much common ground with feminist concepts.

The patriarchal society which is represented by the fascist government in the novel is oppressive toward all groups within society, but women are specifically ascribed as being particularly subordinate to the male authoritative figures whom they are forced to rely on. This is prevalent throughout the novel as women are largely dependent on



male counterparts. Some of these themes are expressed in the film adaptation, but the novel's characterization and situations are much more strongly correlated to the themes which have been discussed in this essay. Overall, the piece itself stands as a tantamount work of anarchic-feminist literature that is worthy of praise and further study concerning gender equality and issues within the field.

References:

- All Sides. (2016). The portrayal of femininity and women in *V for Vendetta*. *All Sides Blog*. Retrieved from <https://allsidesblog.wordpress.com/2016/02/01/the-portrayal-of-femininity-and-women-in-v-for-vendetta/>.
- Gray, M. (2010). 'A fist full of roses...'. Comics as cultural resistance: Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta*. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 1(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504851003798579>.
- Greenblatt, J. (2009). *I for integrity: (Inter)subjectivities and sidekicks in Alan Moore's V for Vendetta and Frank Miller's Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. *Image Text*, 4(3). Retrieved from http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v4_3/greenblatt/.
- Hutchinson, J.D. (2017). *Gender identity in V for Vendetta*. Retrieved from <https://mds.marshall.edu/colaconf/2017/day1/35/>.
- Lindsey, L.L. (2016). *Gender roles: A sociological perspective*.
- Lloyd, D. & Moore, A. (2005). *V for Vendetta*. New York, NY: DC Comics.
- Lorriman, V. (2017). Compare the representation of femininity in *Paradise Lost* by John Milton and *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore and David Lloyd. *Innervate*. Retrieved from <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/documents/innervate/16-17/5.-lorrیمان-v-q32334.pdf>.
- MacFarlane, J. (n.d.). *Anarcha-feminism in Alan Moore and David Lloyd's "V for Vendetta"*. Retrieved from <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/albatross/article/view/13402/4281>.
- McTeigue, J., Wachowski, L., Wachowski, L., Silver, J., Hill, G., Waisbren, B., & Biddle, A. Warner Home Video (Firm). (2006). *V for Vendetta*. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video.
- Toller, P.W., Suter, E.A., & Trautmann, T.C. (2004). Gender role identity and attitudes toward feminism. *Sex Roles*, 51(1), 85-90.