 V for Vendetta

Resource 23

Speculation and the subversive: Narratives as an act of rebellion

McTeigue crafts a future world that highlights the problems inherent in a government with too much control and the individuals who seek to question the world and their place in it.

The imagined world of the United Kingdom of 2028 presents a dystopic vision of a society ruled by fear. This vision of the future is both frightening and, at times, familiar.

In this section of the unit we will consider how James McTeigue's interpretation of the 1988 graphic novel uses the conventions of speculative fiction and the powerful medium of film to spark thought in his audience and, hopefully, encourage us, through the power of his representation, to question the world in which we live.

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Remember, Remember:

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Remember, remember the fifth of November, the gunpowder, treason and plot. I know of no reason why gunpowder treason should ever be forgot.

* Investigate who Guy Fawkes was and what role he played in history.
* What reasons do you think this historical character and event has been so closely linked to the character of V?

Scene Analysis: V for Vendetta

Man in a Mask: 00:02:24

In this scene consider:

* How are the Fingermen represented?
* How is the close up of the speakers meant to frame Norsefire to the audience?
* How is film noir used in this scene?
* What do you make of V's Shakespearean allusions?
* What is the purpose and impact of V's alliterative speech?
* How has lighting and mise en scene been used in this sequence?
* "Strength through unity, unity through faith." The motto of Norsefire employs the rhetorical device of anadiplosis. How does this enforce the values and ideologies of Norsefire?
* How is symbolism employed in the final stages of the scene?

Rooftop Concert: 00:09:07

* What is important about the setting and positioning of V and Evey in this scene?
* How does the wide angle, long shot of the London skyline create verisimilitude?
* V’s dialogue, “It is to Madame Justice that I dedicate this concerto, in honour of the holiday she seems to have taken from these parts”, combined with the close up on the sign stating ‘Defend the children of the poor and punish the wrongdoer’ serve to highlight a the motivations of V in his acts of rebellion. How do they do that?
* Why is Madame Justice and blowing up the Old Bailey such strong symbols?
* The music used in this scene is the 1812 Overture by Tchaikovsky. Why has this music been used in this scene? You may need to do a little research before you can respond to this question.
* What is the importance of the fireworks in the final frames of the scene?
* What is the importance of the date?

Lead on the Girl: 00:11:00

* What is the impact of the framing and camera angles used to depict Sutler?
* Consider the symbols either side of Sutler's screen. What might they represent?
* "Add it to the black list." What does Sulter's dialogue, the references to surveillance (the eyes, ears, fingers, nose and mouth of the government) and their use of propaganda ("We have spin coverage...") reveal about the Norsefire rule?
* How does Sutler use rhetoric in his speech?
* What allusions can you draw between Sutler and real life political leaders?
* How are shadows used in this scene (especially as Creedy emerges from them)? What conclusions might we be able to draw from this?

Vtv: 00:16:26

* How is montage of V speaking to London over the BTN emergency channel used to build the story?
* What do you notice about the setting of V’s Vtv?
* This scene establishes images of various people in various places around the city watching BTN (and now Vtv). Make note of this and compare it to later uses of these people and places.
* How does the little girl with the glasses in this scene becoming a symbol throughout the film?
* Identify key phrases from V’s monologue in this scene. How do these key phrases encapsulate the ideas of the film?
* Where do we see alliteration used in his speech again?
* How is framing and positioning used to communicate that V is in a place of power over the government in this scene?

Creedy’s Threat: 00:48:02

* This is no ordinary situation and requires more than your ordinary attention.” How is the hierarchical nature of Norsefire revealed here?
* “The security of information is paramount.” How is this an ironic piece of dialogue from Creedy?
* Corruption and self-protection are at the heart of Norsefire. How is this revealed in this short scene?

Mystery Woman: 00:49:40

* In this scene we see the personal impact Norsefire’s tyrannical rule has on the individual. How does Gordon’s characterisation reflect this?
* The panning shot through Gordon’s secret room reveals many different works of art and important artifacts. Identify a number of them and explain why McTeigue includes theme as part of the mise en scene (also see symbolism sheet).
* Evey asks Gordon, “Is it worth it?”. What do think about his answer? Would your response change if you were living in circumstances similar to those depicted on the film?
* How do we see parallels from this scene to ones earlier in the Shadow Gallery?

The Man from Room V: 00:56:39

* In this scene we see the narrative being developed through flash backs. How does this narrative device progress and enhance our understanding of V and Norsefire?
* “The subject said he could no longer remember who he was or where he was from. Whoever he was, he is now the key to our dream, and the hope that all of this would not have been in vain.” The voice over serves as an ironic foreshadowing in the narrative. How?
* What other ways do we see the importance of 5 or V being built upon?
* In what ways do we see the development of the totalitarian regime and its values in this flashback? How is allusion used in this scene?

What if?: 01:00:31

* How does Detective Finsh’s speculations reveal the extent to which a government would go in order to gain power and control?
* How is Finch’s role in the film developed further in the scene? How are we positioned to respond to him?

Gotcha: 01:04:47

* This scene highlights the ability of an individual to be a catalyst for change. In this case it is Gordon’s act of rebellion in his satirical presentation of Sutler.
* How is satire achieved?
* How is allusion used in this scene?
* Why is this act such a rebellious and powerful one?
* “It’ll be fine, trust me.” Says Gordon. What do we see next that proves this to be a significant understatement. In what ways do we see similarities between this scene and others throughout the film?
* What conclusions can we draw about Norsefire?

Process Her, Valerie’s Autobiography, Ready to Die, God is in the Rain, Valerie’s Legacy: 01:09:41 – 01:29:20

* How are close ups of Evey and the shadowed interrogator used in the scene?
* In what ways do we see similarities between the mise en scene of this sequence and those of Larkhill Detention Centre?
* Costuming in this sequence plays an important role for Evey. In what ways is this true?
* Lighting and angles are used to create a mood and tone? Find examples and explain the intended effect.
* How does McTeigue create links between Evey and Valerie? Consider the use of flashbacks and parallel scenes used.
* Valarie uses the metaphor “it is the very last inch of us”. Explain what she means.
* How does archival type footage add to the verisimilitude of the speculative narrative and its development?
* “I remember how different became dangerous”. How does this statement encapsulate the totalitarian rule of Norsefire?
* At the end of this sequence we see the birdseye shot of Evey and the drops of water falling. How does serve as a parallel to V? What is symbolically represented here? How does the interconnected frames between V and Evey and Evey and Valarie develop the complexity of their characterisation? How does this complexity contribute to the rich narrative being constructed?
* V says what was done to him was monsterous. Do you think his actions are justified? Is doing wrong for the right reasons possible?
* How does this scene reveal the multifaceted nature of V’s character?

Perfect Pattern: 01:39:28

* What do the dominoes symbolise?
* How does the editing and montage create momentum in the narrative?
* Find examples of Sutler’s oppressive and dictatorial dialogue.
* Find two more examples of symbols found in this sequence.
* What is the importance of the chalk X on the door?
* Finch says, “It was like a perfect pattern laid out in front of me and I realised we were all a part of it and all trapped by it.” How does his oxymoronic imagery perfectly describe the dystopic state of London in this speculative narrative?

All of Us: 01:59:35

* We can see in this final scene how what was foreshadowed in the Perfect Pattern scene has come to pass. Why is this a significant element of the narrative?
* Who is the final piece in the puzzle symbolised by the red domino piece? Justify your answer.
* How does V and Evey’s actions provide hope for their society?
* How is panning and extreme high angle shots are used to communicate important ideas?
* How do we see elements of a circular narrative in this final scene? What impact does it have as a narrative device?

Character development in V for Vendetta

V and Evey – Complex, multifaceted characters...

Establishing V and Evey

In opening scene in the present, we are introduced to our two central characters, V and Evey.

* How is the parallel scenes used in the opening sequence? In what ways can we see links being created?
* What does the mise en scene of each room tell us about these two characters?
* How is foreshadowing used here?
* We see Evey grow and change throughout the film. What two key events do you think act as the most important in her ‘evolution’? Justify your selection with evidence from the film.

Evey Hammond

Consider the following key quotes from Evey. In pairs identify where the quote comes from in the film, what language features are used in the piece of dialogue and evaluate how it contributes to the construction of Evey's characterisation. Share your ideas with the class.

| Quote | Where in the film it’s found | Language technique | Effect: How does this piece of dialogue help build the character of Evey? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| My father was a writer. You would've liked him. He used to say that artists use lies to tell the truth, while politicians use them to cover the truth up. |       |       |       |
| I can't feel \*anything\* anymore! |       |       |       |
| Thank you, but I'd rather die behind the chemical sheds. |       |       |       |
| That this country needs more than a building right now. It needs hope. |       |       |       |
| No one will ever forget that night and what it meant for this country. But I will never forget the man and what he meant to me. |       |       |       |
| She looked me right in the eye and didn't recognise me. I guess whatever you did to me worked better than I'd ever have imagined. |       |       |       |
| God is in the rain. |       |       |       |
| I wish I believed that was possible. But every time I've seen this world change, it's always been for the worse. |       |       |       |
| He was Edmond Dantés... and he was my father. And my mother... my brother... my friend. He was you... and me. He was all of us. |       |       |       |

Map the progression and evolution of Evey and how her ideas and views develop.

V

Consider the following key quotes from V. In pairs identify where the quote comes from in the film, what language features are used in the piece of dialogue and evaluate how it contributes to the construction of V's characterisation. Share your ideas with the class.

| Quote | Where in the film it’s found | Language technique | Effect: How does this piece of dialogue help build the character of Evey? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| What was done to me created me. It's a basic principle of the Universe that every action will create an equal and opposing reaction. |       |       |       |
| The building is a symbol, as is the act of destroying it. Symbols are given power by the people. Alone, a symbol is meaningless, but with enough people, blowing up a building can change the world. |       |       |       |
| "By the power of truth, I, while living, have conquered the universe". |       |       |       |
| I've not come for what you hoped to do. I've come for what you did. |       |       |       |
| Hate was all I knew. It built my world, imprisoned me, taught me how to eat, how to drink, how to breathe! I thought I'd die with all the hate in my veins. But then something happened. It happened to me, just as it happened to you. |       |       |       |
| What was done to me was monstrous! |       |       |       |
| Beneath this mask, there is more than flesh. Beneath this mask, there is an idea, Mr Creedy. And ideas are bulletproof. |       |       |       |
| And thus I clothe my naked villainy with old odd ends, stol'n forth of holy writ; And seem a saint, when most I play the devil. - From Shakespeare's Richard III |       |       |       |
| Words offer the means to meaning, and for those who will listen, the enunciation of truth. And the truth is, there is something terribly wrong with this country, isn't there? |       |       |       |
| But if you see what I see, if you feel as I feel, and if you would seek as I seek, then I ask you to 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 forgotten. |       |       |       |
| Fear became the ultimate tool of this government, and through it, our politician was ultimately appointed to the newly created position of high chancellor. The rest, as they say, is history. |       |       |       |
| The only verdict is vengeance; a vendetta held as a votive, not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and the virtuous. |       |       |       |

"My favourite film: The Count of Monte Cristo with Robert Donat as Edmond Dantes. It gets me every time."

There are parallels between V and the central characters in The Count of Monte Cristo and The Phantom of the Opera. How do these allusions help build the characterisation of V?

McTeaigue also uses film techniques to create links between Gordon and V. What are they and impact are they supposed to have on the viewer?

What impact does the fact that we never see V's face have on the audience? Do you think the way we see V would be different had his face been shown?

Part of what makes V such a complicated multifaceted character is our understanding that his actions are violent and unlawful and yet we are positioned to feel allegiance to his cause. How do you feel about V, his actions and his cause?

V and Evey

How does costuming contribute to the characterisation of V and Evey?

How are parallel scenes used in the film and how do they develop the characterisation of V and Evey?

How do these characters act as a catalyst for change in society? What conclusions does the composer what us to draw?

How does the narrative structure and Evey's voice over position us in relation to V?

How would a change of positioning impact our interpretation of the characters and their actions?

Complete the Venn diagram identifying aspects of character for both V and Evey. How do the similarities and differences between these two characters make them more powerful?



Allusion and symbolism in V for Vendetta:

Using other narratives to build a new one

The narrative of V for Vendetta draws heavily on images and allusions so as to build the depth of its story. Using the table below, explore the allusions made in the film and explain how they assist in constructing the narrative.

Allusion:

| Allusion | Effect |
| --- | --- |
| Guy Fawkes |       |
| The Count of Monte Cristo |       |
| The Phantom of the Opera |       |
| 1984 |       |
| Cross of Lorraine |       |
| Emma Goldman |       |
| And thus I clothe my naked villainy with old odd ends, stol'n forth of holy writ; And seem a saint, when most I play the devil. - From Shakespeare's Richard III |       |
| The multiplying villainies of nature do swarm upon him. disdaining fortune/with his brandish'd steel, which smoked with bloody execution...?- From Shakespeare’s Macbeth |       |
| We are oft to blame in this, - / 'Tis too much proved - that with devotion's visage/ And pious action we do sugar o'er/ The devil himself.- From Shakespeare’s Hamlet |       |
| Hitler |       |

There are a variety of well known texts in Gordon’s secret room and in V’s shadow gallery. Select a few and research them. For each one, give an explanation as to why it might have been included.

Symbolism:

| Symbol | Effect |
| --- | --- |
| Guy Fawkes mask |       |
| Roses |       |
| Lady Justice |       |
| The head/the nose/the eyes/the ears/the fingers |       |
| Valerie’s letter |       |
| Baptism (of fire and water) |       |
| V |       |