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Consider, Consider the Sixth of November...

No one wants to be told that what he is doing wrong, a truth evident everywhere from a child screaming in a grocery store to an adult being reprimanded by an employer for the quality of his or her work dwindling to worrisome levels. In such moments of lecture, one cannot help but become defensive, and more often than not, what is said in a way implying care for the person's future is taken as a direct assault upon his character. Resent and defiance form, allowing for no progress toward betterment, and in the end such remarks can do more harm than good. The same is true in many situations, including dystopian warnings in literature and film. Often a director will have an incredible message to convey, one that might change the world or get people talking about the problems of society. If the director tells his audience that the world has gone down the drain pipe, its audience throws the work to the side in frustration. They do not want to be submerged in guilt--they really just want to be entertained. Because of this, many writers and filmmakers resort to using symbols in the hope of wrangling the audience to the end of the movie without it ever knowing that they've learned something in the process. *V For Vendetta* is one such work of literature that uses this technique, and by using repetition, context, musical and visual elements, and by having its characters place value on certain objects, both the graphic novel and the movie create symbolic meaning in the dreary future they have painted.

Repetitious symbols are meant to do one thing--draw attention to a certain idea or object meant for further study. *V For Vendetta* employs various forms of repetitions with perhaps the most obvious use being the quote, "Remember, remember the Fifth of November..." The movie starts with these lines, explaining that Guy Fawkes was hanged for attempting to blow up Parliament because he believed Roman Catholics were being discriminated against in Protestant England. His ideals are still celebrated to this day, and throughout the movie the audience is told to remember Guy Fawkes and his refusal to accept his government overstepping its boundaries. The movie does an excellent job of showing this opening with the famous lines recited over it, and the audience makes an instant mental connection between the two. The next time the line is said is in the moments before V blows up the Old Bailey. Because of the newly-formed mental connection, one can foreshadow the explosion that comes seconds later and understand that V, as a character, stands for something that is outside of his government's current viewpoint. The graphic novel, however, starts at the movie's second scene, omitting the history lesson and not allowing for any connection to form, and as V and Evey stand upon the roof facing Parliament (as this is the building first blown up in the novel), V seems much more like the terror that Evey first views him as while he calmly recites the gunpowder plot's poem.

The movie version of V sets out to unite England by inviting its civilians to watch the Houses of Parliament blow up in one year's time, while the graphic novel version of V calls for anarchy and chaos by destroying the government from the inside out. Because of this, the cinematic V places great value on Parliament, offering the country's citizens an opportunity to unite to watch it blow up in one year's time. By placing so much value

on the Houses of Parliament, the building becomes a symbol for unity--an end to the old way of life and the start of a new society. The anarchist V from the novel does not place such a hold on the building, blowing it up in the first chapter, but there is a moment before he blows up the Old Bailey during which he talks to the statue of Madam Justice, explaining to her that "Justice is meaningless without freedom." During his one-person conversation with Madam Justice, V once again makes the building important. The audience can assume that by blowing up the Old Bailey, V is really blowing up the idea in its very foundation which has gotten rotten by years of misuse and distrust. So even though value is placed on separate buildings at separate points of the story, the idea of ending one world and starting another is still prevalent because the overall symbolic message does not change.

In the actual story, great value is placed on "Fate"--the television from which the Leader speaks to the citizens, spouting lies and excuses for anything that happens outside the social norm. And even though the audience can see this, and it is, from an outside perspective, a symbol of everything gone wrong in the dystopian society, the characters themselves see the television as truth. They are raised with the idea of flocking to Fate for comfort, and it is only when V takes to the television with an address that any citizens actually take care about what might be happening in the world. When so much power is given to an object, it is much easier to reach a group of people through it.

Special visual and musical emphasis can also enhance the way a symbol is viewed. In the movie, classical, booming music is placed over the explosion of both the Old Bailey and the Houses of Parliament. The only time music is really heard within the film itself is anytime V plays it, whether during these explosive scenes or at his house,

The Shadow Gallery. Music seems to be V's idea of entertainment, and he understands that while blowing up a building might be memorable, blowing up a building while crashing symbols and gallant music blare from the speakers is enough to inspire the most cynical of citizens. Interestingly, because the graphic novel cannot actually have a soundtrack, it relies on visual elements to give it the same flow. V is seen holding a conductor's wand and waving it above a music stand. To give the audience the full effect of music, however, the panels of V conducting are placed horizontally on the bottom of each page, each panel taking up the space of two normal-sized panels. The reactions of other characters are placed in the top panels, showing their lives going on around the musical foreshadowing which remains constant at the bottom. The entire flow of this part is musical in itself, and the visual imagery of the music stand and conductor's wand only help enhance the music as a symbol for the chaos about to ensue as well as beauty in the face of destruction.

The most interesting musical symbol is the use of Beethoven's Fifth in the film scene in which V confronts Creedy in his greenhouse. In Morse Code, the opening lines of Beethoven's Fifth stand correspond with "V". This is just one example of Vs being used in the movie, and it is fascinating that "V" is in the opening line, "V" stands for the number five, and November the Fifth is V's big day.

Another great visual symbol from the graphic novel is the scene in which Evey, after finding out that V has been the one torturing her, goes to the roof with V for some air. It is raining, and she walks out to the balcony, raises her arms, and is free. The scene is also in the movie, but the main difference is that in the movie she is clothed, and in the graphic novel she is completely naked. The visual symbolism comes from her

vulnerability in this moment, which is why the graphic novel does a better job of this scene. She stands naked, in the rain, while V is fully clothed behind her, showing no skin at all. V is no longer vulnerable because in this moment he has become the idea he wanted to be. He knows he will live on in Evey, even if she does not know it yet herself.

V's costume in both the film and graphic novel are perhaps the most important symbol to both the characters and the audience, as it's context creates the character V needs to be. V understands that as a person he is nothing. He literally has no files for his existence and no one would miss him if he disappeared forever. Because of this, V creates a persona--an easily identifiable character which, after his actions have been set into motion, can be instantly recalled at any given time. He wears a mask, a wig, and flamboyant clothing which make him an enigma at first. Neither the audience nor the citizens know quite what to think of V when first introduced, and because of this they watch his every move with intrigue. After gaining everyone's attention, V uses dialogue only possible in a well-rehearsed play written by an incredibly verbose playwright. Everything he says seems to be thought out, as if he knows exactly what will happen next in the plot. In the movie this is almost comforting, as it gives the characters the hope they need for change, if they so desire. In the graphic novel, however, it turns the country upside down as they don't know exactly what will happen next, but they know V has been planning it for quite some time which makes it incredibly hard to stop. To enforce the idea of V as a persona, his house is like a giant museum that would only be possible in fiction. He has stolen paintings all around, and the music he plays adds a soundtrack to his life movie. His larger than life persona affects the other characters in the novel by being so fantastic that they easily remember the idea at the heart of V.

Perhaps the main difference between the graphic novel and the comic is the ending. In the movie, V ends his mission by taking out the Leader, being killed, and having Evey place him on the train and hit 'go', sending the train to blow up Parliament as everyone watches in unity. In the graphic novel V does not take out the Leader, as he is killed by a character not even in the film. And he does die, his body being sent in a Viking funeral to 10 Downing Street in a final act of anarchy. What changes the most, however, is what Evey does in between V's death and the Viking funeral he requested. She wonders if she should take off his mask, see who he is underneath, but then she realizes that the man underneath will not be as powerful as the symbol V has created for himself, so she leaves his mask on. She gets another mask from The Shadow Gallery, and she greets the citizens on the streets, informing them of her plan to blow up Downing street the following evening. Chaos ensues, and she rescues one of the character's assistants and brings him to the Shadow Gallery to train him as V did to her. Why is this ending so important? Why is it so much better than the film's ending where everyone is united and the faces of the dead have once again appeared in the crowd, a symbol of not only what was lost but what has been won? The reason is simple: symbols. Evey understood the power of V living forever, of V coming back from the dead to address the crowd. She knew that it is imperative to never let an idea die, especially after V spent so much time creating the symbol he became. And she knew that she could only survive as V for so long as well, so training the next V would be crucial to the immortality of the cause. By training her replacement, she creates a symbol of the future. Mankind will continue as long as the idea of V survives, and this gives the reader more hope than any cheery unity speech could ever do.

*V for Vendetta* uses many symbols to ensure the reader is fully paying attention to the meaning behind everything the characters do or say in both the film and the graphic novel. By picking some of the symbols apart, the audience can understand the meaning of the film much better. The theme of the story is the survival of an idea and the possibility to inspire, be it unity or anarchy, and symbols are the best way for any idea to survive, as symbols are not concrete and can be analyzed in many ways by any one person. Perhaps this is why symbols are so important to the film--they get the audience thinking which, if one wishes to see the Sixth of November, it is imperative to do.