

EXTENDED ESSAY - ENGLISH B HL

GROUP 2 – CATEGORY 3 LITERATURE

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL “V FOR VENDETTA”

TOPIC: THE COMPARISON OF REVENGE AND JUSTICE

RESEARCH QUESTION: To what extent is the main character’s motives in the graphic novel V for Vendetta written by Alan Moore about revenge or justice?”

WORD COUNT: 3404

Content:

Content Page.....1

Introduction.....2-3

The Power of Symbols.....3-4-5-6-7

Vigilantism.....7-8

Freedom.....8

The Government.....9

V’s Speech.....10

Hero vs Anti-hero.....10-11

Conclusion.....12-13

References.....13

Introduction

“Revenge” and “justice” are the main elements that are portrayed in the graphic novel V for Vendetta by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd. It is important to determine to what extent the graphic novel is to be appealing to either of both these concepts in order to understand it fully. These terms are not obviously portrayed clearly enough to certainly know from which the novel is based on; justice or revenge? Thus, it baffles us that demands to question whether these terms are used in their real definitions or are they are used interchangeably? What do revenge and justice actually mean? Can both be misinterpreted in the novel as it is revealed? As revenge is another form of justice how is it possible to distinguish one from another?

When individuals are faced with wrongful doings, it comes to either act with justice or revenge. The word revenge is defined as the desire to repay a wrong, whereas justice is defined as just behavior or treatment. So, sometimes these two concepts can mislead us in the aspect of one being positive whereas the other negative or is it the other way round? Justice more likely is to correct the wrong doing whereas revenge is to take an act to be even. Justice and revenge are the two instinctive emotions of every living being and every living being from a bacterium to a human accommodates these emotions which are essential for survival. This situation will confuse us to define which emotion is taking place explicitly then. However, the judgements of which emotion is prevalent is indicated from which perspective is taken into consideration. A war between countries, an argument in council, even the conflict between a wife and a husband experience the aforementioned emotions between two parties but the emotion of either justice or

revenge differs not only because of the situation but also due to the perspective which the situation is perceived from. If these terms, these problem creators are crucial for us which we are familiar with, how come is it not that easy to define the emotion in action taking place?

V for Vendetta is a novel depicted with the acts of the protagonist V trying to either take revenge or correct wrongs with justice. V portrays himself as the symbol and the soldier of freedom, justice giver and a warrior. If we analyze his behaviors and empathize with him, it is obvious that he is just and does good. As a result, his acts are justifiable in the aspect of justice, but if we analyze from the perspective that counters this situation then it can be clearly stated that his behaviors are the representation of unjust and unethical, in other words revenge. So, the main character needs to be analyzed in the graphic novel along with other elements that are conveyed in the graphic novel.

Considering the aforementioned concepts, I have decided to discuss the graphic novel in terms of justice and revenge, leading up to the research question;

To what extent is the main character's motives in the graphic novel V for Vendetta written by Alan Moore about revenge or justice?"

The research question will explore these two aspects to determine from which perspective the graphic novel is aimed at; namely from the impact of the government, the power of the symbols, the themes vigilance and freedom, V's speech and lastly the protagonist as a hero vs anti-hero aspect which contribute to the overall message of the novel.

The Power of Symbols

There are many symbols that contribute to the meaning of either justice or revenge.

These symbols are;

a. The statue of Lady Justice:

One of the most vital symbols is the explosion of the Lady Justice statue. Lady Justice, itself has a very important meaning in our world as well as in the novel, its purpose is to represent justice. In the novel, although the presence of the Lady Justice statue is displayed high above the building, which basically symbolizes that the country is based on a solid justice system, the government does not display justice at all. The statue is also the representation of the government, ironically a government which is totally corrupted. The society is built upon a fake justice system, a so-called justice system. The explosion of Lady Justice statue is the message that is given by V that he will bring the justice with his own right ways by correcting the wrongdoings. He also aims to give the message that Lady Justice statue was not displaying its real purpose, for that reason demolishing the statue was to demolish the government's injustice as well.

b. "V" the symbol:

"V" first stands for V's identity as well as the vendetta the protagonist holds. Vendetta is a form of revenge and the symbol is a reminder of his past. For that reason, the vendetta the protagonist holds is the revenge for what someone has done to him in the past. When considering the definition from this aspect it is obvious that V is full of revenge so is the intention of his acts. Furthermore, the symbol "V" is also a symbol of rebel, it now does not only represent V himself but also the whole society. Not only

does this logo encircled in red express the thirst of blood V has as revenge for his vendetta but also the anger the public has towards the government. Thus, this symbol now reflects the emotion of the society against the government. In this way this logo now is the representation of the rebel along with the mask the public wears uniting everyone for one aim; justice. This symbol is the form of justice which the public takes action to fight for their freedom, not the grudge V individually has.

c. The mask:

The vital symbol is the mask which the protagonist wears throughout the novel. It first seems to be a way of V hiding his identity since he was badly burnt and to take revenge but then it becomes a representation of ideas; justice and freedom. A new form of the rebellion is represented with this mask. By wearing this mask, V becomes more than himself representing one fighting for freedom. So, his personal vendetta from revenge now is a representation of justice. The more important and complicated part is V puts his revenge personality to aside when he wears the mask and he switches to the justice side. He uses Guy Fawkes mask because he sees Guy Fawkes as his idol and he accepts him as the symbol of justice, the idea of the mask had a different purpose that turned out to be functioning for a different purpose now. It was the same symbol that originated from revenge but later on turning into justice. V also states in the novel that the mask he wears does not only pertain to him that is his revenge but more as an idea that is a representation of justice with many others adherence, 'Beneath this mask there is more than flesh. Beneath this mask there is an idea, Mr. Creedy, and ideas are bulletproof.'

d. Fire:

The illustration where V is shown surrounded by fire is a representation of his anger which also as destructive as fire. This illustration is in which V is vengeful displaying him in burning flames that suggests that this is the birth of his anger to take revenge. From this perspective, V cannot be considered as a freedom fighter but more as one who is full of fire and has thirst for destruction.

e. Roses

V uses roses as a representation of his own revenge which he marks after his own way of justice. Roses are associated with passion which is true, but the passion V holds is for revenge. After killing those who had caused harm, I mean his enemies, V puts a red rose on the dead bodies to commemorate them which contradicts with the act in itself. This act is not for respect but as a mark to show his brutality as roses have dangerous sides as well, the thorns. This indicates the rose has its negative sides with the thorns that no-one ever thinks of. On the other hand, this act may also indicate that his actions are such a piece of art; after all the murders he commits, it suggests that he is displayed as an artist who signs his lovely masterpiece with a rose. He intends to appeal to his audience so that they can admire the beauty of his masterpieces and in that way allowing others to justify his acts. Therefore, it depends from which perspective you look from to decide as which act takes place; to be admired by others that will respect him or just only to satisfy his desires of revenge?

f. The Dominoes

The illustration in which V builds up the letter V with the dominoes also suggests that his act is all about justice. The two lines combining at the very end to form the letter V

is the merging of the two emotions, revenge and justice. Focusing on independent illustrations that build up the tension suggests the overlapping of both two emotions into only one, but only one is dominant over the other; justice. Side by side built dominoes falling one over another also are the representation of each individual in the society and how all of them unite together for the aim of justice acting all together as one influencing the other to take action. The chain impact of each domino suggests that it first started with one emotion; V's revenge, but then all fighting for one aim; justice. The last domino which does not fall leaves the interpretation to us to decide upon which emotion is prevalent, but it is self-evident that it is again justice. Now, V leaves his revenge aside and acts along with the society.

Vigilantism

In the graphic novel, V portrays a vigilante character. Vigilantism is basically a term which is a double-edged sword. As it can be interpreted both negative and positive, it is essential to make judgements accordingly to the consequences it provides for the society. In other words, V is to be considered as a character who avenges for crime, especially the crime conducted by the government. He has an accumulated grudge from his past and lots of pain and bad memories remaining from the hospital. With all these points, he decides to do something to change his bad memories and past, but he knows that it is not possible, and in this situation 'revenge' plays the role. How he takes his revenge is by death, he kills many government officials and the rulers of the hospital which sets the fire of revenge on V, and he destroys the whole government which made V what he is today. This killing can also be considered as cleansing of a corrupted government for the betterment of the society. It may seem that these killings are an act

of violence but when you look from the perspective of terminating the harm these people did make is a way to accept this act as justice. He kills those who make the people suffer, not the ones who have been suffering from the oppressive government. In this way he also saves people's lives by freeing them from the oppression they have been going through. In short, he corrects the wrongdoings with the enforcement of justice in his revenge but for the justice for the society. His acts may be considered as unlawful but when considering the betterment of the society it is justifiable. For this reason, revenge and justice are used interchangeably for this situation.

Freedom

Freedom is most importantly the theme the graphic novel implicitly focuses on. It is the dominant and crucial theme that in the novel it is conveyed deliberately and this message has a very important role in distinguishing the two concepts whether all this is about justice or more as a personal intention. V tries to give the freedom to people which was taken from him years ago. The way that he uses to give people the freedom is in the middle of two perspectives which are revenge and justice. Fear among the citizens is created by the oppressive totalitarian government where injustice is prevalent. V as the anarchist freedom fighter encourages the people to stand for their rights as he stands for his own rights. He marks that the government not only is the enemy of his own revenge but also the enemies for the society as well. Instilling the idea of justice into the people is what actually what V wants, justice for all! In this way his revenge is fulfilled.

The Government

The government is a powerful government in terms of a totalitarian government where fear is at the front. This depiction of the government is a good example of dystopias. It suggests the terrible ruling of the government is not only the revenge of an individual grudge which V has but also the grudge of the public that cannot dare to utter out loudly of what they want; freedom. The society has already accepted the current situation and cannot do anything to change it. They comply with the government and surrender. In other words, they do not resist to the current rules and rulers. V totally disagrees this situation and he shows his disagreement by saying 'People should not be afraid of their government. Governments should be afraid of their people.' At the beginning, we see that there is curfew in the town and in the country and if someone tries to break the curfew, that person is punished by the police who keep watch around the town. This situation is totally a huge sign that society is not ruled by justice and freedom, and V supports the same idea that there is no justice in the society he lives in. His revenge for the vendetta is a way to combat for making things even for him. His encounter with Evey has triggered him to take revenge for others this time. The society does not resist to V as well because people do not have the habit to resist to someone or something, and they accept what he does and what he shows, and V decides to act with revenge to bring justice but at the end, the society has now the courage inspired by this one man to defend themselves, to fight for their freedom. The gathering of the crowds has also encouraged V to now turn his revenge into the benefit for the public. So, V's behaviors as revenge should suggest that his attitudes are for the sake of justice.

From this perspective, it is self-evident that the longing for freedom is in the hearts of the citizens and is what encourages V to turn his personal vendetta for the people who believe in to him. V supports the idea that the country lacks freedom and the government has a great control over the society. As Guy Fawkes is the hero of the past V now becomes a hero who promises justice and freedom.

V's Speech

The novel V for Vendetta is certainly assertive and an impressive. The reason why it is so assertive is, its political side is so clear and gives a message by using that perspective directly. In addition, V's speech whom he delivers the message to is also very effective and vital.

V tries to convey his ideas and beliefs with the statements about what is wrong within the country. He declares the negativity prevalent in the country; cruelty and injustice; intolerance and oppression. He also adds to the public that the only ones to blame is themselves whom he advises people to look into the mirrors to find the truth. It stands for a realization of the public and a wake up call for them to take action. Inviting them to stand aside him is a call for justice not revenge, so that his ideas become a part of the society to create justness. V aims to correct the wrong. Thus, we can say that V's behaviors and thoughts create a conflict as it targets his own enemies that are involved in this justice.

Hero vs Anti-hero

While justice is a process, only those who can supply the process's requirements can reach to justice. Sometimes, while a government cannot supply it, or the country's level is not enough for reaching to justice, someone from the society can arise and protect the country's values and say that he or she will bring the justice. V sees himself as hero and he talks just like a hero, for example this quote; 'Everybody is special. Everybody. Everybody is a hero, a lover, a fool, a villain. Everybody. Everybody has their story to tell.' The climax begins at this point.

The beginning of V's behaviors is revenge. He states that he will be the only hero who will bring the justice to people, but he is not approved as a hero at the beginning. At first V is displayed as a character who goes out at nights and kills people around his territory and acts just like a terrorist more than a hero, but can this at first be perceived as a protector. This beginning is totally the same with V's creation, he was born by revenge and the novel starts with revenge. For example, when the time V and Evey first meet, V kills the people who try to hurt Evey. This act is the combination of revenge and justice. His aim is helping someone who cannot help and protect herself, in other words bringing the justice, but his decision or way of helping her is not about justice, it is about revenge.

The last part of the novel is totally a good example for justice. V decides to save the country and bring justice and he wants Evey to put his dead body into a train which is full of dynamite and send it to the government building. This act is an act that only heroes would do to bring the justice. While revenge is a primitive and person's feeling,

this act is not about revenge because he sacrifices himself for his ideas, for his country, his people and for the future. At this stage, V becomes what he said to Evey before; 'ideas are bulletproof' and becomes a real hero, a hero which nobody can deny.

Conclusion

At the first look, revenge and justice might seem very different terms but actually they are generally used for the same situations and they bring the same results. In every situation, there are at least two different groups and those groups support different perspectives and ideas which means while a group of people say that revenge and justice cannot be used in the same way for the same aims, some people say that it is possible that they can be used.

According to the flow of events, character and symbols the reader determines the novel from which side is to taken into consideration, whether it is about revenge or justice. If the people, the reader can support V's side and empathize with him, then we can say that the message has been received. The graphic novel's flow of events is presented from the point of V which allows us to perceive the same thoughts and feelings he goes through; therefore, it is evident that the novel is all about an integration of revenge into justice but where justice can be more likely to be outstanding. For this reason, the reader's decision depends on V's acts and events and the line of novel' side; whether it is revenge or justice changes accordingly to V's inner feelings and inner side as we empathize with him more.

All things considered, the movie has been analyzed through different aspects that have an impact on the protagonist's motives, which first seem to be ambiguous but later on clearly indicates that V has gone through a metamorphosis from a terrorist to a justice seeker; who seeks for revenge but then for justice as he sees his enemies not only did harm to him but to others. In this way he tries to correct the wrongdoing in a way that may seem unlawful but justice requires sacrifices at times.

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