“The Only Verdict is Vengeance”

In a pessimistic view of society one isn’t shocked by the way people treat their fellows. Throughout history there have been wars, people wrongfully imprisoned, and mass murder. Horrible atrocities have occurred as far back as the history books can report. And with so much hate and terror in the world, it isn’t shocking in the slightest that people feel anger for the pain they have felt, for whatever reason. Revenge has become a basic human need - the need for justice, for things to be put back into balance. To make someone suffer like they’ve suffered. Just as all other emotions, desires and needs have appeared in all forms of fiction, so too the concept of revenge would naturally appear. The need for revenge, and the lengths one will go to achieve it, is presented masterfully in two very different mediums of fiction. These being the science fiction novel *The Stars My Destination* and the film “V for Vendetta,” based on the graphic novel of the same name. Through the use of the main characters, the concept of revenge is explored in similar ways, but with very different reactions by the respective character leads.

Gully Foyle is a man that the world has passed by. In every aspect of his life, he was in essence, a failure. Even in his official employment records, he was described a man with no skills and no plausible future worth. In the beginning of the novel *The Stars My Destination*, Foyle is shipwrecked in the middle of space, with minimal hope of survival. He threatens his own existence each time he leaves the safety of a small storage
locker, which has become a metaphorical (womb) and tomb for him. Every time he
leaves the figurative coffin, he risks his own life, just so he can have some hope of
survival. On one such outing, he spots what he believes to be an hallucination, his own
mind playing tricks upon him. He sees a spaceship heading his way, and he is quick to
realize that it is no hallucination. Hope fills the man and for a brief moment in time, he
experiences hope and faith. He believes that he will be saved as he excitedly fires flare
after flare, attempting to solicit the incoming ships attention. His hope and dreams are
crushed when the ship passes him by, leaving him alone in the cold, dark, emptiness of
space. Virtually the only emotions his fractured consciousness is left with are anger,
bitterness and determination. He vows at that moment to seek revenge upon the vessel
“Vorga-T: 1339”. Revenge at any cost.

Similarly, in the film and graphic novel V for Vendetta, we see the character of V
as a man who has been wronged. In a futuristic fascist society, set in Britain, any citizen
that is not the government’s idea of normal is sent to a resettlement camp; which echo’s
perhaps too vividly the concentration camps of World War II. The character of V was
interred at a particular camp located in Larkhill. Here the prisoners were tested upon with
different medical experiments. With the exception of V, the testing killed every
participant. In his case, his mental state is questioned, but he also gains many useful
attributes, including an increased intellect and strength. However, he becomes vengeful
against the experiments forced upon him and the other prisoners, eventually creating a
fire, which significantly burns his whole body, but enables his escape. After escaping, he
becomes somewhat of an underground freedom fighter, a vigilante; described by the
government as a terrorist who must be stopped at all costs. While planning a countrywide
social revolution, he manages to find time to seek out those who were responsible for the
events at Larkhill and exact his brand of vengeance.

Both V and Foyle are the only surviving characters of their respective prisons.
While Foyle was trapped upon a marooned ship in the middle of space, V was the only
prisoner to escape from Larkhill. Both characters use the resources around them to create
their own means of escape. Foyle, motivated by his anger and determination for
vengeance, studies various manuals that he finds in the confines of the spaceship. Using
the knowledge he gains, he is able to get his ship to accelerate into a spiral, sending it on
a crash course in the direction of Jupiter, eventually colliding into an asteroid, where he is
rescued by the “Scientific people.” In comparison, V uses his vast knowledge and the
resources available to him so that he can create the fire.

Luckily for both characters, they are able to escape from their respective prisons,
but not without severe consequences. Gulliver sends his ship into a spiral, his one hope of
survival now that rescue seems inconceivable. When his ship crashes onto an asteroid, he
comes face to face with humanity for the first time in months. The presence of the
scientific people at first seems to him a blessing, even though the people have their own
strange ways that could intimidate anyone. By a cruel twist of fate, they brand Gully with
the only name they know him by. That name being N♂mad, for that was the name of the
spaceship he traveled in and it was the only name the scientific people knew him by. But
fate wasn’t done with Gulliver, not in the slightest, for another marking the scientific
people ‘blessed’ him with would haunt him for the rest of the novel. The Maori mask
they tattooed to his face consisted of “stripes and swirls” (Bester, page 27).
Even though he rids himself of the tattoos to some extent later in the novel, the impression they give a passer by never truly leaves. When he experiences any heightened sense of emotion, the tattoos reappear, resembling the stripes of a tiger. This mask, placed upon him by his supposed saviors, is something he is never really rid of. He has no choice in the matter and would be more then content to rid himself permanently of his inflictions. Like Gulliver, V has consequences for his escape. The fire which enabled his escape from Larkhill left him badly burned, so much so that he has severe scaring all over his entire body. V uses the aid of a Guy Fawkes mask to shield his disfigurement, for nowhere in the graphic novel or film is his face revealed. Just like Gulliver, he wears a mask, though that is a very vague comparison.

Both characters become fueled by the need for their own personal vengeance, both refusing to let anything come between their goals. Gully’s journey throughout the entire novel is towards revenge, driven by the need to find Vorga-T: 1339 and its crew. He tries to disguise himself as a student of jaunting, using the time during the lessons to formulate a means of attack against the spacecraft. His plan fails miserably and he is apprehended by the authorities. After refusing to relay information about the whereabouts of Nomad, he is detained in a prison cell. Eventually, with the aid of a fellow prisoner, he skillfully escapes the confines of prison.

Foyle’s capture by the authorities and detainment is remarkably similar to V’s original confinement in Larkhill. Though little is known about who V was prior to his arrival at the resettlement camp, it can be assumed that he was not the image of perfection that the fascist society imagined. It is for that reason and that reason alone that he is thrown into the horrendous institution located at Larkhill. It is impossible to know
whether V was a criminal prior to his capture or simply confined because of his
nationality or his personal orientation. Just like Foyle, as stated earlier, V uses his own
personal cunning to create his own means of escape from his prison.

However, for every comparison between the two great personas in fiction, there
are even more contrasting elements. While both have very similar situations in some
cases, the characters approach them in different ways. For instance, Foyle starts out
seeking revenge upon an actual object, the spaceship Vorga. While he also intends to
obtain revenge against the crew members of the ship, all his plans connect back to the
pursuit of revenge of Vorga, at any cost. The character of V does indeed seek revenge,
but his revenge is against institutions, Larkhill and the fascist regime that not only is
permitting, but encouraging these experimentations. He seeks revenge against all of the
people who helped to enforce the institution’s creation and operation. But V isn’t just
seeking revenge for himself; he is seeking revenge in the name of all the prisoners of
Larkhill. While Foyle has every right to be angry that he was passed by, V is trying to
undo a much greater wrong. That wrong being the unjust experimentation and slaughter
of innocent people. That’s what separates V from Gully Foyle, he may be out for his own
personal vendetta, but he seeks it for all those who no longer can. It is important to note
that V also seeks to enlighten and inspire the people of Britain to move towards change.
Gully has no other intentions through out the novel; he is simply driven by revenge. V
has other motives, striving to obtain the overthrow of this corrupt government, while
seeking justice at the same time.

Then of course, there is the concept of the characters masks. As stated earlier,
yield both bare masks through out their stories. But it is important to note how different
they are from one another. V’s mask is a mask he enforces upon himself, almost as a shield from reality. His mask hides the deformities beneath but also helps to create his persona. As the character of V is more of an idea than a man, it is impossible to separate the mask from the character. They are one in the same, much like the character of Erik in the *Phantom of the Opera*. But if V wishes, he could discard this mask. It is simply an accessory to his entire ensemble. However, Gully’s mask cannot be removed. His attempts to remove the Maori mask at later points in the novel are not effective, as every time he feels intense emotion, his face turns red, causing the stripes to reappear along with the name N♂mad that was branded on his forehead. Gully does not have the “luxury” that V has; he has no choice when it comes to his tattoos. One could note that the two would probably be rather content if they could switch situations. Gully would love to have the option to remove the tattoos, presumably forever, while V would love to have a mask permanently shielding his disfigurement.

As one can see, revenge is a basic human desire, one that can sometimes not be ignored. While Gully Foyle and the character of V often have similar situations, the characters respond in very different ways. Foyle spends all his time and energy on the pursuit of revenge, it is all he is driven by. Revenge for a wrong done to him to and him only. In contrast, V seeks revenge for injustices that were against him as well as every other prisoner of Larkhill. While he is determined to achieve vengeance, he has other goals that he strives for, making him remarkably different from the character of Foyle. Though they both have different ways of approaching their need for revenge, they often share similar experiences and traits that can not be denied.
Works Cited

