

ENGLISH

V for Vendetta and 1984

A dystopia is an imaginary place, state or condition where the people lead dehumanised and often fearful lives. The film *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2006) and the novel *1984* by George Orwell both explore the concepts of a dystopian society. The citizens in these dystopian societies are oppressed by the totalitarian rule of their governments who use propaganda to control them. Individuality is restricted. Like all dystopian texts, both offer a message or warning to the society in which they were composed.

In *V for Vendetta*, the citizens are oppressed by the control that their government has over their lives. This is shown in the beginning where Evey is about to get raped because she was outside of her curfew. As well as imposing a curfew, the government control the population through propaganda and the media that the population is exposed to. Sutler says, "...this message must be read in every newspaper, heard on every radio and seen on every television. This message must resound throughout the whole Interlink. I want everyone to remember why they need us." The government is in control of all sources of media, including the state run British Television Network. Everything is 'censor-approved,' highlighting the power that the media has over the population.

Similarly, in *1984*, the Party aim "to control life at all its levels." This totalitarian power is achieved through propaganda, including slogans like "Big Brother is Watching You," to convince the population that they are constantly being watched. Their thoughts and actions then become oppressed, as shown through Winston- "it was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were in any public place or within the range of a telescreen... the smallest thing could give you away." Winston's thoughts convey the fear and oppression of the population, as they believe that they are constantly under surveillance. Thus the Party achieves totalitarian control over their lives.

V for Vendetta also explores the dystopian concept of restricted individuality. When the government first come into power, they purged the groups in society whom they deemed 'undesirable'- the minorities. "Immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, terrorists. Disease-ridden degenerates. They all had to go." This demonstrates the Government's aim to destroy all those who are 'different', so that everyone is the same- that their values and beliefs are identical. Valerie, one of those who was purged says, "I remember how 'different' became dangerous. I still don't understand why they hate us so much." The society becomes a dystopia because it is dangerous to express individual thoughts, actions and beliefs.

In *1984*, the Party also aims to restrict the individuality of its citizens. O'Brien tells Winston, "You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty and fill you with ourselves." The Party wants to remove all individual characteristics of the population and fill them with the Party's own ideologies, morals and values. "Never again will you be capable of ordinary human feeling. Everything inside you will be dead. Never again will you be capable of love, or friendship, or joy of living, or laughter, or curiosity, or courage, or integrity." Those qualities are what make humans individual, and by removing these symbolically, the population is made to be identical- thus making it easier for the Party to exert control and influence over their lives.

Like all dystopian texts, the way in which the concept of dystopia is explored is related to the message that each composer is aiming to convey through their text. This message is relevant to the culture in which the text was composed.

In *V for Vendetta*, the message conveyed through its depiction of a dystopia is similar to the message that *V* tells the population- "If you're looking for the guilty...you need only look into a mirror...you let fear get the best of you...and in your panic you turned to the now High Chancellor...all he demanded was your silent, obedient consent." *V* emphasises that the citizens are the ones responsible for creating a dystopian society; they allowed the government the power

over their lives. He says, "People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people." V's message of holding the government accountable to the people emphasises the contemporary value of democracy. He implies that the citizens of the country are the ones who should hold the real power and that the government should be answerable to its people, not the other way around.

Likewise, 1984 also conveys a message that is relevant to the culture in which it was composed. Orwell composed 1984 in 1949, after WWII. The world, particularly Orwell who was a journalist at that time, had been exposed to the brutal, totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany (under Hitler) and Stalin's Soviet Union. Orwell's bleak depiction of dystopian London reflects the way in which it looked during WWII- war torn after many bombing raids. Orwell's depiction of the way in which the Party achieves power through propaganda reflects the British government's use of propaganda in WWII. The Ministry of Truth in 1984 represents the Ministry of Information during WWII. Through his depiction of the Party, Orwell warns his society to be careful of propaganda and its power over thoughts. His depiction of Syme, who is all eager to accept the Party's principles- "it's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words"- reminds society not to be gullible, to not allow themselves to be ruled by totalitarian power.

In both texts, the oppressive governments both come into power through a crisis or disaster. In V for Vendetta, it is a deadly virus, reflecting the bird flu pandemics of the early 21st century. Thus the people of the culture in which the text was received are able to relate to McTeigue's message. In 1984, the Party achieved power through the war and the continuity of the war- "war is peace." This relates to the post war context in which Orwell was writing for.

In conclusion, the film V for Vendetta (James McTeigue, 2006) and the novel 1984 by George Orwell both explore the concepts of a dystopian society. They depict a society where citizens are oppressed by the totalitarian rule of their governments who use propaganda to control them. Individuality is restricted by the government, allowing them power over the population's thoughts, beliefs and actions. Like all dystopian texts, both offer a message to its audience, reflective of the culture in which it was composed.