1984 And V For Vendetta: Comparative Essay

As humans, we all have a desire for knowledge, to be able to understand what we are told, and to have the ability and means to question what we want to question. The concept of knowledge is thoroughly explored in both George Orwell's 1984 and James McTeigue's film adaptation of V for Vendetta, through the dystopian world spaces created and the language devices used. Both composers are attempting to draw the audience's attention to the impacts of suppression of knowledge in society both on individuals and the collective, whilst consequently emphasising the power that individual thoughts hold in maintaining humanity.

Orwell composed 1984 using third person limited narration, focalised through the protagonist Winston. This, while allowing us a clear insight into Winston's individual thoughts, presents the reader with deeper understanding through direct insight into the totalitarian society of Oceania. The emotional connection we develop towards Winston through this narration enhances our desire for him to maintain his individuality through his conscious thoughts, heightening the readers response in regard to suppression of knowledge within the text.

The control of information that the governing party utilises in 1984 is portrayed through the creation of the language 'Newspeak'. Orwell's purpose in forming Newspeak, is to focus the reader's attention to the anomalies of Winston's world, as rather than attempting to expand communication, is stripping society of words and their meanings and consequently stripping individuals of possible thoughts. This concept is discussed in the novel by Syme, who asks Winston 'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought?'. The rhetorical question as well as the use of the personal pronoun 'you' creates a feeling in the responder that the question is directed at them, forcing them to personally analyse the representation of suppression of knowledge in the text and draw a conclusion on the effects on the individual.

In the film V for Vendetta, the authoritarian government, Norse fire, supresses the knowledge of its citizens by 'coercing their conformity,' specifically through the altering of news, which is also represented in 1984 through Winston's job of rewriting what is needed so that it aligns with the parties daily claims. The news broadcasts in V for Vendetta construct a version of the truth, positioning the collective to believe what the government wants them to. The head of the propaganda department states 'Our job is to report the news, not fabricate it. That's the governments job,' highlighting the paradoxical nature of the governments need for collective control so that they are able to simply manipulate the individuals into credulous conformity.

On the other hand, each text critically depicts the indestructible strength of knowledge and personal thoughts, highlighted in 1984 though Winston's Diary and the party's actions to torture offenders of 'thoughtcrime'. V for Vendetta illustrates this with the symbolism of V's mask and the recurring notion that ideas cannot be killed.

Winston's diary is a significant display of the power of knowledge as it allows him to record his thoughts, creating a private piece of evidence that is unalterable by the party so long as they are unaware of its existence. As Winston comes to realise later in the novel, evidence has the power to 'blow the party to atoms,' explicitly representing the power of his personal knowledge

through the metaphorical destruction of authority as a result of the possibility of evidence inducing a collective awakening. Whilst Winston is tortured by O’Brien, he asks ‘why bother to torture me?’ as he expects his future entails the fate of vaporisation. O’Brien then replies with ‘We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us: so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him … we make the brain perfect before we blow it out.’ The use of multiple short sentences and punctuation forms a heavy feeling of tension to overcome the readers. The violent imagery positions the responders to scrutinise the power of a single thought, especially in a world space in which society is depicted to be so credulous and uniform.

In V for Vendetta, V himself represents the power of knowledge and individuals conscious to the truth. V asserts ‘Beneath this mask there is more than flesh, beneath this mask there is an idea… and ideas are bulletproof.’ This is a highly symbolic metaphor as V never takes his mask off towards the camera, representing that a person is more than just their physical features, but instead what shapes them is their knowledge, their beliefs and the ideas they fight for. The scene of collective rebellion against the government is filmed with a wide camera angle, emphasising the extent of societal consciousness on the oppressive ways of the government. (SLIDE) Characters including Valerie and the young girl who was shot, appear in this scene forming a physical representation of one of V's most dominant motifs, that you cannot kill an idea. By each person wearing V’s mask it symbolises that anyone can embody V, as anyone can maintain the ideas of freedom and truth of knowledge that V exemplified.

The human experience of knowledge is thoroughly represented in both 1984 and V for Vendetta with the language techniques and forms used. Both composers significantly achieve their purpose in cautioning responders to understand the value that knowledge holds in preserving individuality and societal freedoms.