

# Gender Dynamics and Female Empowerment in Alan Moore's *V For Vendetta*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 15 Oct 2024</p> <p>Revised on: 12 Nov 2024</p> <p>Accepted on: 19 Nov 2024</p> <p>©2024 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords</b> – <i>graphic novel, dystopian fiction, oppression, patriarchy, gender roles.</i></p>	<p>Set against the backdrop of a dystopian England ruled by a totalitarian regime, the graphic novel <i>V for Vendetta</i> explores how patriarchal structures are both exploited and reinforced by authoritarian systems to oppress women. Through Evey's journey, the graphic novel critiques traditional gender roles and highlights the insidious ways in which these roles perpetuate subjugation. Evey's transformation represents a feminist narrative of empowerment, one that challenges the male savior trope and underscores the importance of individual agency in the fight against oppression. This paper examines the portrayal of gender roles in Alan Moore and David Lloyd's graphic novel <i>V for Vendetta</i>, focusing on the character of Evey Hammond and her transformation from a passive victim to an empowered agent of rebellion.</p>

Dystopian fiction is usually a social satire of the evils of totalitarianism and uncontrolled power. These stories focus on the erosion of rights and freedoms, the distortion of truth and the suppression of dissent in totalitarian societies. Due to the liberal use of overemphasized real-life scenarios, dystopian fiction enables the reader to render socio-political and socio-ethical analyses over their own civilizations and potential directions. Through realistic and often unsettling descriptions of authoritarian rule, these stories serve as potent warnings against complacency and the gradual erosion of fundamental freedoms. The hazards of authoritarian rule and the degradation of civil freedoms are common themes in dystopian fiction. Classical examples of such fiction include *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and George Orwell's *1984*.

Not just the classical works, but the comic and graphic novel genre has also explored such themes. The Graphic novels have proved to be a captivating

medium for delving into intricate human rights issues, providing a unique blend of visual art and story that heightens the emotional and intellectual effect of these cautionary tales. Graphic novels may illustrate the dismal reality of authoritarianism, persecution, and the loss of individual freedoms in an immediate and engrossing manner by combining striking images with brief text. The visual aspect of the graphic medium improves the story by allowing readers to feel the psychological weight of surveillance, control, and revolt, as well as providing symbolic images of power and resistance. For this reason, graphic novels are a perfect medium in which to tell dystopian fiction because the artwork emphasizes how dismal exists in society controlled by dictators. One of the examples of the dystopian graphic novel is *V for Vendetta* written by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd. The novel imagines a dystopian future in England in which a totalitarian

dictatorship has tightened its grasp on all aspects of life.

*V for Vendetta* was initially serialised between 1982 and 1985 in the British anthology *Warrior* before published as a complete graphic novel. What the novel presents is a bleak and enticing picture of the England of the future in the hands of the Nosefire party. The strict control of the population is maintained by means of oppression in every aspect of life with the help of censorship and other oppressive means. The authority rules with the help of strict control, censorship, and oppression of freedom in any possible way. The main story revolves around two major characters whose lives become inextricably linked to the larger struggle against this oppressive state: V, a masked wrestler, who covers his face behind the anonymous Guy Fawkes mask is a symbol of opposition to tyranny as is Evey Hammond, who turns from a captor to a ward of V, and later a symbol of women's emancipation. The oppressive society in the novel where people are constantly watched, and their freedoms limited offers a near perfect backdrop for analyzing power and subversion.

In this respect, the story describes the complexities of women's positioning in such society with reference to Evey Hammond. Evey's experience represents a significant metamorphosis. She started as an apparently powerless victim of her circumstances before evolving into a symbol of rebellion and transformation, representing the possibility for individual empowerment in the face of oppression. This paper examines the portrayal of gender roles in *V for Vendetta*, focusing on Hammond's evolution from a vulnerable, passive character to an empowered agent of rebellion. By examining her journey and the feminist themes embedded in her development, this paper attempts to highlight how the graphic novel critiques traditional gender roles while illustrating the broader implications of female agency in a dystopian context.

In the dystopian future of *V for Vendetta*, the totalitarian governments' iron fists go beyond physical control, penetrating into the fabric of societal structures to relentlessly oppress and consolidate women's subjugation. Women are not simply sidelined; they are purposefully degraded to instruments of state control, with their lives and

bodies serving only the regime's interests. As Simone de Beauvoir says in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, "she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the other" (16) is relevant to Evey's early characterization. Her portrayal, typified by weakness and reliance on masculine figures for protection, reveals the subtle ways in which totalitarian governments use and perpetuate traditional gender norms to preserve power. Evey Hammond, at the beginning of the story, is a tragic representation of the deeply rooted cultural rules that define women in this repressive dystopia.

Indeed in *V for Vendetta*, women are on the sharp end of the mechanized state control. Evey's weakness is not just one of her personality features; it is resulted from the world she has been living in. She lives in a dangerous environment and a possibility to bring change is always accompanied by risk of the regime's viciousness. This constant anxiety creates a form of dependency where she has to feel protected by those she feels are strong, and in this narrative, that is the male characters. Meral Erer suggested in her article that "there are two different representations of women in *V for Vendetta*. In one, women are domestic and they are victimized to manage household chores and objectified to be sexually attractive for their husbands. In the other, women are obliged to prostitute themselves in the streets in order to make a living. In many ways, women are in need of men's power to stay alive and to satisfy their needs" (37).

This dependence, however, indicates a more sinister facet of the regime's control: cultural indoctrination that drives women to accept victimization as an inherent part of their existence. Evey's first act of disobedience, stealing a kiss, quickly developed into a fatal encounter with the ubiquitous police. This brief interaction highlights the vulnerable position of women in this dystopian world. This indicates the regime's intolerance for even slight violations, particularly by those viewed as the most vulnerable and so in need of surveillance. Evey's anxiety is obvious at this juncture, underscoring her lack of agency and the very real danger that women face when they seek to oppose, even modestly, the repressive confines of the patriarchal system. Moore and Lloyd's portrayal of Evey's experience offers a chilling glimpse into the regime's control

mechanisms. Violence, or its constant threat, essentially becomes a method of preserving order; a constant and visible warning of the consequences of rebellion. Women are already socially excluded from power and it is for such women their lives and bodily existence becomes represented as useful to the state for the purpose of depowering the populace through force and obedience.

Simone de Beauvoir says, "She is determined and differentiated in relation to a man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the other"(5). Evey's encounters with male characters, particularly early in the novel, highlight the profoundly rooted patriarchal tendencies that shape *V for Vendetta's* dystopian universe. Even within a resistance movement purportedly committed to combating injustice, old gender norms persist in subtle but strong ways. These connections are frequently characterized as loving and protective, yet also serve to perpetuate Evey's initial passivity and reliance, mirroring how women are stereotyped as requiring male supervision or protection. In this setting, Evey is frequently portrayed as a submissive figure whose road to self-discovery is facilitated by men's actions and decisions.

A good example of such portrayal is her relationship with Gordon who is also a member of the resistance. Gordon shows genuine concerns for Evey, but it is too much of a paternalistic interaction, a subject that is dominant in many patriarchal societies which portray women as vulnerable and weak and do not allow them to have any power. He becomes a caring figure, who removes danger from her life and for a brief time makes her feel safe. However, this protective approach while appearing noble is in fact, reinstating the patriarchal positioning of Gordon as the protector and Evey as the helpless women who needs to be saved. This struggle between care and control exemplifies the subtle ways in which patriarchal standards may endure even inside liberation organizations, implying that effective resistance must also include fighting deeply embedded gender roles. Furthermore, the ever-present threat of violence perpetrated by the regime exacerbates Evey's vulnerability to violence. Thus, the constant possibility of becoming a victim of the state's brutality casts a lot of pressure on her and

makes her feel powerless and dependent. This fear which has been put into the heart of women and, nursed by the patriarchal societies is meant to enslave women, to domesticate them to bow to the authorities however cruel they are.

Evey's relationship with V, the enigmatic man who first saves her from the regime's grasp, adds a complicated and highly nuanced dynamic to her quest of self-discovery. V first emerges as a symbol of hope, revolt, and opposition to the oppressive powers who govern their bleak society. He provides Evey a route out of her life of dread and compliance, literally saving her from the regime's merciless police. At first look, he represents the concept of the liberator: a change agent dedicated to deconstructing the fascist system that has destroyed individuality and freedom. Though, after watching their development throughout the series it becomes clear that while V served as an inspiration for Evey, a driving force that helped her to change her life and essentially become reborn, there is still much more to acknowledge about their relationship.

V is inspiration and limitation to Evey's development at the same time. His teachings, which imply freedom and rebellion, awaken the rebellious spirit in her, necessary to bring the change, based on the principles of individualism. He takes her to read the papers of revolutionist and philosophers, endowing her with means to dismantle ideas which shaped her reality. Nevertheless, his organization of her confinement and his scheme for her deliberate emotional influence raises serious doubts about his role as liberator. He becomes a stand-in for the patriarchal systems he professes to be dismantling, exerting control over Evey while attempting to empower her. His guidance, while necessary for Evey's development, is not totally transparent or selfless, and his influence over her life represents a conflict between the principles of freedom he espouses and the power he wields over her path.

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confinement and his scheme for her deliberate emotional influence raises serious doubts about his role as liberator. Evey is driven to her breaking point during this ordeal, fearing she would die as a result of her resistance against the state. This encounter, rather than shattering her spirit, serves as a furnace for her metamorphosis. Evey is subjected to cruel questioning and torture, robbed of her identity and the illusion of protection, forcing her to confront the raw, repressive essence of her world and the depths of her own strength. Evey's enlightenment occurred during this key moment of stress.

One of the most memorable moments of the novel occurs shortly after Evey was liberated from the psychological prison V built for her. Evey stands in the rain naked, with arms crossed across her chest feeling every inch of the drop on her naked body. At that moment Evey proclaims: "everything's so different" (172). Rain symbolises her rebirth and freedom. In the face of unspeakable abuse, devoid of all external support and the apparent safety of masculine figures, she discovers a source of inner power and agency she never realized she possessed. In its attempt to break her, the dictatorship unintentionally sets her free, destroying the bonds of fear and cultural conditioning that held her captive. Evey emerges from the crucible not undamaged, but reborn, her soul tempered by fire and her determination strengthened.

Evey's transformation goes beyond her personal experience to serve as a compelling symbol for women's ongoing battle against oppression throughout history. Despite the complications of their connection, Evey eventually internalizes the substance of V's message, realizing that genuine empowerment cannot be handed but must be sought from within. She removes the skin of the passive, dependant woman and takes a more direct part in the struggle against oppression. Her path exemplifies a greater feminist theme of self-discovery and autonomy, emphasizing that genuine emancipation necessitates the destruction of both exterior oppressive structures and the internalized ideas and expectations that restrict women's potential.

The concept of becoming is critical in feminist theory, for understanding how people, particularly women, navigate oppressive institutions. Evey's journey may be regarded as a process of becoming. She is not born

with a predetermined identity; she shapes it through her experiences and choices. Her decision to assume the mantle of V at the conclusion of the novel is her ultimate act of self-definition, a rejection of the roles imposed on her by both the dictatorship and the men in her life. Evey's path aggressively challenges traditional ideas of femininity and power. She challenges and, eventually, resists cultural assumptions that would limit her to subservient and dependent positions. Evey's empowerment is also a critique of the male saviour cliché, which is prevalent in dystopian literature and superhero stories. While V initially serves as a mentor and guide, Evey's development shows that genuine emancipation cannot be conferred by an external figure, regardless of their intentions. Her transition stresses the value of human agency, demonstrating how women must regain their power on their own terms.

In *V for Vendetta*, Evey Hammond's transformation from a fragile, submissive heroine to a symbol of revolt and autonomy provides a fascinating examination of gender, power, and resistance. Through her change, the graphic novel challenges both totalitarian governments' political tyranny and patriarchal norms that strive to limit women to subservient positions. Evey's experience serves as a reminder that genuine empowerment necessitates not just the destruction of outward systems of control, but also the dismantling of internalized ideas that support such systems. The feminist themes in *V for Vendetta* extend beyond its dystopian setting, providing vital insights into power relations and resistance in real-world movements for gender equality. Evey's legacy as a symbol of female empowerment highlights the continuing resilience of the human spirit, particularly that of women, in the face of injustice. Finally, *V for Vendetta* not only criticizes dictatorship but also questions traditional gender roles, providing a compelling story of resistance and self-discovery. Through Evey Hammond's transforming journey, the novel emphasizes the possibility of individual strength in the face of structural oppression, making it a timeless and current investigation of power, gender, and freedom.

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