

Evocation and Performance:

A Study of Masking in *Batman* and *V for Vendetta*

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Sammendrag

I denne oppgaven analyserer jeg bruken av masker i tegneserier om Batman og i *V for Vendetta*.

Dette gjelder både den fysiske masken, og *maskering* i en videre forstand. Poenget mitt er at måten fortellingene om 'Batman' og 'V' bruker masker og forkledninger tjener en hensikt, både innad i deres egne verdner, og overfor leserne, og mitt formål med oppgaven er å undersøke om det er mulig å trekke noen mer allmenngyldige slutninger om maskering fra mine observasjoner.

I første kapittel tar jeg for meg Batmans maskering. Jeg argumenterer for at måten han bruker sitt kostyme henger sammen med måten han utfører sin superheltvirksomhet, og at begge disse er virkemidler som påvirker både hans forhold til sine medfigurer og hans forhold til sine lesere.

Kjernen i dette resonnementet er at Batmans maskering gjør hans menneskelighet ugjenkjennelig (*unrecognizable*) blant sine medfigurer, og avhengigheten av denne strategien gjør ham desto mer menneskelig ovenfor sine lesere, ettersom den kommer av en mangel på superkrefter.

I andre kapittel undersøker jeg bruken av maskering i *V for Vendetta*. Jeg argumenterer for at Vs maskering er et virkemiddel som kaster en teatralisk glans over ødeleggelsene han forårsaker, og forvandler dem til forestillinger. Dette henger sammen med at fortellingens konflikt beror seg på at de fascistiske styresmaktene har etablert seg som eneste gyldige talerør, og undertrykker alle andre uttrykk (eller 'fortellinger' (*narratives*)) enn deres egne. Deres verdensbilde utgjør en usannferdig fasade som i seg selv fungerer som en slags maske ovenfor befolkningen. Vs agenda er å velte disse styresmaktene ved å punktere denne fasaden, og åpne for en retur av mangfold blant uttrykk. Dermed er uttrykk og maskering knyttet til både hans midler og hans hensikt.

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Introduction

Comics, Costumes and Masking

Comic book narratives are currently enjoying immense popularity, in no small part thanks to a recent resurgence of comic book film adaptations: according to site 'Box Office Mojo', six of the twenty highest box office grosses of all time are superhero films based on comics (Box Office Mojo).

However, this sort of adaptations has raised certain issues around the treatment of its subject matter, one of which became particularly salient with the release of the film *X-Men* in the year 2000. Whereas the original comic book characters wear their characteristic blue and yellow spandex costumes, the filmmakers decided to abandon this design in favor of a more uniform, black leather wardrobe. This caused criticism from fans of the comics, who felt a disconnect between the characters on the page and those on the screen. They argued that the original costume designs served a purpose which the filmmakers ignored: the bright colors of the suits conveying a differentness which ties into the comics' recurring theme of alienation. The costumes' wearers are, after all, mutants who are shunned and feared by the general population because of their congenital superpowers.

This argument indicates that costumes serve an important function, especially in the world of comics. Due to the medium's inherently visual nature, the expressive potential of a character's appearance is emphasized, and as clothing is the outermost layer of a character's appearance, this too receives special attention.

In addition to clothing, the visual emphasis grants the facial region particular importance as well. Art historian and -theorist Hans Belting, in his 2017 book *Face and Mask: A Double History* (originally published in German in 2013), highlights the importance of the face as a vehicle of expression: he deems the face “our social part”, whereas “our body belongs to nature”. He also highlights the face as a “sign of identity”, and argues a connection between the evolution of the face as a communicative tool and the development of individuality (Belting 2017, pp. 2-4). So essential is the face to Belting’s view on humanity that he argues that “[it] is more than a body part, for it acts as a proxy or *pars pro toto* for the entire body” (Belting 2017, p. 18, emphasis in original). According to his observations, people’s attention will instinctively be drawn towards the faces of the person they assess. Belting himself does not study comics specifically, but rather more typical anthropological artefacts such as portraits and burial masks. However, these are related to comics due to their inherently visual natures, and thus, I find his observations applicable to my analyses nonetheless. Indeed, what makes comics stand out in this respect, however, is its history with masked characters.

Since their rise to prominence in the 1930’s, superhero comics have been a central genre in the comics medium, and many of its prominent superheroes were indeed masked. Scholars Barbara Brownie and Danny Graydon have taken note of this, and in their 2016 book *The Superhero Disguise: Identity and Disguise in Fact and Fiction*, they analyze several instances of masking in superhero comics. Their notion of masking, however, extends beyond the confines of the literal face; they argue that “[r]egardless of whether it covers his face, the superhero costume is a kind of mask” (Brownie and Graydon 2016), as it ultimately serves much the same purpose as a mask does. Brownie and Graydon’s claim may appear contradictory to Belting’s notion of face as *pars pro toto* for the body (how can a clothed body represent the face when the face already

represents the body?), but I argue that the solution to this apparent contradiction lies in the notion of costume functioning as an *extension* of the mask. The costume does not represent the face as such, but instead draws the perceiver's attention away from it and thus usurps the face's role as what Belting refers to above as a "sign of identity". Because of this similarity to the mask, in terms of how they function on the face, I consider *mask* and *costume* devices which facilitate a process of *masking*. Furthermore, I propose a *synecdochic* relationship between the two concepts *mask* and *costume*, and the process of *masking*. What this means is that the whole, here understood as the process of *masking*, is represented by its parts, namely the devices *costume* and *mask*. As I will go on to argue throughout the thesis, the acts of masked characters also sometimes bolster or facilitate the function of the mask, and therefore I argue that these, too, warrant consideration when assessing the process of *masking*. The practical effect of this synecdochic relationship, is that a character who is masked or otherwise disguised, is attempting to achieve a certain effect which can be analyzed.

Batman and Masking

One such prominent masked character I will examine is Batman. He first saw the light of day in the 27th issue of the series *Detective Comics*, published on March 30, 1939 (*cover dated* May 1930, cf. discussion on p. 11). Today, Batman is a household name, and his 79 years in the spotlight stand as testament to his staying power. Batman's mask and symbol, and the contour of his cloaked figure are universally recognized designs.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I examine the Batman character and his relationship to his attire. I argue that his disguise, of which the most prevalent feature is his mask, is an essential device,

both facilitating the character's widespread popularity *extradiegetically* (outside of the story's own reality), and functioning as a tool in his vigilante endeavor *intradiegetically* (inside the story's reality).

Specifically, I claim that Batman's design (both appearance-wise and generally) is engineered towards manipulation of *recognizability*. I propose that two kinds of *recognizability* exist which are relevant to my treatment of the character: *discerning recognizability* and *reflexive recognizability*. The former is concerned with a perceiver's ability to identify the character if shown or alluded to, and the latter is concerned with a perceiver's ability to recognize part of *themselves* in the character. What Batman's design does, I argue, is to deny *reflexive recognizability* of his humanity *intradiegetically*. To explain how this works, I draw on aforementioned scholar Hans Belting's understanding of the correlation between *eidolon*, *kolossos* and *body*, as an analytical framework.

In essence, the *eidolon* is an impression manifested in one's imagination, the *kolossos* is the real objects which represent the *eidolon*, and the *body* is the person who envisions the *eidolon* and gives it shape in the form of the *kolossos*. In Batman's case, his alter ego, Bruce Wayne, is the *body*, his costume and M.O., which are extensions of his mask, constitute his *kolossos*, and the *eidolon* is the supernatural entity he tries to evoke. As the other characters in Batman's universe are denied affirmation of his humanity, and he is instead seen as a supernatural figure, he gains a significant psychological advantage over them.

Batman's readers, on the other hand, are wise to his strategy, and the evocation his masking facilitates does not work *extradiegetically*. It is common knowledge among his readership that Batman has no superpowers, and that this is why he relies so heavily on masking as a tactic. This

awareness in fact *bolsters* his *reflexive recognizability* among his readers, which, I argue is a significant part of his popular appeal.

Batman's popularity has, in turn, contributed to the character's widespread *discerning recognizability*: most pop-culture savvy people can identify the figure from his emblem or his cowl. I argue, however, that this form of recognizability is bolstered by the design of the character's costume as well. In keeping with the function of the costume specified in the *synecdoche*-discussion above, the shape of Batman's attire draws attention away from his facial features, which gives his dehumanized shape prominence when perceivers discern his identity. An effect of this is that as long as they stay true to these elements, creators of Batman narratives have looser reins in terms of the rest of the character's design. Thus, throughout his lifespan, some intriguingly diverging Batman-portrayals have emerged. Not only does his physical appearance change, however, as many iconic 'Batmen' exhibit diverging personality traits as well. I argue that this too is facilitated by the strong *discerning recognizability* conveyed by the character's masking. Furthermore, I claim that such a wide range of depictions increases the potential for *extradiegetic reflexive recognizability*, merely because the increased variation offers the readers a wider range of values with which to identify.

This large array of different representations warrants a comment on the history of the character's evolution. Author and historian Søren Hemmingsen and comic book expert Morten Søndergård provide a brief summary in their 2009 book *Batman: Masken og Manden – En Biografi*. The initial Batman from the 1940's is described as "surprisingly similar to that of the present" (Hemmingsen and Søndergård 2009, p. 24).¹ However, a shift took place in the 1950's: due to a

¹ This and all following quotations from Hemmingsen and Søndergård are translated from Danish by myself.

controversial book published in 1954 by psychiatrist Fredric Wertham called *Seduction of the Innocent*, and the establishment of censoring organ ‘Comics Code Authority’ (CCS), publishers were forced to accommodate the demands of a society which increasingly saw comics as having a negative influence on its readers (Hemmingsen and Søndergård 2009, pp. 33-35). Batman was no exception, and the creators moved away from their noir-inspired roots and towards a more child-friendly take.

While the 60’s did see attempts to return Batman to his more somber roots, these were largely unsuccessful. Hemmingsen and Søndergård claim that the breakthrough in this regard first came with the arrival of the ‘Bronze-age of Comics’ around the mid-70’s (Hemmingsen and Søndergård 2009, pp. 37-39): in the wake of the rebellious late 60’s and early 70’s, creators had grown disillusioned with the nostalgic and harmless narratives of yesteryear, and created more gritty, realistic portrayals. This culminated in 1985, when DC Comics, Batman’s publisher, decided to make major revisions to their comic book series, which allowed creators significantly more creative input in terms of shaping the character in their stories (Hemmingsen and Søndergård 2009, p. 42). Since then, comics creators have not shied away from radical psychological explorations of central characters, or creating stories which have drastic, permanent consequences for the *intradiegetic* continuity, which renditions diversify the characters’ representations in the public conscious.

Most of the Batman-depictions I examine in my thesis, are from stories published between 1985 and the present. This is because many of these stories are credited as being particularly influential, while at the same time poignantly illustrating the vast difference between Batman-renditions.

***V for Vendetta* and Masking**

In my second chapter, I examine how masking is performed in Alan Moore and David Lloyd's 1989 graphic novel *V for Vendetta*.² The most conspicuously masked character in the story is 'V', who dons a stylized Guy Fawkes-costume while trying to dismantle an oppressive, fascist government. V's masking is evident from his wearing masks throughout the span of the narrative and is reinforced by his penchant for dramatic flair: whenever he acts against the government, it is accompanied by some sort of performance.

The intended function of these performances warrants closer study. Initially, V's apparent role as a wronged, melodramatic figure implies that his expressions are supposed to elicit a cathartic function. However, it is eventually made apparent that his goal is to elicit a more tangible response from his audience, and his position instead resembles that of a satirist. Finally, in light of his unconventional mode of performance and his imperative drive, V's performances also resemble Antonin Artaud's 'Theater of Destruction'.

A central tenet in Artaud's theory is that "meaningful theater" is supposed to shock, and even hurt. V demonstrates that this holds true even among his allies when he forces his protégé through a reenactment of his own torturous incarceration in order to make her fully commit to his cause.

V's more literal masking can moreover be read in several different ways. One perspective is that he embodies the historical conspirator Guy Fawkes, on whose likeness V's mask is based. This perspective is rooted in the Ancient Greek concept *prosopon*, which denotes both face and mask. Therefore, by donning a mask resembling Guy Fawkes, V is essentially transforming into him.

² The narrative was finished in 1989. For a more detailed account of its publication history, see p. 47.

This is subversive because it ‘reawakens’ a formerly persecuted figure like an old ghost, and keeps him, and the brutal history of his persecution which his presence evokes, out of the control of the government.

However, the *prosopon*-perspective is also possible with a lessened focus on Guy Fawkes if one accepts the notion of V having adopted the mask as his own face. This perspective blocks out the potential for *reflexive recognizability*, as it dismisses the notion of a ‘true’ face beneath. Much like with Batman’s masking, such a perspective denies any affirmation of his humanity: the perceiver is instead met with a fixed, artificial face. Therefore, it grants similar boons to its wearer as Batman’s mask does.

Yet another perspective is rooted in the Ancient Roman notion of *persona*. Whereas the Greek *prosopon* denotes both mask and face, Roman *persona* refers to the mask explicitly. Therefore, such a perspective demands an increased degree of separation between the mask and the wearer. The mask, instead of a “sign of identity”, now resembles a tool, not necessarily restricted to a specific person.

The interplay between the *prosopon* and *persona* perspective is however only fully revealed near the end of the narrative. When V’s protégé, Evey, dons the mask herself, a split occurs between the V *character* and the V *persona*. Evey’s realization of V’s *persona*-function allows her *reflexive recognizability* of the V *persona*: she literally sees herself beneath the mask. However, with her decision not to unmask the V *character* post-mortem, *reflexive recognizability* towards him is forever denied. And by carrying on his mask, she keeps up the appearance of the V *character*, forming an illusion of immortality which further downplays the figure’s perceived humanity.

This is where my reading deviates from those of many others': whereas a popular focus is on the V's revenge-mission, this focus necessarily places V in the center of the story and only really acknowledges the *V character*. Focusing too much on V's own narrative also undermines a central theme of the story, namely the conflict of narratives.

Indeed, a major theme in *V for Vendetta* revolves around narratives and conflict. The government's oppression and censorship bereave the population of their individuality. As their stories are deemed unimportant, the people are made to believe that they are "nobodies" – mere statistics. Simultaneously, the government employs a form of masking themselves, constructing an elaborate façade in an attempt to appear human towards the population.

V's ultimate ambition is to tear down this false façade and oppressive censorship, and make room for the many, varied narratives. His means of doing so are based around performative expression, which means that performance is integral to both his means and his end.

A Note on Writing about Comics

Whilst writing about comics, I have encountered several challenges that appear particular to the medium. They bear mentioning here because they may have an impact on academic assessment. Most of the comics I analyze have initially been published as serialized comic *issues*, and later collected as *Trade paperbacks*, which collect a certain story or story arc, and typically spans between one- to three hundred pages. The reason this is important is that there may be slight changes between the publications. *V for Vendetta*, for instance, was originally in part published in black-and-white in the *Warrior* anthology, before publisher DC republished the series in color. Where such discrepancies exist, I have based my readings on the *trade paperback* version.

The reason why I choose the *trade paperback* versions particularly, is that it is the easiest way for a reader to access already published stories: it allows the convenience of simply buying a single book instead of having to collect every one of the issues that comprise the story (which are likely out of print). It is typically also the more affordable solution.

For the most part, I have based my readings on print editions of the comics I examine. However, when acquiring the illustrations for this thesis, and in some cases because of restricted availability to print material, I have used Amazon's digital comics service 'Comixology'. The reason this bears mentioning is because the Comixology-editions sometimes vary slightly from their print counterparts. One example is, again, *V for Vendetta*, in which the colors of the digital edition are noticeably lighter than those in the print edition. This discrepancy in the colorization can conceal subtle nuances in the coloring which may impact visual analysis.

Furthermore, the print *trade paperback* concludes the end of each chapter with an end mark depicting the story's ubiquitous mask, but this appears to be covered in white in the digital edition of the *trade paperback*, and completely absent from the digital edition of the single *issue*, as demonstrated in *Figure 1* (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 21). This only has a minor impact on my argument, but bears mentioning nonetheless.

In terms of page numbering, I have used the printed numbers in print editions where available. Where not available (such as with *Arkham Asylum*), I have used Comixology's own page numbers. This may be cause for confusion, as this service starts numbering the cover page as '1', rather than the *recto* page following it, and counts certain two-page *splashes* as a single page.

Lastly, there sometimes exists discrepancies in terms of when a work is initially published. One example of this is the story *Batman: Ego*, in which the *edition notice* claims the year 2007 as its

copyright year, while the Comixology store claims June 14, 2016 as its print release date. In such cases I have decided to rely on the *edition notice*. However, this is not entirely unproblematic either: single issues are often released digitally without an edition notice, leaving only the *cover date* to determine when it was published. The problem with this is that in comics industry, the *cover date* typically only gives the name of a month, and seldom the actual month of publication. According to a *Wikipedia* article on the subject, the printed *cover date* is typically two or three months ahead of the actual date of publication (Wikipedia: 'Cover Date', 2018b). In such cases, I have acquired the actual publication date elsewhere.

Chapter 1: Batman and Evocation

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the play with masking and constructed identities so prominently encountered in the superhero-genre. I have chosen to focus on what I consider the most interesting case of the superhero pantheon, namely Batman. The effect of his constructed identity is entirely dependent on manipulating *recognizability*, which he achieves through theatrics and stealth, relying heavily on mask and costume. Furthermore, an essential part of his popular appeal stems from his possessing certain essential traits which his readership can recognize as human. Despite this emphasis of his appearance (via mask and costume), and his widespread recognition, his costume allows for a considerable *malleability*, both of appearance and character. This is expressed through the wide range of depictions of the character, which is evident even within as short a time span as represented in the literature I explore. The particular correlation between mask, recognizability and malleability makes Batman a uniquely interesting case in terms of superhero-comics' adoption of masks. What I aim to do in this chapter is to analyze the relationship between the character Batman and his mask, considering how it works as a crime-fighting tool in the stories themselves, how its differing depictions is used to convey different creators' interpretations of the character, and how it affects the notion of a single Batman-entity, all in light of recognizability.

The *recognizability* of Batman works in two ways: on the one hand, there is recognizing the figure, which concerns the likelihood that one may identify the character when shown or alluded to, and on the other hand, there is recognizing a part of oneself within the figure, which is what renders the character relatable (and *human*) to readers and other characters. This latter sense of

the term, of being able to recognize an element of one's self in the character, I call *reflexive recognizability*. This contrasts with the former, more general sense of the term, concerning an individual's ability to recognize Batman's character and extended symbolism as such, which I call *discerning recognizability*. I choose the word *reflexive* because of the way this sort of recognition addresses the element of humanity present in the perceivers themselves. Both these concepts (*reflexive* and *discerning recognition*) operate inside the *diegesis* – the reality in which the stories take place, (Molotiu), as well as outside it, and are instrumental to my analysis of the character. Indeed, many of Batman's essential traits revolve precisely around his potential for *reflexive recognizability*:

Batman is not granted superpowers from a freak scientific accident, like Spider-Man's; from mythological deities, like Wonder Woman's; or from an alien physiology, like Superman's. In fact, he has no superpowers at all. Therefore, he is a lot closer to his readers than many of his fellow superheroes, whose otherworldly powers alienate them from their audience. What powers Batman does have, have been nurtured and cultivated through rigorous training, utilized through cunning, and sustained by the unshakeable willpower that has kept him faithful to his mission. Thus, his powers are the result of a dedication to values that any reader may recognize and approve of, and Batman becomes an exemplar against whom we may measure ourselves: while people may never hope to run as quickly as the Flash, or to be able to shapeshift like Ms. Marvel does³, they can strive to be as strong, or as intelligent, or as resolute as Batman.

His mission is fueled by the trauma from the murders of his parents, which connects with a primal fear in every human being. The fear of abandonment and of having such a pillar of

³ That is, the recent incarnation whose alter ego is Kamala Khan.

security in one's life torn away are fears that any reader can recognize. Indeed, psychologist Travis Langley asserts that according to several studies⁴, the realization or experience of one's parents' mortality is frequently rated as one of the most stressful life events that can occur to a child, provided it's old enough to comprehend it. Langley particularly emphasizes that, while torture and terrorist attacks also score highly in such studies, they are far less common, and in contrast, "sooner or later we all learn that our parents can and will die" (Langley 2012, p. 37). Thus, the central motivation of the Batman character is rooted in a pain which is both tremendously devastating and recognizable to many readers.

In addition to the character's recognizability among its readers, Batman also manipulates *reflexive recognizability* intradiegetically (in-universe). By dressing up in a costume and fighting crime by applying stealthy scare-tactics, Batman constructs an image of himself as an unrecognizable entity among the criminals of his native city, Gotham. By drawing power from the otherworldly presence that he instills through his theatrics, he and his extended likeness simultaneously become a symbol of hope among the civilians and a symbol of terror among the criminals, as he is no longer recognizable as a human being. A superhero having recognizable values or goals is not unique to Batman, but his case is particular in the way it completely permeates his character and his modus operandi. I will revisit this triad of the *body* which uses a *kolossos* to evoke an *eidolon* in more detail later, when analyzing the practical application of the mask intradiegetically.

A significant number of writers, and many among them scholarly ones, have written about Batman and other superheroes before. Thus, the path ahead is thick with literature on topics

⁴ He cites the 1979 study 'The Children's Life Events Inventory' – by researchers J. H. Monaghan, J. O. Robinson and J. A. Dodge as one such study.

varying from the character's psychological division between the Batman- and the Bruce Wayne personas, to the moral quandary of donning a vigilante identity. While many theorists have covered ground close to my argument (several, for instance, addressing the problem of maintaining the notion of a single Batman-figure), my way of distinguishing mine, is through the particular focus on masking and recognizability (or the lack thereof) and how it functions in relation to the character in the various renditions of the character. The element of recognizability has likely been brought up in discussions earlier, but they have yet to transcend mere superhero comparisons. In contrast, I use this as my general approach to the character. In addition, many of the theoretical works take different kinds of methodological approaches to the subject in their analyses than I do; while Langley, for instance, seems to address a sort of amalgamation of the different Batman portrayals (Langley 2012), I consider the portrayals as aesthetic and literary constructs, directing attention towards the works themselves and their creators' artistic expressions. The wide scope of previous literature on the figure serves to my advantage, however, and my discussions will draw on perspectives from multiple disciplines instead of sticking to just one.

I will analyze a wide array of iconic Batman incarnations from a similarly wide array of creators in order to demonstrate both how some of the renditions carry out their masking, as well as to demonstrate the character's malleability. The central stories visited will be the 1973 comic book issue *Batman #251* by Dennis O'Neil and Neal Adams; the 1986 and 1987 graphic novels *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: Year One* by Frank Miller et al.; Neil Gaiman and Andy Kubert's 2009 graphic novel *Batman: Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader*; Grant Morrison and Dave McKean's 1989 graphic novel *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*; and Darwyn Cooke's 2000 story *Batman: Ego*. As to why so many of these

influential works are published between the mid-80's and today, author and historian Søren Hemmingsen and comic book expert Morten Søndergård point out that extensive revisions made in 1985 by DC Comics to their comics' diegetic continuities paved the way for fresh takes on the characters, and the looser reins allowed writers and artists to treat such established characters and elements with new perspectives (Hemmingsen and Søndergård 2009, pp. 42-43).

Batman, his Masking and Reflexive Recognizability

The most central element in Batman's strategical intimidation is his mask. Batman's cowl, which he wears over his face, masks his human visage and replaces it with something ethereal and inhuman. This effect is pertinently demonstrated in a scene in *Year One* in which the corrupt police officer Detective Flass recounts his encounter with Batman: "Not he. It. [...] He's not human. I'm just telling you he's not human" (Miller et al. 2005, pp. 33, 34). What is demonstrated here, is the power of Batman's costume to transform him into more than a mere human being. This notion of superheroes' costumes containing power to transform their wearers is a notion stressed both by scholars Barbara Brownie and Danny Graydon in their book *The Superhero Costume: Identity and Disguise in Fact and Fiction* (Brownie and Graydon 2016, pp. 27-28), and by psychologist Travis Langley in his book *Batman & Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* (Langley 2012, p. 13). Moreover, Brownie and Graydon claim that the superhero costume plays such an integral part of their identity that "in many ways, the costume *is* the superhero" (a notion to which I will later return) (Brownie and Graydon 2016, p. 29). The effect of the transformation is twofold: an inwards function and an outwards function.

The inwards function has to do with how the superhero persona affects Batman himself. Barbara and Graydon note that even regular apparel has a transformative effect: “people will modify their behavior to suit their clothes” (Brownie and Graydon 2016, p. 34), and for superheroes like Batman, this is even more poignant: dressed extraordinarily, the character is expected to act extraordinarily, and “[a] costumed hero can never stand idly by as a disaster or crime occurs” (Brownie and Graydon 2016, p. 35). Thus, dressing in costume requires a mental acceptance of extraordinary responsibility and heroic conduct essential to superhero identity. Furthermore, Brownie and Graydon claim that the costume’s animal appropriation allows Batman to “channel a beast”, drawing on the ferocity of the animal kingdom to “cast off the restraints imposed by civilized human society [...] [and] resort to primal behavior” (Brownie and Graydon 2016, p. 83). This liberation from civilized behavior allows him somewhat looser reins in terms of heroic conduct, which is advantageous to a superhero that often operates in the shadows: while certain heroes’ apparel and M. O. (*Modus Operandi*) demand that they be in the spotlight whilst saving the day (Superman and his bright blue and red suit comes to mind), Batman is freer to utilize stealth and more ‘typically non-heroic’ approaches.

More important, however, is the outwards function, which has to do with how the superhero persona affects those around him. The primary outwards effect of Batman’s costume, as pertains to his M. O., is a denial of *reflexive recognizability*. This Batman achieves by transforming himself into something more than a mere human being: when criminals can’t recognize parts of their own humanity in Batman, he becomes to them superhuman, which makes him considerably more fearsome, and which plays into his strategy of fear and stealth. While many other heroes achieve this ‘superhumanity’ by way of supernatural powers, Batman solely relies on his costume and performance. While Brownie and Graydon argue that “[r]egardless of whether it

covers his face, the superhero costume is a kind of mask” (a point with which I mostly agree) (Brownie and Graydon 2016, p. 27), the literal mask itself (or, in Batman’s case, his cowl) plays an immensely important part in this transformation from human to superhuman.

The reason for the emphasis on the particular power of the literal mask lies with the socio-cultural importance of the face, which is outlined by art historian and -theorist Hans Belting in his 2013 book *Face and Mask: A Double History* (English translation published in 2017). In his explanation, he draws on fellow historian Jean-Claude Schmitt, who specifies three functions of the face in human society: “a sign of identity, as a vehicle of expression and, finally, as a site of a representation” (Belting 2017, p. 4). Naturally, Batman’s mask hides his identity, which creates a sense of mystery as to whom its wearer is. It also covers large parts of his face, including his eye-region, which obscures Batman’s facial expressions. As Belting points out, “the interplay of many facial muscles generates the full spectrum of expression that makes faces readable” (Belting 2017, p. 3), and with such integral parts of his expressive features covered, Batman’s visage is left unreadable. This covering of identity and expression prevents a verification of his humanity, blocking any *reflexive recognizability* from his fellow fictitious figures. Furthermore, Belting stresses how the face has come to represent humanity as a species, citing literature scholar Sigrid Weigel: “the face has become a concentrated image of the *Humanum* in European cultural history” (Belting 2017, pp. 3-4), and thus, Batman covering his face effectively erases his symbolically human presence, making room for another, ethereal one.

Belting also points out another effect of the mask which further removes its wearer from perceived humanity. He claims that “the man-made mask was used [in rituals] as a vehicle that possesses permanence in all things” (Belting 2017, p. 7), and thus, one effect of masks is to lend a notion of permanence to the wearer. The natural state of the human face is one of constant flux,

as our expressions and changing appearance renders the face a dynamic, living entity: “even though a face remains itself during the course of a life, it does not stay the same” (Belting 2017, p. 3). In contrast, the man-made mask is fixed and rigid, and resembles something eternal. Thus, Batman, when donning his cowl, hides his impermanent, human face and presence and transforms himself into an *image*.

Belting concedes that his notion of *image* defies easy definition, in part because of how “it fluctuates between physical and mental existence” (Belting 2005, p. 42), but in his 2005 article ‘Towards an Anthropology of the Image’, he offers a closer explanation. Drawing from historian and anthropologist Jean-Pierre Vernant’s work on ancient Greek myth and thought, Belting likens *image* and *medium* to the ancient Greek concepts *eidolon* and *kolossos*, respectively. He then proposes a three-way interrelation between the *image*, the *medium* and the *body*: the *image* represents an idea, which exists in the imagination; the *medium* is the artifact which lends itself to the representation of the idea; and the *body* is the person who imagines the idea and gives it shape through the medium (Belting 2005, p. 44). In Batman’s case, the *body* in question is Bruce Wayne; the *kolossos* is his mask and his costume, but also his actions, as these too contribute to the presentation; and the *eidolon* is the terrifying entity that he hopes to evoke. In embodying this *eidolon*, Batman hopes to draw attention away from his *body* and *kolossos*, and leave only the immortal, indestructible *eidolon*, rendering any *reflexive recognition* of his humanity utterly impossible among his fictional peers.

Part of Vernant’s original understanding of the *kolossos*⁵ underscores this effect from a mythological point of view. He establishes the man-made stone artifact of the *kolossos* as

⁵ Vernant uses the spelling “colossus”, but I keep with Belting’s for sake of consistency.

intrinsically tied to the undead spirit, *psuché*⁶: if a person is long lost or has not been given a proper burial, their spirit double, their *psuché*, will “wander aimlessly between the worlds of the living and the dead, [...] harbor[ing] some dangerous power” (Vernant 1983, p. 306), and the purpose of the *kolossos* is to serve as a physical double to the departed, substituting the remains in a burial ritual which grants the spirit peace. Thus, Vernant claims, the *kolossos* serves three complimentary functions: “it regulates the relationship between [the departed] and the living” (as it infixes the person’s spirit in the afterlife), “it is a visible representation of the power of the dead man, [and] it embodies the active manifestations of it” (Vernant 1983, p. 314). In light of its role as a mediator between the worlds, Vernant claims that the *kolossos* takes on an otherworldly air of its own. While he does stress the notion that the stone material of the artifact places it in binary opposition to all things living, he also asserts that “while it thus aims, so to speak, to establish a bridge with the divine, it must at the same time emphasize the gap, the immeasurable difference between this sacred power and anything that attempts to manifest it” (Vernant 1983, pp. 314-315). Therefore, simply by referencing the superheroism which it symbolizes, Batman’s own *kolossos*, namely his costume and his M.O., carries a power to inspire awe in his foes and protectees alike, which resonates with the argument made above by Brownie and Graydon about the costume itself in many ways “[*being*] the superhero” (Brownie and Graydon 2016, p. 29).

A crucial part of the equation has yet to be explored, however: Batman’s careful construction of the impression of him as a terrifying otherworldly entity is futile unless that impression is ‘transferred’ to his spectators. Belting’s *body* is described as “a person [...] who experienced the *eidolon* and constructed the *kolossos*” (Belting 2005, p. 44), but his three-part equation leaves

⁶ Vernant uses *eidolon* as an umbrella term collecting various instances of doubles, among them *kolossos* and *psuché*.

out the part who experiences the *eidolon* after encountering the *kolossos*. This assessment of the role of the perceiver begs the question of where the *eidolon* originates, whether it is a creation in the mind of the person experiencing it, or if it has some external existence of its own. Vernant argues the latter point. He claims that, being a double, the *eidolon* is not “an illusion of the mind or a creation of thought [...] [but] something separate from the person who sees it” (Vernant 1983, p. 308). Thus, the *eidolon* that Batman evokes has an existence in its own right, and Bruce Wayne is merely channeling this towards his enemies. This image fits well with the year 2000 story ‘Batman: Ego’ by Darwyn Cooke, in which Bruce Wayne suffers a mental breakdown and is confronted by an external, nightmarish Bat-entity which claims to be the power of the Batman-persona:

You **prefer** to call me Batman. But the reason you can never escape me... ..is that **my name is fear**. And I live within you. Your purpose had always been clear, but I supplied the method. We would take all the pain... ..all the rage... ..all the fear that had been bottled inside you... and we would share it... ..with those who deserved it. (Cooke 2016, pp. 40-41, emphasis and ellipses in original)

This story boils the Batman-*eidolon* down to a fearsome, vengeful spirit that Bruce Wayne harnesses in order to transfer the fear on to “those who deserve it”, and thus, the nature of the spirit Batman channels is already given, and the question of his success hinges on whether it is successfully transferred, and thereby whether the perceiver is phased by it or not.

Belting, however, maintains that the perceiver plays a larger role in shaping the nature of the *image*, and he describes this process as *the gaze*.⁷ He describes the experiencing of images as a

⁷ Not to be confused e. g. the Lacanian interpretation of *the gaze*.

collaborative process between the spectator and the medium: “Images *happen* between we who look at them and their media, with which they respond to our gaze” (Belting 2005, p. 46).

Inspired by mediology scholar Régis Debray, Belting proposes a division of images between those experienced from outside ourselves – *exogenous images*, and those we encounter within our own mind – *endogenous images*. He stresses that these are continuously influencing each other, as an *exogenous* image is an expression (a manifestation) of an internal, *endogenous* image, and our endogenous images are, in turn, influenced by the exogenous images we encounter (Belting 2005, p. 50-51). The gaze, then, is the force that allows us to make sense of, and internalize an *exogenous* image. This notion is aptly demonstrated in the 2009 story ‘Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader?’ by Neil Gaiman, Andy Kubert and Scott Williams, in which Batman, or a spiritual manifestation of him, witnesses his own funeral, during which several nemeses and allies tell impossibly conflicting stories about the hero’s life and death: Wayne’s trusted butler Alfred, for instance, admits how the whole superhero endeavor was an elaborate ruse to give a depressed Wayne a sense of purpose, and Batman’s loyal sidekick Robin describes the fallen hero as a messianic figure, capable of “pull[ing] off **miracles**” (Gaiman et al. 2009, p. 44). While the narrators all give different accounts about how he eventually died, the corpse in the casket continually changes shape, taking the forms of several of the most iconic Batman-designs throughout the character’s lifespan. These character-narrators have built different *endogenous images*, the variety of which is expressed through the variety of their narratives, and their narratives in turn become *exogenous* depictions of Batman.

Contrary to their divergent interpretations of the concept of the *kolossos*, both Vernant (Vernant 1983, p. 307) and Belting (Belting 2005, p. 46) agree that the *kolossos*’ (and thus, the *mediums*’) functions as a substitute. While establishing a presence, the *kolossos* also confirms an absence:

were the represented entity present, there would be no need for the *kolossos*'s representation in the first place. Therefore, it is crucial to Batman that his *kolossos* not be recognized as such in-diegesis by the criminals he persecute: realizing that the costume and the act make up for absent superpowers would instantly allow for *reflexive recognition*, breaking the illusion and reducing Batman to 'a mere man'. Ironically, however, the readers' awareness of this illusion as such is precisely what grants Batman his uniquely *human* appeal among his audience. The illusion must be upheld at all costs intradiegetically to deny *reflexive recognizability*, but must be acknowledged extradiegetically to spur it.

The Portrayals of the Character and how they Diverge

Examining how different Batman-creators construct this *kolossos*, in terms of how they shape the character's look and behavior, is the next logical step in the analysis of the figure's masking. Frank Miller's 1986 graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns (DKR)* is one of the earliest of my selected renditions, and simultaneously one of the most controversial, here represented in *Figure 2* (Miller 2016, p. 80). When it initially appeared, it stood in stark contrast to the dominant Batman-design of the 70's and early 80's, as developed by Neal Adams (represented here in *Figure 3* by a panel from 1973's *Batman #251*) (O'Neil and Adams 1973, p. 21). An early giveaway as to their differences is the toned-down use of color: while the very earliest Batman-comics used blue as a highlight in black materials because of limitations in printing technology at the time, the 1970s Batman artists had incorporated a cobalt-like blue as the dominant color of the cape and cowl. While Miller does apply this color scheme in several instances in *DKR*, most depictions vary the cobalt-like blue with either darker, more washed-out hues or grey, or revert to the predominantly black scheme with a more highlight-oriented use of the color, leaving the

vigilante with a grittier look. Furthermore, about halfway through the story, Miller clothes the vigilante in a new suit, abandoning the signature 'yellow-oval' chest symbol in favor of a more rectangular, all black bat-symbol and using a cape and cowl that are more consistently grey, further detracting from the previously vivid color scheme.

DKR's Batman furthermore has a much more rectangular build. While Adams's illustration has a far leaner, more acrobatic body type, Miller's comes across as a concentrated mass of muscle. The consistent squareness of *DKR*'s Batman extends to his cowl head, with its short ears and considerable chin, and to the bat-symbol on the suit in the latter half of *DKR*, demonstrated in *Figure 4* (Miller 2016, p. 116). The framing of the panels also conveys a contrast between the dynamic and the static: both illustrations are *splashes*, which means that they occupy larger parts of the page than typical panels do – in both these cases, an entire page. However, where *Figure 2*'s Batman seems framed by the edges of the panel (and thus, the page), *Figure 3*'s Batman appears to leap out of the panel. The effect is that *Figure 3*'s depiction conveys an agile strength, like a pouncing tiger, while *Figure 2*'s depiction conveys a more static strength, like a combat tank. Furthermore, Batman-artists often use the character's cape as an illustrative tool to emphasize movement. In *Figure 3*, Batman's cape swirls and gives the impression of flapping in the wind, whereas in *DKR*, as illustrated in *Figure 2*, it mostly merely trails the character or hangs off of him. In the instances where the cape *does* fan out or appears to play in the wind, it is usually cropped out of the panel, Batman is shown to be a static pose, or he is enshrouded in shadow, which downplays the impression of acrobatic movement.

This consistent squareness emphasizes *DKR*-Batman's muscular build, which matches his more physical approach to the challenges he faces. When attempting to disband a gang, for instance, he opts for hand-to-hand combat against the gang leader in duels amid the other gang members (Miller 2016, pp. 78-85 and again at pp. 100-104). While close combat is not particularly original to *DKR*'s depiction, the way it is conducted, out in the open and with a clear emphasis on crippling his opponent, speaks to a bloodthirstiness that is uncharacteristic of the more cool-

minded depictions common at the time. In comparison, Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's 1988 graphic novel *The Killing Joke* depicts a Batman determined to confer with his longstanding nemesis, the Joker, attempting to convince him to end their rivalry before either of them is killed. After the Joker shoots the recurrent character Barbara Gordon through the spine, permanently crippling her, and attempts to traumatize her father, Commissioner Gordon, through mental and physical torture, Batman is still insistent on apprehending the Joker "by the book" (Moore and Bolland 2008, p. 50). Furthermore, *DKR* breaks the longstanding rule of Batman's refusal to use lethal force and guns, as he has the vigilante shoot and kill a gang member during a hostage situation (Miller 2016, pp. 66-67).

This added emphasis on physicality and brute force in turn speaks to his brutal, near-sadistic mindset. When interrogating a gang member hanging upside-down over the city, Batman's internal-monologue-captions read: "It was tough work, carrying two hundred and twenty pounds of sociopath to the top of Gotham Towers – the highest spot in the city. The scream alone is worth it" (Miller 2016, p. 70), and when witnessing a criminal fall from a helicopter, contemplating that "It takes nearly a minute to fall from this height. And despite what you may have heard, you're likely to stay conscious all the way down. Thoughts like that keep me warm at night" before intervening (Miller 2016, p. 55). When initiating the first of the aforementioned fistfights against the gang leader, Batman sports a menacing grin (as shown in *Figure 2*), and when the second is concluded, the chapter ends with a similar self-satisfactory smirk (Miller 2016, p. 104).

The positive depiction of the brutal mindset and the emphasis on the physical presence combine to make *DKR*'s Batman a hypermasculine character. This propagation of hypermasculinity is underscored by several other elements, too. The character Commissioner Gordon is depicted as

conservative, as he shows annoyance towards his wife's "hippie vegetarian recipes," her not allowing him to smoke at home, and at discovering that "a woman" is given his position as police commissioner upon his retiring (Miller 2016, pp. 60, 60, 74). This pro-masculine sentiment is also expressed through the queerness of some of Batman's adversaries in the story. One such goon is Bruno, a Neo-Nazi woman who is depicted as masculine, with a flat top haircut and a square face, and an aggressive demeanor (Miller 2016, p. 108), which places her firmly outside of the gender-normative. The Joker too is depicted with an ambiguous sexual nature, as he is shown sporting dyed curly hair and lipstick, by which he murders his first victim with a kiss, and refers to Batman as "darling" and "my sweet" (Miller 2016, pp. 123 (*Figure 5*), 143, 152). This way, *DKR* establishes a dichotomy between the positive, heteronormative masculine on the one side, and the negatively feminine or queer on the other.

DKR depicts Batman's vigilante endeavors as threatened by the tyrannies of incompetent liberal-minded idealists and big government. The idealists are mainly represented by Gotham City's mayor, who is depicted as thoroughly timid and naïve, and psychiatrist dr. Bartholomew Wolper, who deems recurrent Batman-villains sane, releases them from confinement, and antagonizes Batman for pursuing them. Their voices are joined by several of the interviewees interspersed throughout the narrative, such as a man who demands "rehabilitative treatment" of treatment for "the socially misoriented", and then goes on to admitting that he'd "never live in the city" (Miller 2016, p. 47). *DKR* depicts these people as fundamentally out of touch with the threat posed by the criminal presences in the city, and both the mayor and Wolper eventually meet ironic ends: the mayor is killed by the gang leader during a one-on-one consultation which he insisted on attending alone (Miller 2016, p. 93), and dr. Wolper is killed by the Joker during a television appearance arranged by Wolper to plea for the Joker's sanity (Miller 2016, p. 130).

Batman, on the other hand, recognizes and handles the harsh reality of the city's rampant corruption and violence. In terms of big government, *DKR* depicts a Batman whose distrust towards authorities is justified by the latter's oppression and naïveté. When Batman goes to work on dismantling the dystopia that Gotham has become during his retirement, the president of the United States, depicted in the media as a vigorous and jovial Ronald Reagan, tasks Superman to subdue him: as a foil to the cynical Batman, *DKR* depicts an obedient Superman who answers to the president's every beck and call, and is used as a weapon by the US in armed conflicts against the Soviet Union. The narrative heavily implies that the US has ulterior motives for their military presence on the fictional South-American island Corto Maltese, where the superpowers' forces are currently deployed, and expresses (through Batman) a sense of shared responsibility between both Soviet *and* the US for the proliferation of the arms race (Miller 2016, p. 170). This leaves the reader with the impression that Batman's refusal to bend to the will of the US government is justified. Thus, when Batman and Superman's irreconcilable views culminate in a fight near the end of the story, the reader's intended sympathies are supposed to be with the wiser, more skeptical Batman.

In sum, Miller's *DKR* depicts a square, burly Batman who is more than typically prone to violence and excessive force, and particularly distrustful towards authorities. Thus, the *eidolon* which he evokes is a sadistic entity of unimagined violent potential which will not bend to societal norms or conventional conceptions of good. Miller shaping the *kolossos* this way has bearings on *reflexive recognizability* among the readers. Considering Batman's relatability among his audience being a central appeal, Miller's decisions seem to convey that he regards the traits which he emphasizes in his rendition particularly valuable parts of the character.

Interestingly, however, many of these traits were overturned in *Batman: Year One*, which was

also written by Miller and illustrated by David Mazzucchelli, and published in 1987, the year after *DKR*.

The Batman of *Year One* is, as the title implies, younger and more inexperienced than the one encountered in *DKR*. In the beginning of the story, before Bruce Wayne dons the Batman persona, the character feels torn: although eager to commence his vigilante ambition, noting that he “[has] the means [and] the skill,” he is reluctant, as he lacks “the method” (Miller et al. 2005, p. 7). The emphasis on the importance of this ‘method’ is made clear when he, in a relatively neutral disguise, attempts a “reconnaissance mission” in the city’s seedier parts, and ends up starting a fight and eventually gets shot by police (Miller et al. 2005, pp. 8, 10-19). Having escaped the scene, he lies in his study, close to death, and ponders “how do I make them afraid?” before the revelation appears to him with the bat crashing through the window (Miller et al. 2005, pp. 20-22). Thus, for the remainder of the story, Batman’s tactical approach relies far more on stealth and intimidation, and the narrative dedicates much attention to demonstrating this. In one instance, he attempts to eavesdrop on a mob boss and displays annoyance towards another vigilante who disrupts the scene in an attempt to garner publicity for herself (Miller et al. 2005, pp. 83-87), and in another, he uses smoke bombs and manipulates the light when he delivers a threat to several crooked Gotham elites who are gathered at a dinner, punctuating the flamboyant theatrics with the internal comment “it’s showtime” (Miller et al. 2005, pp. 37-38, (*Figure 6*)).

This shift from the more physical approach of *DKR* reflects the more humane mindset displayed by this Batman, which is evident from his treatment of criminals. The first time the *Year One*-Batman is shown to engage with criminals after donning the suit, he appears mortified when one of the burglars, “get[ting] too scared”, nearly falls to his death in the calamity, and promptly jeopardizes his mission to save him (Miller et al. 2005, p. 31 (*Figure 7*)). In another instance,

when Batman persuades a drug lord to incriminate a corrupt police detective, little actual violence is shown, and when the victim appears at the police station the following day, he appears unharmed (Miller et al. 2005, pp. 77-78). This is a far cry from a similar display in *DKR*, in which Batman weighs his options when faced with a gunman, reckoning he has “seven working defenses from this position. Three of them disarm with minimal contact, three of them kill. The other – hurts.” Evidently opting for the latter, he delivers a kick towards the man’s hip at the sound of the bone-shattering onomatopoeia “KRAK”, and after nonchalantly brushing away the concern of a present police officer, Batman proceeds to scold the downed, pleading criminal for his possession of cigarettes and pills while scouring his belongings for clues (Miller 2016, p. 41-42 (*Figure 8*)).

While *Year One* is more explicit in demonstrating theatrics as an intrinsic part of its Batman’s M.O. (as demonstrated in *Figure 6*), it is certainly important to *DKR*’s Batman as well: the latter’s inclination towards violence and brutality serves to amplify the terror of his presence. A major part of why he decides to engage in hand-to-hand combat against the gang leader, even though he muses that “I honestly don’t know if I could beat him” (Miller 2016, p. 79), is to make the leader lose face (and thus, his authority) and establish himself as a more powerful figure in the eyes of the other gang members. Thus, one could argue that *DKR*-Batman’s sadistic behavior is merely a façade, but his internal comments (such as the one about falling that I quote above) gives it a genuine air.

Year One’s de-emphasis on physically violent means and mindset is also reflected in Batman’s physique: compared to *DKR*’s compact build as seen in *Figure 2*, or even the definition of the muscles in O’Neil and Adams’s *Batman #251*, as seen in *Figure 3*, the Batman encountered in *Year One* appears to have a fairly ordinary body (Miller et al. 2005, p. 45 (*Figure 9*)). Apart from

the feats of strength performed in the story, there is comparatively little visual emphasis on muscularity; none of the *splashes* in the story accentuate a towering physical presence as does the *DKR* illustration of *Figure 2* or burst with anatomical transparency as does the details of the *Batman #251* illustration of *Figure 3*. Rather, the *splashes* featuring Batman in *Year One* depict stealth or evasive maneuvers.

The Batman of *Year One* is also more inclined towards cooperation with law enforcement. In addition to the emerging friendship with Lieutenant (yet to be made commissioner) Gordon, who refers to him as “friend” in an internal-monologue-caption (Miller et al. 2005, p. 96), Batman appears to be on friendly terms with assistant DA Harvey Dent. The vigilante is allowed to listen in as Dent gives testimony during an investigation into Batman’s identity (Miller et al. 2005, pp. 40-41), and it is heavily implied that Dent is at least aware of Batman’s plot to use the drug lord’s testimony, due to his nonchalant responses when confronted with the news of the latter’s bail, and the swift transition from this scene to the next, which shows Batman’s confrontation with the drug lord (Miller et al. 2005, p. 75). Thus, the *Year One* Batman comes across as less of a misanthropic ‘lone wolf’ character than the *DKR*-Batman does.

The Batman depicted in *Year One* seems to evoke an *eidolon* different from that in *DKR*. While still aiming to instill fear, the method (and thus, the *kolossos*) appears to revolve around resourcefulness and trickery rather than threats of violence. This, in turn seems like a complete turnaround from implicitly valued traits of the *DKR*-depiction – so much so that *Year One*’s botched ‘reconnaissance mission’ can be seen as a direct protest against the head-on approach in *DKR*. While these changes make Miller’s vision for the character’s values somewhat ambiguous, they seem to celebrate the character’s malleable nature.

However, while these previous ‘Batmen’ certainly have their differences, their distinctness pales in comparison to the Batman encountered in the 1989 story *Arkham Asylum (AA)*. Written by Grant Morrison and illustrated by Dave McKean, *AA* presents a more abstract Batman than those encountered so far. Firstly, the ‘ears’ on the cowl are longer than the previous incarnations, and the edges of the cape’s shoulders sometimes curl upwards in twisted spikes. I use the word ‘sometimes’ because of the fact that Batman’s appearance keeps shifting slightly throughout the story, as demonstrated by the change in Batman’s cape and ‘ears’ in *Figure 10* (Morrison and McKean 2014, p. 35). Secondly, Batman is rarely given a clear outline or particularly contrasting colors, making him ‘blend in’ with the background in most panels. These elements detract from Batman’s perceived humanity and make him appear as somewhat of an abstract figure. This way, his *kolossos* emphasizes a notion of an otherworldly, intangible presence.-

The unfixed nature of *AA*-Batman’s physical appearance is mirrored by the character’s implied mental instability. This notion is first implied by the Joker: the first pages of the ‘present day-narrative’ depict the Joker’s plot to lure Batman to the mental institution “Arkham Asylum”, as he comments that the inmates “want **you** – in here. with us. In the **madhouse**. Where you **belong**” (Morrison and McKean 2014, p. 16), and throughout the remainder of the story, his plan seems to revolve around proving this true. Indeed, the Joker’s claim is given a hint of merit, as shortly after Batman’s arrival, the Joker persuades him into participating in a word-association test with one of the psychotherapists at the asylum. The string of words quickly come to center around the traumatizing experience of witnessing his parents’ murders, prompting Batman to give in, much to the Joker’s amusement (Morrison and McKean 2014, pp. 41-42 (*Figure 11*)).

The composition of the scene reveals more layers to Batman’s anguish, opening with a face-to-face panel and moving on to alternating close-ups. The close-ups resemble point-of-view

framing, and the ‘zooming-in’ on the therapist’s eye implies a focus on her probing gaze, and the similar ‘zoom’ on Batman depicts this gaze, attempting to reach behind the mask and into the self. The image of Batman’s face divided between two panels on page 42 resembles a fractured self: the upper panel captures his cowl, symbolizing the vigilante persona, and the bottom panel captures his mouth and chin, symbolizing the human underneath. The last panel underscores Batman’s vulnerability: his visage is reversed compared to the other panels, indicating his turning away, and his gaze downwards. The long shot framing makes him appear small in the context of the panel, and the small typeface in the word balloon indicates a faint, meek utterance.

This display of Batman’s vulnerability is connected to another element which makes *AA* stand out among the previously discussed works, namely doubt. After receiving the Joker’s ‘invitation’, Batman voices his concern to commissioner Gordon, admitting that “I’m afraid that the Joker may be **right** about me. Sometimes I... **question** the rationality of my actions. And I’m afraid that when I walk through those asylum gates... when I walk into **Arkham** and the doors close behind me... it’ll be just like coming home” (Morrison and McKean 2014, p. 19). While the Joker is known to cast doubt over the vigilante’s mental faculties, only very rarely does Batman admit to doing so himself. Furthermore, Batman’s confused meanderings through the asylum is intercut with scenes from the life of the institution’s founder, Amadeus Arkham. He is a psychiatrist who dedicated his life to provide treatment for the “men whose only real crime is mental illness , trapped in the penal system with no hope for treatment” (Morrison and McKean 2014, p. 23), but eventually succumbed to insanity himself in the wake of his family’s deaths at the hands of one of his patients. Thus, as the characters Batman and Arkham are linked through their similar trauma and their similar desire to help the criminally insane, Arkham’s failure, succumbing to “the Great Dragon” – a symbolical manifestation of the evil and irrational given

shape as Archangel Michael's serpentine adversary (Morrison and McKean 2014, p. 39), bodes ill for Batman's mission. However, a late entry in Arkham's journal reveals that the mental illness suffered by his mother reveals itself to Arkham in the shape of a hallucinatory bat (Morrison and McKean 2014, p. 88), and he believes it to be a malevolent spirit dwelling in the house. This sentiment leads present-day doctor Charles Cavendish to accuse Batman of being a manifestation of this spirit, having "kept this place supplied with poor mad souls for years" (Morrison and McKean 2014, p. 91). This accusation also implies that the insanity of the inmates is to some extent caused by Batman, which also casts his mission and methods in a dubious light.

While allowing for the doubt, AA reaffirms Batman's heroicism through symbolic emphasis on his self-sacrificial nature. While suffering a vivid flashback revisiting the killing of his parents, Batman stabs himself through the hand with a glass shard, inflicting a wound like the *stigmata*, underscoring the allegory by uttering "Jesus" in pain (Morrison and McKean 2014, pp. 48-51). This connection is revisited when dr. Cavendish accuses Batman of being the malevolent bat-spirit Arkham believed he saw, and while Batman replies "I'm just a **man**", an image of Jesus is apparent in the background, with text reading "Ecce Homo" (Morrison and McKean 2014, p. 91). In another scene, while battling the inmate Killer Croc with the spear from a statue of the Archangel Michael, Batman is impaled by the spear himself due to the pressure applied to it. Meanwhile, the captions from Arkham's journal read "What **wounds** are these? I am Attis on the pine. Christ on the cedar. Odin on the world-ash" (Morrison and McKean 2014, p. 83). These images evoke the notion of sacrifice, as these three are deities who are particularly noted for their symbolic sacrifices: the Greek god Attis's self-mutilation, death and resurrection symbolizes vegetation which disappears each winter and returns in spring; Christ died on the cross for the sins of mankind, and Odin hung himself in order to gain knowledge of the runes. Batman's final

sacrificial act in the story is entrusting his life to Two-Face's coin toss, forcing the inmate either to risk causing Batman's death or to lie about the outcome, thereby exercising free will and proving his potential for rehabilitation. The latter option being chosen, AA restores the reader's faith in the vigilante.

As demonstrated, the character 'Batman' exhibits widely differing character traits in different works, but all the depictions are still *discerningly recognizable* as Batman: despite a considerable malleability, the Batman-image remains strong among his audience. How can this be? How could a literary figure with so many divergent manifestations remain a single recognizable entity? Philosophy scholars Ryan Indy Rhodes and David Kyle Johnson, in their article 'What Would Batman Do? Bruce Wayne as Moral Exemplar', and fellow philosophy scholar Jason Southworth, in his article 'Batman's Identity Crisis and Wittgenstein's Family Resemblance', approach this paradox from two different angles.

Rhodes and Johnson attempt to evaluate Batman as a moral exemplar among his audience, and therefore need to isolate his virtues and traits. They concede, however, that this is a difficult task in light of the wide array of creators who realize the character in different ways: "The more Batman stories that are written, by more and more people, the higher the chance that these stories will not represent a consistent, cohesive character" (White and Arp 2008, p. 122), and thus, "Batman cannot serve as a moral exemplar, because there is no way to pick out the *true* Batman" (White and Arp 2008, p. 123). As an example of moral divergence, they mention an early rendition of Batman (such as 1939's *Detective Comics* #31 and 32), who (like the later Miller's in *DKR*) breaks the moral 'rule' that forbids Batman from using firearms and lethal force. Rhodes and Johnson argue, however, that in spite of this paradox, Batman can still be considered a single entity in a sense: they claim that the character Batman over time has evolved into an *icon*

(White and Arp 2008, p. 124). The Batman icon exists apart from Batman-literature as part of a modern mythology, and it possesses a set of essential properties which are taken into account whenever a reader, in subconscious *discerning recognition*, determines whether a character could be considered Batman or not.

Southworth's inquiry is more direct: how does one identify an entity as 'Batman'? At first, he addresses this problem through considering various conditions that would allow for such a classification, but meets with the same conclusion as Rhodes and Johnson. However, Southworth offers a different solution, borrowed from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein: a way of categorizing known as *family resemblance*. Similarly to how various members of a biological family may share certain traits (thus, a *resemblance*), although all members don't necessarily share all the same traits (White and Arp 2008, p. 161), the different Batman-renditions have certain features in common, but don't need them all to be considered Batman. Thus, classification is built on vague similarity to other members of a group rather than a definition, and the primary tool in explaining a concept should be to provide examples. Southworth dismisses the notion of the necessity of rigid definitions: many words are used satisfactorily in day-to-day conversation without the need for detailed definitions. Demonstrating this, Southworth recounts Wittgenstein's applying his theory to explain ambiguous terms such as 'game' and 'language', which are otherwise difficult to define, as they both encompass several widely different entities (such as both basketball and solitaire) (White and Arp 2008, pp. 161-2). When a person encounters an instance that diverges from the given examples, the concept is expanded (White and Arp 2008, p. 164).

What sets Southworth's approach apart from Rhodes and Johnson's, is the proximity of the overarching Batman-concept to the reader – the Batman-*family* in Southworth's case and the

Batman-*icon* in Rhodes and Johnson's. Southworth's 'family' is determined by the examples that the reader themselves encounter, and is therefore a more malleable notion, while the Rhodes and Johnson's 'icon' exists independently from the instances that the reader encounters and is thus a more rigid concept. Southworth himself points out this distinction: "if Wittgenstein is right, then it will serve as an objection to moral theories that attempt to use fictional characters as moral exemplars [...] If there is no fixed description that can be given of a character [as is the case with family resemblance], then you can't make reference to specific traits of that character" (White and Arp 2008, p. 165). In this way, Rhodes and Johnson's *icon* has similar properties to Vernant's *eidolon*, in the way it resembles an external entity which is interpreted and given shape in a work of art. Likewise, Southworth's approach is similar to Belting's division between the *endogenous* and the *exogenous image*, as the concept – Southworth's 'family' and Belting's *endogenous image* – is more personal, and shaped by the interaction between the perceiver and the work of art itself.

In terms of diverging depictions constituting a single entity that is *discerningly recognizable*, I maintain that the literal mask itself also serves a purpose. The way Batman's cowl (and cape) emphasizes his contour draws attention away from his facial features as sign of identity (see (Belting 2017, p. 4)), which allows the artist more freedom in terms of his countenance.

Furthermore, I claim that the prominence of the costume, and the ease of recognition it allows, lessens the importance of behavior as an element of identification. In a way, the costume and its extended symbols serve as keys to a mental 'shortcut' to the established notion of Batman, be it internal, as with Southworth's family, or external, as with Rhodes and Johnson's icon. This effect is reminiscent of comics scholar Scott McCloud's concept of *masking*, as explained in his work *Understanding Comics. The Invisible Art*. He argues that simplifying a character's

appearance, shifting it towards the more abstract ends of his spectrum and making it more masklike in appearance, gives the reader more room to identify with the character, as there are fewer discernably *othering* human features to obstruct such a role-taking (McCloud 1993, pp. 32-34). The effect of a character's appearance made more relatable to the many readers has the secondary effect of making it more malleable: if a larger group of different readers are able to see themselves as the character, then the character must necessarily have a less fixed nature.

Conclusion

Batman's masking has proven to be a complicated process which operates on several levels. On an *intradiegetical* level, Batman's masking is an essential part of his M.O., designed to hamper *reflexive recognizability*, which is connected to the perception of his humanity. Not only does it diminish his perceived humanity, but it also evokes an otherworldly presence in its stead. This choice of strategy has implications on the *extradiegetical* level as well: it accentuates the character's lack of superpowers, which makes Batman all the more human, or *reflexively recognizable* to his readers.

Another effect of Batman's close relationship to masking, is that the heavy emphasis on his costume has made his other features less relevant as representations of his identity. The shape of Batman's costume has garnered such a high degree of *discerning recognizability*, which is the ability to identify something correctly, that his facial features or his body type are less important in this regard. This, in turn, has led to these features becoming less rigid, which gives creators more leeway to experiment with his design. Not only does this apply to physical features, but

behavior as well. This has resulted in a very wide range of depictions of the character, which widens its potential for *reflexive recognizability*: when a character exhibits a wide array of traits and values, the chance is that much bigger that one identifies with the character.

A way to analyze the effects of the masking is by applying a concept borrowed from Ancient Greek ritual practice, which revolves around the interplay between the concepts *eidolon*, *kolossos* and *body*. The reason why this model is so useful, is that it separates the masking-process into parts which are more easily scrutinized, and it provides a terminology that spurs a discourse around the mechanics of masking. Coupled with the wide range of Batman-depictions, this framework facilitates a comparative assessment which is particularly helpful for the analysis of this character who would otherwise be rather unwieldy. Thus, my approach to the character allows for a more nuanced analysis of him as a literary construct rather than seeing all the Batman-incarnations as one.

Chapter 2: *V for Vendetta* and Performance

Introduction

While the last chapter examined Batman's use of masking (both literal and figurative) with primary focus on masks' ritualistic historical function, the following chapter will explore *V for Vendetta*'s use of masking with a more theater- and performance-oriented focus. In so doing, I will examine the historical origins of the masked drama, and certain other performative expressions in western theatrical cultures for analytical context. In the following, I will argue that the way the character 'V' in *V for Vendetta* uses mask and performance evokes a theatrical effect which transforms his destructive acts against the story's fascist government into performance. This plays into the story's conflict thematically, as it revolves around narrative power and dominance. The reason I focus on western cultural history in particular, is that most of the cultural references and homages in *V for Vendetta* refer to western art, which serves to evoke that particular cultural heritage.

As scholars Barbara Brownie and Danny Graydon argued in the previous chapter, a superhero is compelled to 'act how he dresses' (Brownie and Graydon 2015, pp. 34-35). Art historian and -theorist Hans Belting expands this notion to include the masked actor of ancient theater: "The choice of a recognizable mask was the choice of a [given] role". Indeed, "[t]he masked drama of antiquity developed firm rules that made rigid types of masks and plots transparent to the audience" (Belting 2017, pp. 48, 49). Thus, donning a certain mask was fraught with expectations as to how one would behave. This likely stems from two factors: firstly, ancient theatrical performance was firmly rooted in the ritual practices from which it evolved, which, in turn, were heavily dependent on tradition and custom; secondly, where theater breaks from ritual

is with the notion that the masks (and thus, roles) were considered “a representation of living people who, as figures in a drama, were made recognizable through masks” (Belting 2017, p. 48), in contrast to the otherworldly entities evoked in rituals.

In the previous chapter (p. 12) I proposed two different sorts of recognizability that masking affects, namely *discerning recognizability* and *reflexive recognizability*. The former refers to the perceiver’s ability to identify an entity, while the latter refers to the perceiver’s ability to identify a part of him/herself *within* the entity, which renders it relatable. I suggest my two interpretations of *recognizability* lends a new dimension to Belting’s observation, as both types simultaneously work to produce different effects: the actors’ masks bolstered their *discerning recognizability* because their distinct, expressive masks would clearly communicate the specific role the actor played. The notion of masks being “representation[s] of living people” meant that an actor’s mask was understood to represent a person to whom the audience may relate, inspiring *reflexive recognizability*. As mentioned above, theatrical masking’s capacity to instill *reflexive recognizability* contrasts to the use of masking in rituals, which instead conveyed transcendence of humanity and served to inspire awe. Thus, according to Belting’s observation, a central difference between theatrical and ritualistic masking is that the theatrical use of masks inspires *reflexive recognizability*, while the ritualistic use prevents it.

However, a masked person is not solely *restrained* by their attire: Belting claims that as the modern period introduced an increased pressure towards compliance to societal norms, the stage became a place free of such restraints (Belting 2017, p. 49). Thereby, acting became a legitimate way of transgression, as the actor could not be held accountable for the acts of the character performed on stage.

Furthermore, modern theater departed from the strict rules of the classic, and masks on stage grew less common, the actors' own faces taking the roles previously held by the masks (Belting 2017, p. 48). These two factors, while loosening the strictness of expectation towards the actors' performance somewhat, also came with a new set of expectations. As masks could no longer be counted upon to convey a role's personality, the actors had to bolster their expressions to convey this instead: not only did their facial features have increased emphasis, but their whole body-language as well. Belting comments that "[i]n modern times the mask is a role that is played with the whole body" (Belting 2017, p. 48), and so, actors were 'permitted' (and thus, to some degree expected) to "behave eccentrically" (Belting 2017, p. 49). In addition to the liberating effect of performance, this reduced emphasis on the physical mask means that the roles played become more 'internalized': as the characters no longer emanate from the mask itself, they must be summoned forth from within the actors themselves.

One work which treats masking in a particularly interesting way is Alan Moore and David Lloyd's graphic novel *V for Vendetta*. The first parts of the story were initially published in a British comics anthology named *Warrior* between 1982 and 1985, and after *Warrior's* cancellation, the narrative was republished and completed in ten independent issues from 1988 to 1989. The story is set in England, in a near dystopian future (1997-8, to be precise), in which a fascist political coalition called Norsefire has seized control in the riotous wake of a global nuclear war. Early in the story, the characters V and Evey are introduced. V is a mysterious, masked person who seeks to thwart the oppressive government, often using explosives in the process. Little is ever told about his past, apart from him being incarcerated in a government-run concentration camp at Larkhill, in which he was subjected to chemical experiments, and from which he eventually escaped. Evey is a young woman who, after being rescued by V from

attempted rape, becomes his protégé. Many critical readings of *V for Vendetta* focus on framing the narrative as a revenge tragedy, which situates V in the center of the story as a wronged, heroic figure, much like Edmond Dantès in Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*⁸. This reading renders his personal vengeance the narrative's central motive, which, admittedly, is supported by the 'vendetta'-part of the title. However, I argue that such a restricted interpretation ignores the story's theme of conflicting narratives and undermines the more complex functions of V's masking and performance.

In terms of the various historical understandings of masking outlined above, V's relationship to masks is not easily categorized. He wears masks throughout nearly the entirety of the story, his face is never shown to the readers, and his primary mask is modelled off of the facial features of the historical gunpowder-plot-conspirator Guy Fawkes, as shown in *Figure 12* (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 10).⁹ On one level, this seems indicative of the first theatrical sort of masking: this mask resembles "a representation of [a] living [person]" (cf. Belting's note on early theatrical masking discussed above (p. 41)) in a very literal sense.

However, I argue that V's use of the mask goes beyond merely emulating the historical figure, and that it becomes an integral part of his own identity. As the character is denied a face underneath the mask by his creators, his mask takes on the role as his face. This way, the notion of face equating mask as emphasized in later theater also holds sway, albeit through a curious inversion of Belting's notion of the actor's face taking on the role previously held by masks.

⁸ The 2005 film adaptation of *V for Vendetta* pays homage to this similarity, as it has V declare the 1934 film adaptation of *The Count of Monte Cristo* his favorite film.

⁹ Another of V's reoccurring disguises resembles the traditional English puppet Mr. Punch, himself derived from the *commedia dell'arte* stock character Pulcinella. However, apart from Mr. Punch's violent disposition towards authorities, I couldn't find much about this connection relevant to my argument.

Finally, I argue that V's use of masks and costumes, and more importantly, performance, serve a purpose closer to the ritualistic use of the mask. In the previous chapter, I examined the relation between the concepts *image*, *medium* and *body*, as explained by Belting (p. 19). He likens them to the religious Ancient Greek concepts *eidolon*, *kolossos* and *body*, as explained by scholar Jean-Pierre Vernant. I apply them to masking. We recall that *image* refers to an intangible concept, which exists in the mind, and Belting likens this to his understanding of the *eidolon*. *Medium* refers to that which serves to represent the *image*, and Belting equates this to the *kolossos*. *Body* is the entity which conceives of the *image* and gives it shape through the *medium*. V, serving as the body, employs his mask and performance as a sort of *kolossos* to evoke theatrical creativity as a sort of *eidolon* to infuse his presence with an inherent theatrical aspect. The notion of V's masking functioning as a *kolossos* imbuing his presence with a certain theatricality, is bolstered by how he accompanies his every destructive act with a performance. Examples of this include reciting a part of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* whilst thwarting a band of rapists (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 11-12), conducting Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture to two bombings, assumedly timing the explosions to the composition's characteristic cannon blasts (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 182-187), and reciting a part of the Rolling Stones' 'Sympathy for the Devil' before subduing a pedophile bishop (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 54). These performances serve to add an aspect of creativity to his destructive acts, rendering them creations as well as destruction.

This performative penchant serves to cement performativity, and thus, expression, as part of V's *means*. However, certain strategical choices, which reveal V's ultimate purpose in the story, suggest that narration itself is an goal as well. V's ultimate objective of dismantling the

government's façade (through his own performative destruction) and opening up for alternative narratives, makes performance intrinsically connected to both means *and motivation*.

The need for alternative narratives stems from the government's oppressive manipulation of the people's worldview. Like typical fascist regimes, the one in *V for Vendetta* relies on propaganda and censorship to maintain their power, which means that they 'tell a story' to keep the people in check. Furthermore, they have prohibited several venues of cultural expression, such as music and literature – V refers to it as “eradicated culture” (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 18). This narrative power is what V ultimately seeks to wrest from their grasp, and to replace their narrative with multiple freer ones. This purpose is evident from his targets for destruction, as two of the most important ones include the government's mouthpieces, namely radio and television. In attacking these, V effectively forces a change in the otherwise rigidly routine broadcasts and dismantles their 'monopoly of narrative'. His later attack on the surveillance system also cripples a major censoring organ, which allows the people to express themselves in ways otherwise forbidden.

The assertion that V's acts of destruction are performative in nature and serve as a form of expression means that they serve an expressive function inside the *diegesis*. The *diegesis* is, according to scholar Andrei Molotiu, the reality in which a story takes place (Molotiu), and the acts being perceived as expression means that they attempt to convey something. An examination of V's intentions and parts of his M.O. will shed light on what manner of performance he is trying to enact, which is important when discussing his utilization of masking.

In the following, I will engage with the issues presented in a more in-depth manner. I will start with analyzing V's use of Guy Fawkes's specific likeness, then move on to examining V's masking as pertains to his identity, and what connotations this has for his role in the story's plot.

Then, I'll analyze what V's acts and intentions say about the sort of narrative he tries to convey. Lastly, I'll examine role of narratives in the diegesis, and how this pertains to V's mission.

V's Relation to his Mask

Belting comments on how “[s]ince the origin of theater, the mask has been inseparable from its history” (Belting 2017, p. 48). Therefore, seeing as both performance and masking utterly permeates *V for Vendetta*, examining V's masking seems an apt place to start. Seeing as V's most central costume resembles the culturally prominent figure Guy Fawkes, I will examine this connection and what it conveys.

Firstly, the most conspicuous aesthetical feature of V's primary costume is his mask, fashioned after the likeness of the historical figure Guy Fawkes. Indeed, it is probably the most prominent aesthetic feature associated with the story, which means it carries a lot of *discerning recognizability*. It appears frequently throughout the graphic novel, not only as part of V's costume, but also in other, structurally salient positions: the mask adorns the cover of the *trade paperback*, as shown in *Figure 13* (Moore and Lloyd 2005, cover) and also, to a lesser extent, the cover of the first issue of the serialized publication. Furthermore, the ending of each chapter is signified by an end mark in the shape of a black circle with the mask in white, presented in *Figure 14* (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 251 (Print edition)).¹⁰

¹⁰ The appearance of these end marks, however, appears to be limited to the print edition of the *trade paperback*, cf. my note on edition discrepancies in the thesis introduction (p. 10).

So influential is this aesthetic feature that V's mask has evolved to become a modern symbol of rebellion, separate from the source material. As noted by scholar of aesthetics and literature Oliver Kohns, in his article 'Guy Fawkes in the 21st Century', "[this] mask has become a trademark of contemporary protest movements" (Kohns 2013, p. 90). As examples of groups who have adopted the mask, Kohns mentions the internet-based group 'Anonymous', and the Occupy-movement, and although he does elaborate on the historical connotations and public use of the Guy Fawkes-likeness (an element to which I will return), he maintains that the groups' usage of the mask is more closely linked to *V for Vendetta* than to Fawkes himself: "The mask, after all, represents not so much Guy Fawkes but the avenger "V,"" (Kohns 2013, p. 93). He further explains that these groups' use of the mask serves several functions, but argues that the Occupy-movement has a specific ideological connection to V: just like V demolishes the Houses of Parliament, which are rendered mere dysfunctional symbols of democracy by the story's non-democratic rulers, the Occupy-movement seeks to dismantle the current system of representative politics due to their belief that it is no longer sufficiently representative (Kohns 2013, p. 102). These political groups' use of the mask has thus given Guy Fawkes's likeness a new political life, moving its symbolical connotations further away from the historical figure himself.

V himself, however, maintains close ties to the Guy Fawkes figure. In addition to the use of Fawkes's likeness, another element that cements this connection is the fact that V's initial appearance in the narrative and first action against the government is carried out on November 5th. This is the same date as the historical Gunpowder Plot of 1605, during which a group of conspirators, Guy Fawkes among them, attempted (and failed) to blow up the Houses of Parliament. The date is well known in the UK because of an annual commemoration celebrated since, called 'Guy Fawkes Day' or 'Bonfire Night' (*Encyclopædia Britannica*: 'Guy Fawkes

Day', 2010). Indeed, V even recites a verse typically sung or recited as part of the celebration:

Remember, remember

the fifth of November,

the gunpowder treason and plot.

I know of no reason

why the gunpowder treason

should ever be forgot. (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 14)

These connections cement Fawkes as an important figure to V, as evident from his mimicking the figure's appearance *and* actions, as he indeed does blow up the Houses of Parliament on November 5th.

One effect of V embodying this figure is that it wrests a controversial symbol from the government's control: V appropriates the symbols of the Guy Fawkes Day-celebration, and utilizes them to convey a message of brutality. In real life, the traditional celebration of the ceremony shares many similarities with historical military triumphs as remembered from Ancient Roman culture, both in appearance and function. Scholar Susan Harlan writes in her 2016 book *Memories of War in Early Modern England* about what such a traditional military triumph entails, and what sorts of impressions they convey, and a central focal point of hers is the role of trophies and spoils.

She uses a scene from the *Aeneid* as an example, in which Aeneas, having his adversary Turnus at his mercy, is prepared to spare Turnus's life when he discovers his foe wearing a fallen comrade's belt as a trophy. The belt is described as a "memorial of brutal grief" (Harlan 2016, p. 215), and the sight compels Aeneas to strike Turnus down. Specifically, Harlan argues that the

belt has a transformative effect on Aeneas, as the poem asserts that “It is Pallas [the fallen comrade] who strikes” (Virgil, via Harlan 2016, p. 215).

Thus, Turnus’s spoils has two immediate functions: as a testament to Pallas’s killing, it affirms Pallas’s *absence*, and through Aeneas’s remembrance and transformation, it establishes Pallas’s *presence*. These two functions are the very same as those of historical masks (and other *media*, cf. p. 22). Shortly put, the ritual mask also establishes a *presence* in the sense that it serves as a symbolical substitute for the entity represented, such as a deity in the case of a religious mask, or a dead person in the case of a funerary mask. Simultaneously, the mask also affirms an *absence* precisely because of its role as a substitute: it is needed because the thing represented cannot itself be present. The central feature which sets the spoil apart, however, is how it bears testimony of an act of conquest, and the effect of this feature carries severe connotations for Roman triumphs in general.

While the example from the Aeneid may appear particular to its narrative, Harlan applies her observations to the treatment of spoils during the triumphal processions as remembered from Ancient Roman culture. When she does this, she draws on Walter Benjamin, who asserts that “According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession [...] the cultural treasures [the ruler] surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror” (Benjamin, in Harlan 2016, p. 220). Harlan also cites scholar Anthony Miller, who observes that armor and weaponry, when displayed in this manner, are “pacified into harmless ornaments” (Miller, in Harlan 2016, p. 220), but she goes even further in her analysis, arguing that armor and weaponry displayed during triumphs often is arranged so as to resemble a human figure – a hollow effigy of the conquered (Harlan 2016, p. 222).

These elements, I argue, are also found in the traditional Guy Fawkes-night celebration. Firstly, an effigy resembling Guy Fawkes himself is built and paraded through town, much like the armor resembling the Romans' conquered foe, and eventually burned, his annual posthumous execution further reasserting Fawkes's conquered status. Fawkes's 'weapons', the gunpowder intended to demolish the Houses of Parliament are also in the conquerors' hands, symbolized by the pacified, ornamental fireworks accompanying the celebration.

What V does in *V for Vendetta*, is to reclaim these symbolical spoils from the conquerors, and to recontextualize them, using them as a weapon against the reigning conquerors. He uses explosives to attack the government's symbols of power and takes on the likeness of the Guy Fawkes as his primary costume. This is a reversal of the process of conquest which made these elements into spoils in the first place: the pacified weapons have again become potent, and the hollow effigy is again alive. While a dead entity leaves the living to define it (or squelch it and its memory), a living one is free to oppose any such notions. Indeed, as noted in this thesis's previous chapter (p. 18), the medium of the mask even lends a notion of permanence to that which it represents, and immortalizes the character. This is also demonstrated in the narrative by how V's protégé, Evey, eventually adopts the mask, extending the lifespan of the persona beyond that of its original wearer. A newspaper in the story alludes to Guy Fawkes, which indicates that the figure is still present in the cultural consciousness of the story's Britain (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 124). This means that V, by subversively seizing the symbolism of the conquered, is in control of the imagery that relate the horrifying history of brutal persecution of dissidents.

Despite how clearly the mask represents Guy Fawkes, however, it is evident that it has become inseparable from V's own identity as well. Throughout the narrative, V's actual, human face is

never shown to the reader. Only once in the story is it acknowledged, which is when V confronts and kills Dr. Delia SurrIDGE, who conducted the experiments at the Larkhill camp: she asks to see his face, and V complies, lifting his mask, as shown in *Figure 15* (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 75). In another scene, which explores Dr. SurrIDGE's journal from Larkhill, she does appear to take particular interest in V's face, as she describes it as "very ugly" and repeatedly remarks on his gaze (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 81, 83), but her notes imply that her preoccupation with his visage is connected to a psychological assessment of her patient. At any rate, Dr. SurrIDGE is the last remaining person who was in contact with V during his incarceration, and thus, the last person with any relation to his pre-masked self (Bishop Lilliman being dead and Commander Prothero having suffered a complete mental breakdown, both at V's hands). Thus, his killing her effectively severs his ties to his old identity, and his showing her his human face does little in terms of establishing it as his actual face, seeing as SurrIDGE dies mere moments later and his visage is not shown to the readers. Indeed, the page's composition reinforces the notion of the readers' exclusion: the panels preceding the one in *Figure 15* are fairly intimate, as they consist of close-ups of SurrIDGE facing V, which emphasize her facial expressions and lends an air of familiarity to the scene. Suddenly, the panel containing the reveal, pulls the perspective away, into a remote birds-eye view. The following panel moves back in for a close-up, filling nearly the entire frame with SurrIDGE's reaction, which makes the previous shift in perspective even more jarring. The way the creators have constructed this scene seems to firmly deny the readers access to whatever identity V might keep under his mask.

The other characters in the narrative also seem to accept V's mask as his face. Evey, for instance, refers specifically to his mask as his "stupid smiley face" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 43), and the detective Mr. Finch, when referring to V as "the smiling man" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 42),

seems to disregard the notion of a mask as well. In this way, Hans Belting's earlier observation about the mask of later theater equating the face (p. 42), seems to hold true in V's case too, albeit in a reversed sense. Whereas Belting notes that the mask disappeared from the theater, and the face took over its role, V's face has been discarded and the mask has taken its place. This ties into V's desire to obscure his human nature. As argued in the previous chapter, a central element in masking is the potential of hindering the perceivers' ability to recognize parts of themselves in the mask's wearer. As mentioned, I call this phenomenon *reflexive recognizability*. The way V downplays his human features by performing seemingly impossible feats and replacing his face with a mask certainly prevents *reflexive recognizability* in the *diegesis*. V's mask and wig, shown in *Figure 16* (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 25), appear artificial by design, due to the wig's neatly trimmed and perfectly symmetrical style and the mask's stylized, nearly contorted features, as well as its apparent material, which seems to resemble porcelain. The effect of this lack of *reflexive recognizability* is that he renders himself invincible in the eyes of his foes. As he explains to Finch: "There's no flesh or blood within this cloak to kill. There's only an **idea**. Ideas are **bulletproof**" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 236, emphasis in original). By convincing his enemies that he is more than a mere human being, he, like Batman, gains a psychological advantage over them.

This denial of *reflexive recognizability* does not only concern his enemies, however. V's protégé, Evey is also never shown his face or given any insight into his identity. Near the end of the narrative, after V dies, she has the opportunity to unmask his corpse, but ultimately decides not to. As she herself puts it: "If I take off that mask, something will go away forever, be diminished because whoever you are isn't as big as the idea of you" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 250). Evey realizes that the memory of V is far more powerful when he remains apparently superhuman.

V's adopting the mask is also worthy of analysis from an earlier historical point of view: Belting observes that in the Ancient Greek language, the word for mask and face were both the same, namely *prosopon*, while the Ancient Romans separated the human face from the artificial *persona* (Belting 2017, p. 50). These two concepts will prove helpful in the discussion on V's relationship to his mask. The Greek *prosopon*-notion correlates with the notion of V's mask having 'become his face'. This interpretation forces a stronger focus on V as an individual character: seeing as the mask symbolizes V himself, so too does the prominence of his mask situate him in the center of the story. This prominence is discussed earlier in this chapter (p. 46), and the notion of V being such a central figure plays into a common reading of the narrative, which presents V as the wronged heroic avenger. This reading, grounded in the *prosopon*-notion, is particularly valid in the initial parts of the story because of the narrative's focus on V acting out his vengeance against the Larkhill personnel. However, after the first of the story's three books, the narrative scope expands, as other characters' ambitions come into play. As V's ambitions are proven to reach beyond mere vengeance, and his *modus operandi* is shown to be more scheming and manipulative than initially thought, a further interpretation of his masking would prove useful.

The Roman *persona*-notion separates the worn mask from the self underneath. Indeed, the word *persona*, from *per+sonare* (through+voice) has the mask become a literal mouthpiece. While Ancient Greek masks were also carefully constructed so as to amplify the wearer's voice acoustically, the way the Romans' concept emphasizes the notion of a separate speaker underneath sees the mask used more as a tool than a symbol of one specific identity. This notion also turns into a major feature in the narrative, as Evey eventually dons the mask and the V identity after V's death. Through this interpretation, the mask is not necessarily tied to V and his

personal vendetta, but becomes a tool with a certain effect, whose power is available to anyone who possesses the mask. This interpretation also gives new meaning to the extensive mask-artwork interspersed alongside the narrative: no longer does necessarily it represent the character V himself, but rather its function as a mask in and of itself is accentuated.

These two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, however. Rather, they function simultaneously on different levels. On the one hand, the *prosopon*-interpretation, which sees the mask as V the character, suits V in the sense that it is in his interest to appear as a single, vengeful entity towards the government. This lends a supernatural air to him, much like Batman's masking, discussed in the previous chapter. On the other hand, the *persona*-interpretation, which sees the mask as a tool rather than an identity, is a vital prerequisite for Evey to be able to carry on V's mission.

The way these two perspectives operate in tandem, (and the course of the narrative) necessitate a distinction between the *V-character* and the *V-persona*. This divide is hinted at by V himself, as he tells Evey that "you must discover whose face lies behind this mask, but you must **never** know my face" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 245). A result of this distinction is that one can assess the notion of *reflexive recognizability* with more nuance. As mentioned, Evey is denied *reflexive recognizability* towards V, but this only holds true for the *V-character*. The fact that she imagines her own face under V's mask quite literally illustrates her *reflective recognizability* towards the *V-persona* (cf. my introduction of the term p. 13). Evey is the only character allowed the insight into and recognizability towards the *V-persona* in the diegesis, and thus, they and their implicit testament to any humanity beneath the mask, becomes a 'trade secret' for the carriers of V's mantle.

In addition to understanding the mask itself as it pertains to V's identity, I find it noteworthy how it correlates with the character's penchant for performance. As demonstrated several times in the narrative, and as mentioned previously, V has a tendency to add dramatic flair to his every action, such as incorporating illusion and monologue-recital whilst saving Evey when they first meet (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 11-13), or how he reenacts the atrocities at the Larkhill 'resettlement camp' when confronting Lewis Prothero (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 32-35). V himself explicitly confirms this fondness of his when Evey asks him about "all that theatrical stuff" being so important to him, responding, "it's everything, Evey" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 31). Therefore, it is hard to ignore the inherent theatricality of the masked body: V, as a means to weave performance into his destruction, wears a mask in order to strengthen the theatrical connotations which turn his actions from merely destruction into a form of art. In a way, one could argue that this functions similarly to the trinity of Batman's masking discussed in the previous chapter: the *body*, here V, attempts to evoke an *eidolon* of theater through the *kolossos* of performative destruction, bolstered by his mask. This trinity is a core part of the power which is transferred with the mask when the *persona*-notion is taken into account.

The inherent theatricality of the masked body is connected to the mask's history as a symbol for the theater. As mentioned, Belting maintains that "[s]ince the origin of theater, the mask has been inseparable from its history" (Belting 2017, p. 48), and despite the fact (also argued by Belting) that the mask to a large extent has been phased out of modern theater, I argue that it still holds tremendous power as a symbol for theater and performance. Because of this long historical association, a masked person is still expected to 'behave eccentrically', i.e. to express himself in a performative manner. I suggest that this is because of the *eidolon*, *kolossos* and *body*-interrelation at work, transforming every masked person into an actor. This deep-rooted

connection between the mask and theater further facilitates V's evocation of theater which renders his every act a performance.

V and the Role of Performativity

Before specifically tackling the notion of performance as an *end*, I find it pertinent to consider what sort of role V inhabits within the narrative. I argue that V is not merely content with being an actor in the story, and his command over and knowledge of the plot's development suggest otherwise too. The way he foreshadows story elements well before they occur implies an intimate knowledge about events to come which is usually reserved for either a meticulous schemer who has arranged everything well in advance, or the knowledge of an omniscient narrator. One example of this includes the magic trick scene, in which V allegorically introduces to Evey how she, once truly liberated, can never return to the comforting but imprisoning state of ignorant compliance (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 94-95). This lesson she only truly embraces after her reenacted incarceration at the Larkhill-camp, orchestrated by V himself (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 168-172). Another example is the lyrical content of 'This Vicious Cabaret', a musical number V plays as an introduction to book 2, in which he references the fate of the newly widowed Rose Almond, who eventually has to take a job as a burlesque showgirl to make ends meet. V predicts she "will be dressed in garter and bow-tie and be taught to kick her legs up high" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 90), and indeed, by book three, she is shown doing exactly that (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 205). Furthermore, V's comment to Evey shortly after the demolition of the Houses of Parliament: "There, the overture is finished. Come, we must prepare for the first *act*" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 14, italics in original) is reminiscent of a stage director, and certainly carries connotations of a larger scheme at play. These incidents imply that the events in

the story are carefully choreographed and that V certainly plays a larger part in the story than that of a mere actor.

A logical next query concerns what manner of narrative it is V wants to convey. It seems as though destruction and suffering is an intrinsic part of his expressions, which is poignantly demonstrated when he relates his motivation to Evey. In order to do so, he puts her through an elaborate scheme, detaining her in an enacted imprisonment with interrogations and torture which are meant to relay the suffering he himself endured during his incarceration (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 147-167).

The sheer amount of destruction or pain in his 'performances' may suggest that they are supposed to have a *cathartic* function, as initially conceived by Aristotle. The basis of this concept is that the purpose of the performance is to 'purge' unwanted sentiments from one's mind by experiencing them vicariously through the actors on the stage. Common interpretations of the catharsis concept, such as *Encyclopædia Britannica's*, allow for the interpretation that one such feeling purged is fear (Encyclopædia Britannica: 'Catharsis' 2018a). Thus, one could certainly argue that V's destruction is supposed to 'cure' the British People of their fear of the government's oppression, that the violent revelry which the people then experience vicariously through V's endeavors is meant to inspire fearlessness.

This interpretation is flawed, however, as typically cathartic performances aren't supposed to elicit a change in behavior from the audience, such as the kind we see in book three's chapter 'Vox Populi'. In this chapter, we see ordinary people revolt in various ways against the government: a young schoolgirl swears at a security camera and sprays graffiti, the burlesque club perform a satirical farcical dance number, people loot groceries and sell them on the black

market, and onlookers speak up against a public execution of an assumed looter (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 189; 192; 191; 194).

There is, however, one genre that does intend to inspire actual reactions from its audience, namely satire. Scholar Robert Paulson remarks that “The satirist, in short, demands decisions of his reader[s], not mere feelings” *because* “he wishes to arouse [the readers’] energy to action, not purge it in vicarious experience” (Paulson 1967, p. 15). Scholar Ruben Quintero elaborates that while satire, like typical tragedy and comedy, moves the audience “through building tension and provoking conflict”, the audience of satire is denied the harmony that follows the resolution of said conflicts (Quintero 2007, p. 3). Therefore, the tension built up over the course of the narrative is directed towards the object of the satire instead, which, as scholar Linda Hutcheon asserts, is always *extramural* – that is, a real-world entity as opposed to a piece of art (Hutcheon 2000, p. 25).

However, the format of V’s performative narrative is also incompatible with many preconceptions and definitions of satire. Thus, the notion of drama cannot be abandoned entirely. Dramatist and essayist Antonin Artaud provides a theory that allows for a form of drama which *does* have subversive effects similarly to satire. Artaud’s theory, as elucidated in his 1938 collection of essays *The Theater and its Double*, attempts to determine the function of drama, much like Aristotle’s *catharsis*, but seeks a similar effect to that of satire: he calls for “a theater that wakes us up: nerves and heart” (Artaud 1958, p. 84). Initially, Artaud proposes that “the world is hungry”, and thus primarily preoccupied with satisfying more primal needs, and that an endeavor to force people’s primal attentions “toward culture” is “a purely artificial expedient” (Artaud 1958, p. 7). Therefore, Artaud argues, any meaningful cultural endeavor ought to convey “ideas whose compelling force is identical with that of hunger”, and any culture or civilization

that is removed from natural life is artificial and unnecessary. This seems an appropriate philosophy in regards to V's mission: the fascist government has proven its disdain for life through the atrocities carried out in the camps, paired with their need to control and surveil all life. It could consequently safely be argued that theirs is a civilization removed from natural life, and that V's passionate endeavor to replace their narrative with his own seems very much in line with Artaud's philosophy, and that the 'compelling force' that drives V is the struggle towards freedom.

Furthermore, Artaud's theory As for V's destructive performance, Artaud specifically seeks a "culture-in-action" that has bearing on the audience's conduct – a civilization too preoccupied with thought rather than action is an absurdity (Artaud 1958, p. 8). Furthermore, Artaud embraces the notion of unorthodox forms of media, as he seeks a "theater, not confined to a fixed language and form" (Artaud 1958, p. 12). This certainly applies to V's mode of performance, which is carried out far from the more typical theatrical framework.

Fascist regimes are typically well aware of the power that comes with 'being the one telling the story', and 'Norsefire', the political party in power in *V for Vendetta*, is no different. When Evey is initially introduced to V's home, 'The Shadow Gallery', she is exposed to many cultural impressions she has never before encountered. As V explains, "you couldn't be expected to know. They have **eradicated culture**", and as for what they provide instead, "Just his master's voice. Every hour. On the hour." (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 18, 19). This clearly illustrates the level of censorship and control the government exercises: by stripping away all cultural expression, leaving only their own channels as sole outlet, they have effectively established a monopoly of social narration. The fascists know that every cultural production contains a narrative, often an alternative to the dominant one. Thus, the world, its events, and how they are

to be perceived are all conveyed from the government's own mouthpiece. Indeed, bishop Lilliman's comment about Fate (here understood as the government's computer system) altering his sermon indicates that the government controls the church too.

The result of this suppression of people's stories is that they are bereaved of their individual identities. When V insists to Evey that "everybody has their story to tell", and in response to her story, tells her that "they made you into a victim, Evey. They made you into a statistic", he demonstrates this point (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 26, 29). Evey's claim that she's "nobody" demonstrates the effect of this bereavement: as the people are held to believe that they are nobodies individually, the concept of individual freedom is easily waived. When V then illustrates how Evey indeed has a story to tell, he demonstrates how she too harbors a unique perception of reality – a story of her own, and that she too is "special". V's comment about Evey being made into a statistic poignantly juxtaposes an individual perception of one's life to the cynical statistical representation issued by the authoritarian government, and how they reduce the population of individuals to a faceless mass.

Due to this level of control, the government has constructed an elaborate façade towards the people. The falsity of this façade is evident in several parts of the narrative. An early, poignant example, is how the policemen who apprehend Evey for her attempted prostitution attempt to rape and kill her (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 10-11). Another example is Bishop Lilliman who is revealed to regularly engage in pedophilic misconduct facilitated by church staff (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 47-48).

An integral part of this façade is the way the government attempts to appear human. The different agencies that constitute the government are named after various human body parts. For example, the video-surveillance department is called 'the eyes', and the propaganda department

is referred to as 'the mouth'. In adhering to these practices, the government constructs a figurative *costume* (and thus partaking in *masking themselves*), in hopes to be perceived as more in touch with their human subjects, as opposed to the remote, indifferent regime they are. Their masking also evokes an air of the supernatural, but this interestingly has the opposite intended effect to the otherworldly element in Batman and V's masking: an advanced computer system that aids the 'leader', Adam Susan, is simply named 'Fate', and the radio presenter Lewis Prothero preens himself as "The voice of Fate". Thus, the government give off the impression that they "have faith on their side", which is supposed to have a reassuring effect.

The importance of this façade is evident from the reactions when V disables the government's radio voice: even the slight change of having a different newsreader is met with incredulous gazes and the certainty that "it just won't be the same" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, p. 36, *Figure 17*). This façade is precisely what V seeks to dismantle, as evident from the way he specifically targets the government's mouthpieces. In addition, V crippling the surveillance system incapacitates the most active part of the government's censoring, which allows for spontaneous cultural expression where previously prohibited, as exemplified by the graffiti-spraying schoolgirl (Moore and Lloyd 2005, pp. 188-189). Therefore, V's actions serve a threefold purpose: firstly, the acts themselves are subversively performative, which, as Artaud or satirists would argue, serves to inspire reactions from his audience. Secondly, they disable the government's 'performance', which weakens their control over the people. And thirdly, it provides room for more cultural expressions, and thus, more alternative narratives.

Conclusion

V for Vendetta's treatment of masking is a complex one. The central, aesthetic image of the mask carries so much *discerning recognizability* that it has become a cultural icon. Even more to the point, it has evolved into a full-fledged, internationally recognized political symbol of its own, which speaks volumes of the effectiveness of its message. And while the literary legacy of the story has analyzed its dystopian setting and touched upon its performative presentation, I have yet to come upon an attempt to combine the two.

V for Vendetta's initial setting is steeped in a conflict in which narrative is both means and end: the fascist government utilize propaganda and censorship (i. e. control over the public narrative) as a means to remain in power, a position which itself essentially revolves around controlling the public narrative. Their monopoly in this regard oppresses the people, who are reduced to 'nobodies', as their own lives and 'stories' are experienced as inconsequential, while the government themselves attempt to evoke a notion of humanity. Incidentally, the proposed solution to the problem also revolves around narrative: namely dismantling the government's singular one, and making room for plurality.

The main protagonist in the story, V, who offers this solution, also operates with narrative. This character, disguised and masked from head to toe, aggressively targets the government's sources of their narratives. One such source is the symbolical Houses of Parliament, which no longer function as a democratic assembly, but represent power nonetheless: the image of the buildings still erect, symbolizes a possibility of returning to democracy – a false hope which benefits the fascists by inspiring compliance. Their demolition symbolizes a departure from the old, the

nostalgic, and a willingness to tear down what is for the promise of what could be. In addition, he uses fireworks, which changes the act from one of mere destruction into a performance. In doing so, he not only cripples the government's narrative, but defiantly challenges it with one of his own.

This strategy permeates V's M.O.: never a destruction without an accompanying performance. V's connection to performance is bolstered by his mask, which evokes a notion of theater (and thus, performance) due to a metonymic connection between the two: masking *is* performance. By the same token, his performances are never quite without a destructive element either, which raises the question what manner of narrative it is V attempts to convey. On the one hand, his aim seems one of betterment of society. His destruction could be argued to have a cathartic effect on the masses. Then again, mere sentimental purification seems to fall short of his ambition: perhaps the provocation of a satirist is the intended effect. On the other hand, his mode of communication is fairly unorthodox for a satirist. One theory which allows for both unorthodox expression and destructive intent is Artaud's 'Theater of Cruelty', which demands that theater only pursue the most essential of drives, and insists that performance have a violent quality. V's pursued drive is the will for freedom, and his performances certainly don't shy away from violent expression.

V wears a literal mask, which physically anchors his performative proclivity. This is because of an implicit chain of association consisting of an *eidolon*, a *kolossos* and a *body*, which constantly affirms a connection between mask and performance. The *eidolon*, here performativity or theatrics, is evoked by the *kolossos*, here V's mask and performance, by command of the *body*, here V himself, who gives the *kolossos* its shape. Thus, in addition to representing whatever entity the mask is supposed to represent, it also evokes performativity itself.

As for V's mask and what it symbolizes, there are two perspectives which are both in conflict, yet operate simultaneously. On the one hand, there is the mask perceived as a tool to be worn, functioning more as a mouthpiece than resembling a certain entity. This equates to the Ancient Roman concept *persona*: the Romans emphasized the mask and its wearer as two distinct entities, as *persona* refers to the worn mask, and not the wearer underneath. This distinction between mask and wearer allows for *reflexive recognizability*, as the perceiver of the mask can be certain of a human presence underneath the mask with which he may identify. The intriguing exception to this notion is V keeping his masked visage even after death, as Evey decides against de-masking his body. The other interpretation is the notion of the mask representing a given entity. This equates to the Ancient Greek concept *prosopon*: this word denotes both mask and face, indicating that the Greeks did not emphasize a separation of the two. This unity obstructs *reflexive recognizability*, as the wearer of the mask is perceived to have transformed into the entity which the mask represents. The former, *persona*-notion is useful to V as a closely guarded secret, as it allows him to 'pass on the torch' of a shared *V-persona*. The latter, *prosopon*-notion is useful to V as the publicly held interpretation, as it ensures that cumulative actions are ascribed to a singular 'V-entity', which will appear supernatural. As the two uses are combined, the mask achieves an immortality and a supernatural air, which will have a demoralizing effect on his enemies.

In addition to V's mask symbolizing himself, there is also a clear connection to the historical figure Guy Fawkes expressed through the mask. The effect of this connection is subversive in its own right, as it reappropriates certain symbols, in order to establish an uncontrollable presence. These symbols, Guy Fawkes's likeness and his gunpowder, have previously been treated like

spoils by those in power, which pacified them. V's reappropriation, however, reinstated their potency.

Seeing as the end of the narrative is somewhat ambiguous, it is not easily determined whether V was ultimately successful or not. On the one hand, he does dismantle the government and defeat their monopoly on narrative. However, the story ends with society in a state of riotous chaos, from which the future is uncertain. A spark of optimism remains, however, as Evey successfully adopts the 'V'-*persona*, and even takes on a protégé of her own.

What is certain, is that V's own story is book-ended by acts of narrative agency: his introduction into the story depicts him dressing up, preparing to oversee his demolishing of the Houses of Parliament, his first major attack on the government. His exit, is his body loaded on a train, in correspondence with his own funeral arrangements, blowing up Downing Street, which is likely one of the few symbolical remains of the old political system.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the role of masking in several Batman-comics as well as in the comic *V for Vendetta*. I started by proposing a relatively liberal interpretation of *masking*, which includes a character's costume (or other disguise) as well as their behavior.

I then introduced the concepts *reflexive* and *discerning recognizability*, as well as a model for representation, borrowed from Belting's understanding of Ancient Greek rituals, which explains the terms *eidolon*, *kolossos* and *body*, and how they relate to each other.

These concepts I applied to Batman first, and found that his masking relies on an evocation of a supernatural presence in order to prevent *reflexive recognizability*. Furthermore, this same effect has an opposite effect on his readership, which is an integral part of his popular appeal.

Then I directed my attention towards the character 'V' *V for Vendetta*, and found that his masking is more geared towards performativity. Playing into the story's major theme of narrative agency, V wields his performativity as a weapon against the oppressive government. In so doing, he aims to tear down the government's own dominant narrative and restore a plurality of voices in society.

While I maintain that the masking in Batman centers around evocation which harkens back to the ritual use of masks, I have also demonstrated that this evocation is facilitated by theatrical means. Similarly, the performativity which perforates V's masking is facilitated by an evocation of a 'theatrical *eidolon*'. Thus, while the core functions of their masking differ, they still employ similar mechanics.

I propose that the analytical framework that these mechanics constitutes can be applied beyond my use in this thesis. In light of my inclusive interpretation of *masking*, I maintain that any representation of self can be analyzed in this manner. By applying this framework to both Batman and *V for Vendetta*, I have demonstrated its potential to account for both characters who have faced substantial changes and diverging depictions, as is the case with Batman, and characters whose characteristics remain relatively ‘fixed’, as is the case with V. Furthermore, my discussion around the government’s figurative use of *masking* in *V for Vendetta* demonstrates the framework’s potential to operate beyond the more literal sense of the term.

What this means for comics is that it opens for a more expansive treatment of the forms of masking they convey: by mostly focusing on literal masks, I have merely scraped the tip of the iceberg that is comics’ potential in this regard. Due to the inherently visual nature of the medium, I consider masking to be one of comics’ most ingrained traits, and were I to continue my studies, I believe I would find ample material in the medium.

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