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# *The Representation of Violence in Five Dystopian Film Narratives:*
## *Myth, Catharsis and Adaptation in '28 Days Later,' '28 Weeks Later,' 'Children of Men,' 'The Road' and 'V for Vendetta.' Five Case Studies.*

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## Introduction

The representation of violence has always been an integral part of artistic creation. Ancient human and animal sacrifices or hunting scenes have been depicted in caves around the world, the indirect treatment of violence in Greek Tragedy and the direct representation of physical violence in Roman spectacle, as well as Elizabethan revenge plays full of torture, mutilation and cannibalism bear testimony to the inherent human attraction towards violence performed by others. Philosphical and psychological studies have tried to provide answers to the underlying reasons for the human need to sublimate violence in different art forms and the fascination the dark sides of human nature exert on audiences of all times, but the discussion is by no means ended.

The abundance of violent films, but also other forms of violent entertainment, such as computer games or role-playing games, in our time prove that this fascination for the depiction of violence is more alive than ever. Therefore, the question arises whether images of horror, which would shock human beings in real life, can make traumatic events accessible through mimetic simulation. Through the vicarious experience of suffering, fear and death of fictional characters, the spectator explores his/her own mortality. However, to what extent this experience leads to a simplistic enjoyment of the spectacle or to a critical awareness of the disastrous consequences of violence largely depends on the way this surrogate bloodshed is conveyed. My thesis sustains that the representation of violence can have a cathartic effect as long as the narrative presents mythological elements linking it to deeply embedded archetypal fears and anxieties. The quality of the catharsis however varies according to the presence or not of complex tragic characters and plot lines and can either be limited to a temporary melodramatic thrill, or result in a more complex catharsis which provides tragic insights.

This study addresses two major arguments, both concerning the representation of violence in dystopian narratives. One line of analysis focuses on the transposition of violence from one semiotic system to another, in other words from novel (*The Children of Men* and *The Road*) and graphic novel (*V for Vendetta*) to film and from film (*28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*) to graphic novel. The selection of the works has been determined by the need for exemplary texts that enable a comparative analysis of the

expressive means of the respective semiotic systems. Another criterion for the choice of films is linked to the dystopian genre which traditionally deals with issues dear to the time of its creation. In fact, the films that will be analysed in depth in the main body of the thesis are artistic expressions of anxieties of the first decade of the twenty-first century and reflect current social and political developments. The second line of enquiry focuses on the role of violence in contemporary dystopian film narratives and its possible cathartic effect when combined with mythological elements and tragic heroic figures.

Apart from the first chapter which is only theoretical, the remaining chapters of the thesis provide a theoretical introduction to the topic before moving on to the applied analysis of the texts or films in question.

Chapter One provides an overview of the critical assumptions on the concept of adaptation, or, in other words, the process of appropriating meaning from a prior text into a new work of art which, in the case of the selected texts, requires a change of medium. Despite the growing tendency in recent years of moving away from fidelity to the source text as criterion of evaluation, adaptations are still sometimes considered as culturally inferior by both critics and scholars, mainly when literary texts are involved. This general contempt of adaptation is also related to the status of the expressive means in question. Traditionally, words, and consequently works of art using words as expressive means are considered more valuable than works of art which rely on images to convey meaning. In adaptation studies, there is a general tendency to distinguish between the mental image and the visual image, the former seen as a concept created by the mind, the latter seen as being perceived by the eye. However, as Kamilla Elliott's analysis shows, no art form is completely pure and both types of images are present in both film and novel. In addition to the importance of the semiotic systems that are involved in the adapting process, also the context of the time of a text's reception plays an important role. An adaptation always reflects the ideology and culture of the period of time it belongs to and may consequently require changes in order to meet the needs of its time.

The main body of Chapter One deals with adaptation as product and process. With regard to the process involved in transposing a narrative into a different medium, Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* and Brian McFarlane's *From Novel to Film*

have proven useful. According to Hutcheon, re-interpretation of the source text is fundamental for a successful adaptation. McFarlane distinguishes between 'transfer' and 'adaptation', implying that the former refers to all the elements of a narrative that are independent from a particular mode of expression and can thus be directly transferred to another text, whereas the latter consists in changing the way a narrative is conveyed according to the semiotic system that is employed. The media-specific changes involved in the adapting process are fundamental in this study, insofar as the way violence is represented and experienced largely depends on the strategies adopted by the medium. Therefore, the final part of this chapter deals with the expressive peculiarities of the novel, the film and the graphic novel, thus providing a starting point for the subsequent in depth analysis of the representation of violence in Chapter Three.

In order to narrow down the range of the representation of violence, works from the dystopian genre have been chosen for this study. Chapter Two introduces the notions of utopia and dystopia, by giving a short overview of the development of the concept with its emphasis on both the fantastic and the real, or, in other words, the projection of a narrative into a distant future but with profound roots in the historical time of its creation. The films rely on the viewers' suspension of disbelief, depicting apparently realistic narratives, which are however unreal and distorted. The use of documentary-style film techniques in addition to the introduction of well-know historic images stresses the link to reality. However, by distorting reality through unrealistic plot elements and distancing effects typical of the medium film (such as the grey layer that seems to cover the images in *The Road* or the impression of digitalised movement in *V for Vendetta*), the films come closer to representing an underlying truth. Similarly to Lacan's assumption that truth is structured like fiction and only in fictional space the truth of our desire can be articulated, only fiction enables a glimpse of the Lacanian Real.[1]

Dystopia is a comprehensive term for the narratives analysed in this study. They all present dystopian elements, but they are also set in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic scenarios which will be analysed as sub-genre of dystopia. As products of their time, the selected films are informed by the contemporary preoccupations about terrorism, infectious disease, environmental issues or anxieties about the misuse of science and

[1] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Massachusetts: MIT, 1992), p. 18.

technology. The fear of terrorism is shaping the political agendas of Western countries and leads to the introduction of laws limiting individual freedom which can be interpreted as a first step towards a totalitarian system. Infectious disease, on the other hand, can be seen as a metaphor for the evils of our time with its dehumanising quality hinted at in *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*, as well as to some extent in *V for Vendetta*.

Chapter Three is dedicated to the representation of violence and its relevance both with regard to film violence and its transferability from one medium to another. The first part of the chapter provides a short historical outline of the development of film violence, its critical reception and theoretical assumptions on its impact on the viewer. What is perceived as utterly violent is not always linked to the explicitness of the image. Sometimes the mere impression of danger, which largely depends on the narrative, may heighten the impression of violence, whereas graphic depictions of horror may only have a limited effect insofar as stylisation can either increase the impression of reality or create a distancing effect. The distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' violence as postulated by Devin McKinney,[2] with the former resulting in critical reflection upon the violence depicted and the latter implying pure entertainment, is important for the discussion inasmuch as it impacts the cathartic experience of the viewer.

The films selected for this study, in addition to their dystopian aspects, present elements of both the action and the horror genre. Generally speaking, the action genre is based on special effects which are introduced at the expense of storytelling. Whether action violence leaves a lasting impact on the audience depends on its revelatory capabilities. Most action violence focuses on spectacle and a simplistic plot based on the melodramatic victory of good over evil. However, as my analysis will show, action elements combined with mythological themes and complex heroes can result in a tragic cathartic experience. The horror genre mainly relies on the transgression of visual taboos, but employs also other techniques such as music or light and shadow to increase the impression of threat. The genre addresses some of the most deeply embedded fears of humanity and thus often represents myths of the collective unconscious.

[2] Devin McKinney, 'Violence: The Strong and the Weak', *Film Quarterly*, 46.4 (1993), 16-22.

The second part of Chapter Three provides a thorough analysis of the adaptation process as theorised in Chapter One. After some preliminary thoughts on the violence of adaptation and the implications that go hand in hand with a change of medium, this chapter focuses on the adapting process from novel to film, from graphic novel to film and from film to graphic novel. The transposition from novel to film, in addition to providing an example of different degrees of fidelity to the source text, focuses on the close analysis of action and horror conventions in novel form and film form. The analysis of the cinematic rendering of the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* gives insight into the different expressive potential of the visual image in its still and in its moving form. The analysis of the transposition from film into graphic novel, on the other hand, emphasises the visual restrictions the comic encounters when based on a film, but also provides examples of the techniques the comic medium employs in order to convey action or horror experiences to the reader.

Chapter Four analyses the underlying mythical and archetypal aspects of the dystopian narratives in question. According to my thesis, these elements are fundamental ingredients for a possible cathartic experience. Myths provide a significant level of insight about human fears and anxieties reflecting a primeval reality that is still valid in contemporary society and finds due expression in works of art of all kinds. Similar to the necessary balance between fiction and reality in the dystopian genre, also the reception of myths depends upon the audience's dual and apparently contradictory awareness of the contrived and unreal character of the mythical narrative and its inherent reality as expression of something deeply human. The archetypal elements that lie at the basis of ancient myths and which, according to Jung, are in themselves unrepresentable, recall Lacan's concept of the Real which Žižek compares to "a grey and formless mist, pulsing slowly as if with inchoate life."[3] However, archetypes have effects on real life which enable visualisation and narration.

All the selected films contain mythical and archetypal elements, the most pervasive being the heroic journey into the unknown which the characters have to undergo in order to grow and gain insight. The Saviour myth and its varieties is another important element as well as archetypal elements such as the feminine or the family. Moreover, like most apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives also these contain

[3] Žižek, *Looking Awry,* p. 14.

cosmological and eschatological elements. In addition to these, evil as innate to human nature finds its expression in all the films, but reaches mythical dimensions in *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*.

Chapter Five addresses catharsis as an aesthetic concept that is particularly relevant in the discussion of violence and its possible function of discharging excessive destructive energies. Catharsis is linked to ritual and sacrifice in its role of interrupting the cycle of violence that governs society through the sacrifice of a scapegoat. The tragic heroes in the dystopian films in question to some extent figure as modern scapegoats whose sacrifice enables society to find a way out of its crisis. Lacan's concept of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary is significant in explaining how art can provide a glimpse of the presumably ungraspable Real. The distortions art applies to the apparent reality of everyday life give (limited) access to the real reality that is otherwise lost behind the Symbolic and Imaginary order. This encounter with the Real is achieved when the work of art triggers existential questions in the addressee. Mark Pizzato argues that tragic catharsis, as opposed to melodramatic catharsis, has the capability of forcing the viewer to deal with imperceptible issues that only come to the surface through a significant artistic experience. Melodramatic catharsis, on the other hand, provides simplistic entertainment without long lasting effects on the viewer.

The selected films achieve their cathartic effect to different degrees. This does not depend on how much violence is presented, but how it is presented and received. Violence showing its painful consequences can lead towards a cathartic clarification in the viewer. The risk of melodramatic catharsis with its simplified distinctions between good and evil, predictable plot and clear-cut identifications with the hero or against evil, on the other hand, lies in its stereotypical and single-layered outlook onto the world. The questions, should any arise, are already answered within the narrative, the purging of fears and desires is superficial and the cinematic experience only short-lived. Only by forcing the spectator to question simplified assumptions about what is right and wrong by displaying the troubling reality of violence and thus raising the awareness of his/her own shortcomings can cinematic storytelling lead towards a more critical understanding of violence.

# Chapter One: Adaptation

## 1.1 Introduction

Adaptation is a creative process consisting in transposing a well known work of art into a new work. The topic has been widely discussed and the range of scholarly work about adaptation reflects the importance of the process for art in general and for film in particular. From Sergei Eisenstein's[4] first considerations about the peculiarities of film language as opposed to the written word over George Bluestone's groundbreaking *Novel into Film* (1957) to structuralist approaches on the comparative analysis of mediatic differences by Christian Metz[5] and the likes, the selection is vast. In more recent years, works such as Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996) or James Naremore's *Film Adaptation* (2000), collections of essays in Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo's *A Companion to Literature and Film* (2004) or *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (2005), as well as *Linda Hutcheon's A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) have formed the theoretical landscape of film adaptation.[6]

The various approaches and considerations that have informed the discussion will be analysed in the following paragraphs, starting with some general reflections on the concept of adaptation (1.1.1), moving on to the discussion about the reasons for a general contempt of adaptation (1.2) that can be explained by a long lasting insistence on fidelity (1.2.1) and deep-rooted cultural assumptions about word and image (1.2.2 and 1.2.3) before touching upon the role of the context in which adaptation takes place (1.3). The main focus of this chapter lies on adaptation as product and process (1.4) with a thorough discussion on the differences between transfer and adaptation (1.4.1)

[4] Sergei Eisenstein, 'Film Language' in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda (1944, reprint New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949), pp. 108-21.
[5] Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. by Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974)
[6] Due to the vastness of the critical work on the topic it is impossible to give an extensive bibliographical overview. The following list is just a limited selection of works that have been useful in understanding the adaptation discourse and is not meant to be exhaustive: Casetti, Francesco, *Dentro lo sguardo. Il film e il suo spettatore* (Milano: Bompiani, 1986); Dusi, Nicola, *Il cinema come traduzione. Da un medium all'altro: letteratura, cinema, pittura* (Torino: UTET, 2006); Gaudreault, André, *Dal letterario al filmico. Sistema del racconto* (Torino: Linaud, 2000); Sabouraud, Frédéric, *L'adattamento cinematografico* (Torino: Lindau, 2007).

before moving on to the analysis of the different media-specific strategies (1.4.2) that distinguish novel, film and graphic novel.

### 1.1.1 Reflections on Film Adaptation

There are different ways of how adaptation can be understood. Dudley Andrew claims that the distinctive feature of film adaptation is "the matching of the cinematic sign system to a prior achievement in some other system."[7] More generally speaking, adaptation can be considered as "the appropriation of meaning from a prior text."[8] The fact that novel, graphic novel and film draw upon different signifying systems – verbal as far as the novel is concerned, visual and verbal in terms of the graphic novel, and visual, verbal and aural for the film – requires adaptation and raises questions such as, for example, to what extent the visual suggestions of the novel have been picked up. In his *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Brian McFarlane points out that "the verbal sign, with its low iconicity and high symbolic function, works *conceptually*, whereas the cinematic sign, with its high iconicity and uncertain symbolic function, works directly, sensuously, *perceptually*."[9] Often, the viewers' dissatisfaction with a film adaptation is due to the high iconicity of the film medium which constricts the audience's potential to use their imagination, whereas part of the pleasure of reading lies in the reader's visualisation activity. Consequently, according to McFarlane, the aim of adaptation is "to offer a perceptual experience that corresponds with one arrived at conceptually."[10] However, since the 'appropriation of meaning from a prior text' is rarely achieved successfully, adaptation should aim at transferring the narrative basis of the source and adapting those aspects of its enunciation which are worth retaining in order to create a similar affective response in spite of the different means of signification and reception.[11] In addition to the tension between familiarity with elements of the source and innovation in the derivative text, both a possible change of

[7] Dudley Andrew, 'The Well-Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory', *Narrative Strategies: Original Essays in Film and Prose Fiction*, ed. by Janice R. Welsch and Syndy M. Conger (Macomb: West Illinois University Press, Macomb, 1980), pp. 9-17 (p. 9).
[8] Andrew, p. 9.
[9] Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 26-27.
[10] McFarlane, p. 21.
[11] McFarlane, p. 21.

medium and a change of context may be necessary in order to make the story relevant to the addressee. Thus, the fundamental question to ask about adaptation is not whether the adapted text is more or less valuable than the earlier text, but how the two texts relate to each other, in other words, to what extent the adaptation plays upon or derives from the original text and whether the derivative text succeeds in bringing across its message. All in all, the adapting process is not simply copying, but creatively engaging with a text and thus appropriating it. In her *Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon suggests that "Perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptation is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous."[12] For the receiver, adaptation implies a dialogical process in which the work that is already known is compared with the one being experienced.[13] Thus, an adaptation is inevitably connected to a previous text. Otherwise it would not be experienced as adaptation, but as an autonomous text which, of course, does not curtail the value of the work of art, but changes the receptive experience. Part of the pleasure or disappointment of adaptation is its familiarity with the source. In order to experience a text as adaptation, the audience needs the memory of the original text in order to appreciate the similarities and differences of the adaptation.

It is not always easy to establish what exactly may be called an adaptation and what may not. In broad terms, all kinds of transformations of texts, including translations, condensations, paraphrases or transcriptions, imply some sort of adaptation and result in a loss of the original text's integrity. However, not all these 'adaptations' are relevant to this study. The focus here is with the adaptation of novels and graphic novels into film, with its main focus on the semiotic differences in rendering violence. Even though strictly speaking sequels and prequels such as the *28 Days Later* comic book series are not real adaptations but expansions of a pre-existent text, they are relevant for this study, insofar as they provide insight in the transfer and adaptation of visual aspects from film to graphic novel. In the second part of this thesis the films are, however, also analysed as autonomous text with regard to the combination of violence with mythic elements which lead to tragic or melodramatic cathartic experiences in the receiver.

[12] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 20.
[13] Robert Stam, 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation', *Film Adaptation*, ed. by James Naremore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp. 54-76 (p. 64).

## 1.2 The Contempt of Adaptation

In the context of this work, some aspects of the adaptation discourse, such as the contempt of adaptation with its insistence on fidelity, only play a secondary role, but need to be addressed in order to complete the general picture. The comparison of the expressive power of word and image and the culturally rooted discourse on their value, on the other hand, are fundamental, inasmuch as the semiotic systems in question rely on these means of expression.

### 1.2.1 Fidelity

One of the difficulties of film adaptations is that viewers constantly compare their own mental images with those created by a film-maker. As Christian Metz points out, the reader "will not always find *his* film, since what he has before him in the actual film is now somebody else's phantasy."[14] The audio-visual images created by the film-maker can or cannot correspond to the conceptual images created by the reader. As Anthony Burgess puts it, "the verbal shadow [has to be] turned into light, the word [has to be] made flesh."[15] Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, there seems to be a constant need of having verbal concepts transformed into perceptual concreteness.

Up until the early 1990s, fidelity to the source used to be the main criterion in evaluating the merit of an adaptation, a discourse which is based on the assumption that the adapter is interested in reproducing the source text. McFarlane's *Novel into Film* (1996) has introduced a new wave of criticism that challenges 'fidelity criticism,'[16] but as J. D. Connor points out in his article "The Persistence of Fidelity: Adaptation Theory Today," despite the efforts of critcs such as Robert Stam ("Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," 2000), Linda Hutcheon (*A Theory of Adaptation*, 2006) or Christopher Orr ("The Discourse on Adaptation,"[17] 1984) to change the agenda of

[14] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. by Celia Britton and others (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 12.
[15] Anthony Burgess, 'On the Hopelessness of Turning Good Books into Films', *New York Times*, 20 April 1975, p. 15.
[16] Hutcheon, pp. 6-7.
[17] Christopher Orr, 'The Discourse on Adaptation', *Wide Angle*, 6.2 (1984), 72-6

adaptation studies, even contemporary film studies still rely on fidelity as evaluating criterion.[18] The discourse on fidelity is based on the assumption that an adaptation is meant to simply reproduce the source text. However, as Hutcheon puts it "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication."[19] Even the dictionary meaning of the verb 'adapt' makes it clear that it means 'to change something to make it more suitable.'[20] Hutcheon also compares adaptation to the idea of paraphrase which in one of its principal meanings is defined as "a free rendering or amplification of a passage."[21] According to Brian McFarlane, "the insistence on fidelity has led to a suppression of potentially more rewarding approaches to the phenomenon of adaptation."[22] He sees adaptation as "an example of convergence among the arts, perhaps a desirable – even inevitable – process in a rich culture."[23] He suggests approaching adaptation in terms of intertextual references to the source, thus transforming it into a true resource for the derivative work of art.

Even though major authors such as Shakespeare, Aeshylos, Racine, Goethe and many more have adapted popular stories and adaptations have always been part of Western culture, they are often considered as culturally inferior, mainly if the transposition occurs from a so-called higher art form to a lower art form. However, according to Aristotle, *imitatio* or *mimesis* are instinctive human behavioural traits and the source of human pleasure in art.[24] Walter Benjamin's assumption that "storytelling is always the art of repeating stories"[25] goes in a similar direction. There may be imitation and repetition, but the way the stories are told can change: adapters can simplify or amplify the source or extrapolate what they consider important from it. Thus, there is always a relationship to prior texts, though, not necessarily a hierarchical one. In other words, 'prior' does not necessarily mean 'better'.

The appeal of adaptations lies both in the recognition of familiar elements and the surprise due to variations and changes. Thus, the addressee finds pleasure in

[18] J. D. Connor, 'The Persistence of Fidelity: Adaptation Theory Today', *M/C Journal* 10.2 (2007) <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0705/15-connor.php> [accessed 18 January 2012]
[19] Hutcheon, p. 7.
[20] *Macmillan Dictionary* < http://www.macmillandictionary.com/> [accessed 17 January 2012]
[21] Hutcheon, p. 17.
[22] McFarlane, p. 10.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Rudolf Wittkower, 'Imitation, Eclecticism, and Genius', in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Earl R. Wasserman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 143-61 (p. 143).
[25] Walter Benjamin, 'The task of the translator' in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 71-92 (p. 90).

recognising the timeless characteristics of the story (the mythical/archetypical elements) and at the same time relates to the changes made to the original text in order to underline the aspects which are relevant to an audience of a certain time and culture.

### 1.2.2 Logophilia and Iconophobia

When it comes to film adaptations of literary texts, what Robert Stam[26] calls 'iconophobia' and 'logophilia', continue to play an important role. There is still a certain suspicion of the visual whereas the word is considered sacred. A similar hierarchy can also be seen when it comes to graphic novels which are considered low-brow compared to novels, but also compared to films which have increasingly gained ground in terms of critical appreciation.

In her article "Sacred Word, Profane Images: Theologies of Adaptation,"[27] Ella Shohat compares the theological anxiety concerning the adaptation of sacred texts, mainly in the Judeo-Islamic context, with discourses about film adaptations of literary texts. She sees the anxiety mainly connected to the movement from the sacred and the canonical to the flesh-and-blood incarnation of film which is grounded in the concrete and thus in the profane. Visual representation in Islam and Judaism has always been enmeshed in taboos and prohibitions. According to Shohat, "the novel retained an a priori affinity with the religion of the word and scripture."[28] She suspects that the denigration of cinematic adaptations of novels may be linked to the biblical phobia of visual representation. She wonders to what extent faith in the sacred word may have provoked, as she puts it, "contemporary iconoclastic anxiety, perceiving adaptation as an inherently idolatrous betrayal."[29] Very often, the adaptation is disdained as "merely a surrogate icon incapable of surpassing the true god, the supreme textual being."[30] Continuing the theological metaphor, Shohat claims that "within this literarist theology, film incarnates an earthly embodied object, inferior to heavenly words, while the

[26] Stam, 'Beyond Fidelity', p. 58.
[27] Ella Shohat, 'Sacred Word, Profane Image: Theologies of Adaptation', *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. (23-45).
[28] Shohat, p. 24.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Shohat, p. 42.

practice of adaptation remains always already an act of inauthenticity and deviance."[31] Accepting the traditional albeit superficial translation of the Greek word *logos* at face value, according to the Bible, in the beginning there was the word and consequently, within this logic, film is only a copy of the original word of the novel. However, the rigid dichotomy between verbal and visual is only theoretical inasmuch as the written word has visual aspects as well, first of all because of its graphic manifestation and second and more importantly because of its ability to create images in the reader's mind. Similarly, also images may elicit words in the addressee's mind in the form of concepts, metaphors or comments. Adaptation can only be successful if both 'iconophobia' with its blind 'adoration of the word' and 'logophilia' with its 'fetishism of the image'[32] are overcome.

### 1.2.3 Word/Image Dichotomy

In her article "Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars,"[33] Kamilla Elliott argues that the generally agreed essential opposition between words as the exclusive realm of novels and images as the exclusive realm of film has no strong evidential basis.

This apparent opposition has been discussed since the origins of film, but became a widely received idea following George Bluestone's 1957 book *Novel into Films* in which he applies Lessing's differentiation of poetry as the realm of time and action and painting as that of static bodies and space to novels and films. According to Bluestone, both novelist and film director have a common intention, but one sees visually through the eye whereas the other sees imaginatively through the mind. He continues, "Between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image lies the root difference between the two media."[34] In Elliott's reading of Bluestone, the latter "designates the novel as conceptual, linguistic, discursive, symbolic, inspiring mental imagery, with time as its formative principle, and the film as perceptual, visual, presentational, literal, given to visual images, with space as its

[31] Shohat, p. 42.
[32] Shohat, p. 43.
[33] Kamilla Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', in *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 1-22.
[34] George Bluestrone, *Novels into Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 1.

formative principle."[35] Critical theory in both, film studies and literary studies, but also interdisciplinary studies, have stressed this distinction between word and image, although there is evidence that this differentiation is rather arbitrary. Both media can be considered as hybrid, even though the trend to illustrate novels has declined with the rise of cinema. Elliott underlines that

> Films abound in words – in sound dialogue, intertitles, subtitles, voice-over narration, credits, and words on sets and props – and written texts form the basis of most films. In the same way, novels have at times been copiously illustrated with pictorial initials, vignettes, full-page plates, frontspieces, and end-pieces and unillustrated novels create visual and spacial effects through ekphrasis.[36]

However, film words have always been neglected in film criticism and theory as well as have illustrations of novels in literary studies. For filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein, words are considered uncinematic and words in film are nothing more than bad literature.[37] In other words, verbal narration in general is considered as highly uncinematic and implies resorting to literary modes of storytelling. Theorists such as Gilles Deleuze refer to words or sound as "a new dimension of the visual image."[38] According to Elliott, the reason behind this strict distinction is that "traditionally, pure arts have been more highly valued than hybrid ones"[39] and consequently "novels and films have been pressed towards semiotic purity."[40] This insistence on artistic purity may be one of the reasons why graphic novels, which are neither prose nor movies, have entered literary criticism only in recent years.

Despite this word/image dichotomy, the film/novel analogy has been part of critical theory since the origins of film studies. Moreover, prose words entered the pictorial territory inasmuch as their pictorial capacities were underlined. In Victorian times, novels were often referred to as canvas and their characterisations as portraits, thus highlighting the visual qualities of a written text. In his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), Joseph Conrad explains, "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to

[35] Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', p. 2.
[36] Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', p. 2.
[37] Eisenstein, 'Film Language', pp. 108, 115.
[38] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 226, 233.
[39] Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', p. 5.
[40] Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', p. 5.

make you *see*."[41] Thomas Hardy, for example, subtitled his novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), "A Rural Painting in the Dutch School", whereas the title of Henry James' novel *Portrait of a Lady* (1880-81) explicitly refers to the pictorial realm. According to Elliott,

> Prose painting analogies pervade nineteenth-century periodical reviews of novels to such an extent that it is difficult to find one that does not speak of prose in terms of painting, or of characterizations as portraits, or of the novel as canvas, or of prose style in terms of painting schools, or of writers by analogy to well-known painters.[42]

Similarly, film images are often referred to as language and films as texts. Moreover, from the 1960s onward, critical methods derived from linguistics have often been applied to film studies. Semioticians such as Christian Metz discuss film as a language or a language system[43] and thus enter verbal territory.

In addition to terminological borrowings between the two semiotic systems, there are other analogies. Eisenstein, for example, pointed out that Western film techniques were influenced by the Victorian novel with its alternating viewpoints, its attention to visual details and its atmospheric close-ups.[44] But these interdisciplinary exchanges also function the other way round. Cinematic techniques such as fragmentation, cross-cutting, multiple viewpoints and temporal discontinuity have influenced modern narration.[45] Bluestone argues that because of the film's ability to visually represent exteriority, "The novel has tended to retreat more and more from external action to internal thought, form plot to character, from social to psychological realities."[46] Similarly, Christian Metz argues that the film took on the role the nineteenth-century novel had at its time, whereas the twentieth-century novel both formally and culturally evolved into a different direction. In his words,

> The classical film has taken [...] the historical place of the grand-epoch, nineteenth-century novel (itself descended from the ancient epic); it fills the

[41] Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (New York: Dover Thrift Editios, 1999), p. 3.
[42] Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', p. 7.
[43] Christian Metz, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?' in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. by Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 31-91.
[44] Sergei Eisenstein, 'Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today' in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda (1944, reprint New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949), pp. 195-255 (p. 195).
[45] Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', p. 4.
[46] Bluestone, p. 46.

> same social function, a function which the twentieth-century novel, less and less diegetic and representational, tends partly to abandon.[47]

Finally, Elliott suggests a more useful consideration of the word/image rivalries. She argues that both novel and film are hybrid art forms. Illustrated novels were common at Victorian times and a close look at some of the illustrations of *Vanity Fair*, for example, reveals that some illustrations create montage sequences with different angles and perspectives within a chapter.[48] Also a close analysis of the link between the use of intertitles and advances in montage techniques proves that some general film history assumptions need to be reevaluated, as for example André Gaudreault's point that verbal narration and the use of intertitles declined with the development of editing techniques. Gaudreault claims that, "until the narrative faculties of *editing* had been further developed – [a] narrator would carry out the work of narration through the use of words, of articulated language, either in written form (intertitles) or oral form (speaker)."[49] However, Elliott, comparing two film versions of *Oliver Twist*, one made in 1912, the other in 1922, contradicts Gaudreault's assumption. According to her close analysis even more intertitles were used as montage developed. She also noticed a growing trend during the late silent period of "montage sequences that interweave intertitles and filmed scenes to form hybrid verbal-visual 'sentences' governed by verbal syntax."[50] In other words, narrative intertitles are often only fragments or dependent clauses whereas the filmed scenes function as main clause. According to Elliott, these intertitles are not needed in order to explain the plot, "but they provide rhetorical and rhythmic effects, closure and enclosure for filmed scenes within a verbal structure."[51] All in all, neither film theory nor novel theory benefit from an interdisciplinary opposition of image and word. Both within and between the two media the word/image engagements are fare more complex and permeable.

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[47] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. by Celia Britton and others (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 110.
[48] Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', p. 14.
[49] André Gaudreault, 'Showing and Telling: Image and Word in Early Cinema', in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: British Film Institute, 1990) pp. 274-81 (p. 277).
[50] Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', p. 16.
[51] Elliott, 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars', p. 16.

## 1.3 Context

Adaptations are stories and as such they can be seen as mere forms of representation which change according to the period of time of their creation and their culture, thus reflecting and affirming prevailing ideologies and cultural assumptions of a certain social climate. According to Joseph Hillis Miller, "We need the 'same' stories over and over, then, as one of the most powerful, perhaps the most powerful, of ways to assert the basic ideology of our culture."[52] On the other hand, stories can also be seen as, what theorists such as Marie-Laure Ryan call 'timeless cognitive models' which provide a way of making sense of the world and human behaviour.[53] These two aspects of storytelling reflect the two main characteristics of adaptation, namely the tension between invention and imitation. George Steiner considers this 'economy of invention' as a human characteristic which can best be seen in the mechanics of music based on theme and variation, but also in how human language and representation work.[54]

In his article "Adaptation and Mis-adaptations: Film, Literature and Social Discourses,"[55] Francesco Casetti considers the traditional approach of film studies which sees film as a mode of expression similar to literature and consequently uses literary categories in analysing film in terms of author, poetics or intentions as limiting and suggests a different perspective. According to him, "both film and literature can also be considered as *sites of production and the circulation of discourse*; that is, as symbolic constructions that refer to a cluster of meanings that a society considers possible (thinkable) and feasible (legitimate)."[56] Thus, film and literature say more about the interaction between writer/director and reader/audience than about the author's personal expressive abilities and should therefore be seen in the same way as conversations, news reports, public speeches or anecdotes, or, in Casetti's words, "as discursive formations which testify to the way in which society organizes its meanings

[52] Joseph Hillis Miller, 'Narrative', in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2nd ed., ed. by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 66-79 (p. 72).
[53] Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 242-43.
[54] George Steiner, *What Is Comparative Literature?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995), p. 14.
[55] Francesco Casetti, 'Adaptation and Mis-adaptations: Film, Literature, and Socail Discourses', in *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 81-91.
[56] Casetti, p. 82 (emphasis in italics in the original).

and shapes its system of relations."[57] Consequently, the idea of adaptation as re-reading or re-writing a prior work should be overcome.

Casetti claims that adaptation is the "*reappearance, in another discursive field, of an element (a plot, a theme, a character, etc.) that has previously appeared elsewhere.*"[58] Faithfulness to the source is not an important criterion since we are dealing with a new communicative situation. The previous discursive event (the source) is only present as a memory within the time and space of the new discursive event (the adaptation). As a result, what is vitally important to take into consideration is the dialogue between text and context. In Casetti's words, "adaptation is primarily a phenomenon of recontextualization of the text, or, even better, of reformulation of its communicative situation."[59] Often, spatial or temporal displacement takes place. The situation of the source text is often very different from that of the derivative text and the conditions and modes of existence of the latter need to be considered.

There are non-literary influences on the film such as certain conditions within the film industry, advances in technology (e.g. digitalisation or special effects) or the prevailing cultural and social climate which impact on the way a text is adapted. The text has to be considered not only in relation to its context, but also in terms of communicative interaction, expressive and receptive rules, intertextual references and personal and collective experiences. The reading or viewing experience of the addressee determines which aspects of a given text are considered predominant and thus the general meaning of the adaptation can differ from that of the source. All these key factors outside the source shape the way a text is adapted. For instance, a film such as *V for Vendetta* works on several levels and speaks to different audience members differently. A viewer who is familiar with the graphic novel may be disappointed by the absence of certain story elements, whereas an action film enthusiast may appreciate the special effects. The film critc, on the other hand, may find the intertextual references appealing while a viewer with a strong feminist agenda may find the treatment of the female heroine to be limiting. Also the historical context of the film's production plays a role. Certain visual references, such as those to American prison camps, would not be there had the film been produced in the 1990s. Sometimes a text provides information

[57] Casetti, p. 82.
[58] Casetti, p. 82 (emphasis in italics in the original).
[59] Casetti, p. 83.

about contemporary life, sometimes it merely entertains, sometimes connections with previous discourses are established. All in all, what is important is the way the text relates to the world of the addressee.

Another important aspect is that of the reception of a story, a character or a theme. The social function of a text can change. While the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* is aimed at a limited readership, the film reaches a larger audience and speaks both to action movie fans and more intellectual spectators. A text can be faithful to some aspects of the source text and at the same time trigger a completely different reception. To give an example, Baz Luhrmann's 1996 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is faithful to the bard's language, but the same words are likely to be received differently by a contemporary audience compared with an Elizabethan audience. The reprogramming of the reception is not necessarily intentional but may depend on different processes around the production of a film. Adaptation does not consist in re-proposing a certain number of common elements, but in re-proposing similar communicative situations. According to Casetti, we are involved with 'mis-adaptations' either if the derivative text does not distance itself enough from the source text or if there is an excessive distance between the two texts so that the connection is lost.[60]

The aim of the analysis of adaptations should be that of searching for inner relations. As Casetti states, "The goal is to give an account of a *network of discourses*, their connections and their intersections; and within this network, the coming together and the coming apart of some entities and configurations."[61] On an intertextual level, aspects of a text either connect or mis-connect with the whole text. On the receptive level the text is confronted with the expectations of the addressees, their previous knowledge and their viewing or reading experience. However, also on an institutional level (the institutionalised rules and manners of a given text or genre) there are tensions between conventions, rules and principles and the expectations related to them. Similarly, on a broader social level the text is confronted with the social practices, the needs and the reality of certain groups of people making the text an individual and collective resource. According to Casetti,

> In the case of cinema – that is, in the case of a medium that has had such a strong impact on the forms of discourse, reception, and social habits of the past

[60] Casetti, p. 88.
[61] Casetti, p. 89 (emphasis in italics in the original).

> century – to emphasise the process of negotiation of some films permits us to focus on them while considering the broader network to which they belong, which can then be used as a background or as a generic whole.[62]

## 1.4 Adaptation as Product and Process

Linda Hutcheon sees adaptation in three ways, first as "a formal entity or product," second as "a process of creation" and third as "a process of reception."[63] She describes adaptation as "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works; a creative *and* interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging; an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work."[64] The transposition of a work often involves a change of medium or genre, but not necessarily. As far as the process is concerned, re-interpretation and re-creation are fundamental aspects of the adapting process. Finally, because of the relationship between original text and adapted text, as long as the end product is experienced as adaptation and not as autonomous text, the receptive process always involves intertextuality.

Adaptations are often compared to translations, but to the same extent that literal translation as such is impossible, there is no such thing as literal adaptation.[65] Similarly to a translator, who needs to bear in mind the cultural background of the reader, an adapter has to take into consideration the addressee's world. What Susan Bassnett says about translation, namely that it is "an act of both inter-cultural and inter-temporal communication,"[66] can also be said about adaptation. In Walter Benjamin's terms, translation, as well as adaptation, is "an engagement with the original text that makes us see that text in different ways."[67] Very often adaptations occur across media resulting in intersemiotic transpositions (from one sign system to the other) with the necessary transcoding into a new set of conventions.

Adaptation is a process of appropriation. Someone else's story is filtered through the adaptor's sensibility and interests. As Hutcheon puts it, "adapters are first

[62] Casetti, pp. 89-90.
[63] Hutcheon, pp. 7-8.
[64] Hutcheon, p. 9.
[65] Hutcheon, p. 16.
[66] Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 9.
[67] Walter Benjamin, 'The task of the translator', in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 71-92 (p. 77).

interpreters and then creators"[68] and the choice of medium widely influences which aspects of a given story will be put in the foreground. Sometimes, plot elements require contraction or subtraction, characters need to be cut or actions need to be speeded up or explained. At times the source material even needs to be expanded. As Kamilla Elliott observes in *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*, adaptation shows that form or expression can be separated from content or ideas.[69] Generally speaking, while the form changes with adaptation, the content or part of it persists. Adaptors try to capture the spirit of a work, its style and tone. However, usually it is the story which is transposed from one sign system to another and the technical constraints of a medium will influence which aspects of the story become more relevant. Themes and character are the easiest elements to be transported from one text to another. As far as the fabula is concerned, plot ordering can be respected or changed according to the focalisation or point of view an adaptor chooses. These aspects will be discussed in more detail under the subsequent heading.

### 1.4.1 Transfer versus Adaptation

Brian McFarlane applies Roland Barthes' "Structural Analysis of Narratives"[70] to film adaptations arguing that despite its other possible uses, cinema achieves its greatest power in telling stories and thus shares the centrality of narrative with the novel. He distinguishes between 'transfer' and 'adaptation' implying that some elements of the novel can be directly transferred to film whilst others require adaptation. McFarlane uses the term 'transfer' to refer to "the process whereby certain narrative elements of novels are revealed as amenable to display in film, whereas the widely used term 'adaptation' will refer to the processes by which other novelistic elements must find quite different equivalences in the film medium."[71] Barthes' distinction between distributional and integrational narrative functions is useful in distinguishing what can be transferred from one medium to another and what needs to be adapted.

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[68] Hutcheon, p. 18.
[69] Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 133.
[70] Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in *Image-Music-Text: Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977), pp. 79-124.
[71] McFarlane, p. 13.

Barthes' distributional functions, also called *functions proper*, refer to actions and events. They are linked in a linear, syntagmatic way and refer to a functionality of doing. Within these *functions proper* he distinguishes between *cardinal functions* or *nuclei* and *catalysers.* Cardinal functions are the 'hinge-points' of a narrative and thus open up alternatives of consequences to the development of a story. They are crucial to narrativity and provide the bare bones of the narrative. Catalysers are supportive of cardinal functions and usually denote small actions thus rooting the cardinal functions in a particular reality. Since both these functions refer to aspects of story content they are directly transferable from one medium to the other.

Integrational functions are called *indices* and denote a "more or less diffuse concept which is nevertheless necessary to the meaning of the story."[72] Indices provide psychological information of characters, information about atmosphere or places. In contrast to the linearity of the cardinal functions, indices influence our reading in a pervasive way, their functionality is that of *being* and they operate on a paradigmatic level. Indices are subdivided into *indices proper* and *informants*. The former relate to concepts such as character or atmosphere and are more diffuse than the functions proper. Consequently, they are open to adaptation rather than direct transfer. Informants, which in Barthes terms are "pure data with immediate signification,"[73] on the other hand, are directly transferable. This data may include names, professions of characters, details of setting, etc., and thus, similarly to catalysers, set the narrative in a precise reality. In McFarlane's reading, cardinal functions and catalysers constitute the formal content of a narrative, and consequently are independent from their manifestation as film or novel. Informants "help to embed this formal content in a realized world, giving specificity to its abstraction"[74] and are thus a first step towards mimesis. However, the full mimetic process relies on the indices proper.

According to McFarlane, it is important to distinguish between *narrative* (or *enunciated*, more widely used in film theory) and *narration* (or *enunciation*). The former is independent from the semiotic system whereas the latter largely depends on it. Consequently, narrative, or the enunciated is transferable whereas narration (or enunciation) requires adaptation. To put it in simple terms, the narrative is the story or

[72] Barthes, p. 92.
[73] Barthes, p. 96.
[74] McFarlane, p. 15.

fabula, in other words the story material as pure chronological sequence. Narration, on the other hand, is the discourse, the plot as arranged and shaped by the story-teller. McFarlane considers 'enunciation' or 'narration' as "the whole expressive apparatus that governs the presentation – and reception – of the narrative."[75]

Summing up, what can be directly transferred from one semiotic system to another are 'distributional' functions or 'functions proper' such as 'cardinal functions' or 'catalysers'. Underlying character functions such as those of the helper or the villain, for example, are crucial to the narrative and can be transferred. Moreover, the story with its basic succession of events can be transferred as well, whereas the plot can be conveyed through different strategies according to the semiotic system. Other easily transferable aspects are mythological and psychological patterns. They are both universal aspects of human nature and independent from their semiotic manifestation. As Claude Lévi-Strauss points out, "the mythical value of the myth is preserved even through the worst translation."[76] In other words, neither style nor syntax is important, what counts is the underlying truth of the story the myth tells.

In general, it can be said that elements which exist at deep levels of the text, which are independent from a particular mode of expression and allow for an objective treatment can be transferred into another medium. When it comes to visual, verbal or aural elements which can change according to the semiotic systems, spatial or temporal aspects, or media-specific codes, adaptation is required.

### 1.4.2 Media-specific Strategies

Even though adaptation does not necessarily involve a change of medium, as for example many stage adaptations of Greek tragedies or Shakespearean plays for a modern audience prove, what theorists are mostly interested in are the media specific changes involved in the adapting process. Every medium has its own conventions, in other words, a medium-specific grammar and syntax to convey meaning. These conventions are often restrictive, but can also be seen as a chance to explore the text from different angles. Mainly cinema as a multitrack medium can combine the visuals

[75] McFarlane, p. 20.
[76] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 210.

of photography and painting, the sound and noise of music and the performance and movement of theatre and dance. However, the preciseness of these visual, aural and kinaesthetic signs do not allow for the approximation and allusiveness typical in novels. Whereas cinema and theatre use, to put it in Peirce's terms, indexical and iconic signs, novels can use symbolic and conventional signs.

Linda Hutcheon distinguishes between three modes of engagement, the 'telling mode' which immerses the receiver in a fictional world through imagination, the 'showing mode' which adopts aural and visual elements to engage the audience with a text, and finally the 'participatory mode' typical of videogames and theme parks which immerses an audience physically and kinesthetically.[77] For this study, only the first two modes are relevant insofar as this thesis focuses on the adaptations of novels or graphic novels into film and the expansion of films in graphic novel form. As Hutcheon points out, "Telling a story in words, either orally or on paper, is never the same as showing it visually and aurally in any of the many performance media available."[78] Or, as McFarlane states, "the novel's metalanguage (the vehicle of its telling) is replaced, at least in part, by the film's mise-en-scène. In a sense, the film's story does not have to be told *because* it is presented."[79]

#### 1.4.2.1 Novel and Film

Every kind of adaptation encounters the limitations of its own medium. Even in the less frequent case of adaptations of films into novels, the adapter is challenged by difficulties such as how to convey the multiple points of view of a film in a novel. But one of the major difficulties of film is that of adapting a specific narrative point of view of a novel. Even though there is a widely agreed assumption that only the written mode can convey distance and intimacy, also cinema has found its conventions to solve the problem and there are cinematic ways of conveying first person narration. Although 'subjective cinema' with a preponderance of point-of-view shots is very rare, the intimacy of first person narration can, however, be achieved through voice-over, oral narration, soliloquies or close-ups. It must be said, though, that these simulations of first person narration are rarely maintained throughout a whole film. According to Robert

[77] Hutcheon, p. 22.
[78] Hutcheon, p. 23.
[79] McFarlane, p. 29.

McKee's *Story*,[80] a handbook for screenwriters, these techniques are even considered pejoratively as literary devices which privilege the telling mode in a medium that should focus on the showing mode.

Omniscient narration in the novel, on the other hand, seems to bear resemblance with the cinematic narration of events. Both, the omniscient inaudible narrator in the novel as well as the camera are in a position of knowledge. There is always a certain level of objectivity in what is shown or narrated. The film's mise-en-scène establishes physical settings or the look of certain characters and thus functions similarly to the novel's omniscient narrating prose. The way the camera focuses on character movements, gestures or details of the setting can be compared to the narrating voice of the novel. However, the simple fact that the camera is outside the discourse of the film, whereas the omniscient narrator of the novel is part of the novel's discourse, suggests that there is no real correspondence between omniscient narration in novel and film. McFarlane argues that "neither first-person nor omniscient narration is, of its nature, amenable to cinematic narrative. Both seem always to know too much, or at least to know more than we feel is known in advance by the more directly experienced film narrative."[81]

According to McFarlane, at the end of the 19th century, writers such as Joseph Conrad and Henry James anticipated some of the characteristics of cinematic story-telling. In addition to Conrad's aim of making the reader 'see', with its focus on the physical surface of objects, as well as his and James' way of decomposing scenes with altering points of view of an object or fragmented visual fields rather than stage-like presentations of scenes can be seen as a first step towards, as Keith Cohen puts it, "*showing* how the events unfold dramatically rather than recounting them."[82] As a consequence, there is less emphasis on the author's personal narrating voice (which is another similarity with film). McFarlane considers the novelistic form of *restricted consciousness*[83] as can be found in Conrad's or James' novels, with the introduction of vantage points from which to observe the action of the narrative, as the closest one can

[80] Robert McKee, *Story:Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: Regan Books, 1997)
[81] McFarlane, p. 18.
[82] Keith Cohen, *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 5.
[83] McFarlane, p. 6.

come to the cinematic narrative mode. He explains, "One is conscious always that there is a more comprehensive point of view than that available to such protagonists,"[84] and the impression is that of the camera looking over the shoulder of the protagonist.

Notwithstanding the similarities or differences with novelistic kinds of narration, film can express point of view through different camera angles or focal lengths, through mise en scène, performance, music and costume. However, in film, seeing does not necessarily imply knowing whereas in the novel access to character knowledge is fully controlled by the author.

Another generally acknowledged limit of movie over novel is its difficulty of conveying characteral interiority. Conceptualising and intellectualising are considered the realm of language, whereas direct visual and aural perceptions are part of the performing arts. However, cinema has developed its own devices and conventions to enter a character's mind. In addition to the above mentioned so called literary devices such as voice-over or soliloquy, film uses visual and aural correlatives for internal events. Often, the external appearance of a character mirrors inner truths or certain scenes can be given an emblematic value. Moreover, character subjectivity can be created through visual analogues such as slow motion, rapid cutting, distorted lenses or lighting. Also sound effects, editing, shadows and space, as well as flashbacks and flashforwards can help convey a character's inner life.

On the other hand, there seems to be general agreement that whereas movies have their forte in showing exteriority, novels meet some difficulties when it comes to that. Often novels need to resort to long descriptions while movies only need a frame to convey the same. However, this apparent limit of the novel can also be an advantage. Whereas a novelist can choose significant details or omit certain visual information for narrative reasons, the images used in film are complete and do not leave anything to the viewer's imagination. If a film wants to trigger its audience's imagination, images have to be omitted completely and maybe substituted with sound.

According to McFarlane, another difference between the two semiotic systems lies in the novel's linearity and the film's spatiality.[85] Whereas novels work on a linear level, providing gradual information word after word, films function spatially. The smallest units of a film are frames and film is watched frame after frame. However, this

[84] McFarlane, p. 19.
[85] McFarlane, p. 27.

similarity with words, the smallest units of the novel is only apparent. Unlike words, frames are not perceived as discrete entities and they offer visual complexity and a multiplicity of signifiers at one glance. Consequently, the film-maker cannot really control in what order these signifiers are perceived. Moreover, in film there is always a spatial tension between on-screen space and off-screen space.

Another major difference between film and novel regards time. In the telling mode with language as its medium it is easy to shift from present to past or future, whereas the showing mode of the film is always somehow linked to the present. But here again, film has developed its own conventions to convey time and everything related to it, with flashbacks and flashforwards or time-lapse dissolves as the most obvious devices. In addition to conveying past through costumes, décor or other props, the use of sepia colour, archaic recording devices or historic footage are an option as well. Moreover, certain shots and their duration or repetition can convey boredom, tedium or routine, as films such as *Turin Horse* (2011) with its long takes and repetitive scenes prove.

Film and novel use different codes which need to be understood by the addressee so as to make sense of the narrative. McFarlane claims that unlike written language with its comparatively fixed punctuation or rules which signify tenses, film codes require audiences to be frequently exposed to them in order to be understood, although there is no guarantee that certain conventions will always be used the same way.[86] There are some general cinematic codes, for example related to genre or editing (e.g. fading in/fading out denoting a major lapse of time), but there are also some extra-cinematic codes such as language codes (accents or tones of voice can have an additional social meaning), visual codes (the response to these elements goes beyond merely 'seeing' and implies selection and interpretation, e.g. an orange prison jumpsuit in a contemporary film triggers a number of associations in the viewer), non-linguistic sound codes (music, noise) and cultural codes (information about ways of life, historical period, geographic setting) that need to be read.[87] The film largely relies on all these codes whereas the novel draws on the expressive means of the written language.

[86] McFarlane, p. 28.
[87] McFarlane, p. 29.

#### 1.4.2.2 Graphic Novel and Novel

The graphic novel shares elements from film and novel, but is neither of them. As Douglas Wolk argues in *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*,

> Comics are not prose. Comics are not movies. They are not a text-driven medium with added pictures; they're not the visual equivalent of prose narrative or a static version of film. They are their own thing: a medium with its own devices, its own innovators, its own clichés, its own general traps and liberties.[88]

However, this does not mean that graphic novels do not borrow strategies from other media. Wolk also claims that the way graphic novels are experienced is closest to the reading of prose books, even though they are not only more visual but at the same time also less verbal than prose. This impacts the way physical settings, characters or any other visual phenomenon are conveyed. Similarly to films, graphic novels can do without long descriptions and due to their pictorial elements the visual information is more immediate and encompassing than that which a novel can provide. On the other hand, dialogue or nonvisual concepts which need to be described or explained take up more space in comic form.[89] Aviva D. Rothschild argues that

> Graphic novels use words and pictures in ways that transcend ordinary art and text, and their creators are more than writers and artists. The artist must have a director's eye for shadow, angle, setting, and costume. The writer has to know when the text speaks and when the art speaks, avoiding redundancy. In the ideal graphic novel, the text does not distract from the art or vice versa; the eye flows naturally from element to element, creating a whole that a text-only book cannot match.[90]

From the 1980s onward, with the emergence of more refined titles and the increasing prestige of graphic novels resulting in first literary awards (e.g. the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, 1986, or in 2001 the 'Guardian First Book Award' for *Jimmy Corrigan*, 2000, by Chris Ware[91]), research on the mechanics of the medium has entered academic studies. Comics can be considered a language inasmuch as they combine writing and art in a unique way and consequently have their own syntax, grammar and conventions. In a similar way to novel and film,

[88] Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), p. 14.
[89] Wolk, pp. 25-26.
[90] Aviva D. Rothschild, *Graphic Novels: A Bibliographic Guide to Book-length Comics* (Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, 1995), p. xiv.
[91] Stephen Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel* (New York: Nantier-Beall-Minoustchine, 2003), p. 38, p. 58.

graphic novels have to deal with the limits, but also the advantages of their own semiotic system.

Pictures, words and other icons are the vocabulary of the language called comics. In *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*,[92] Scott McCloud distinguishes between reception and perception in relation to how information is acquired. Whereas pictures are 'received' information in that the message is instantaneous and does not require any formal education, writing is 'perceived' information insofar as it takes specialised knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of a language. However, he also points out that, "When pictures are more abstracted from 'reality,' they require greater levels of perception, more like words. When words are bolder, more direct, they require lower levels of perception and are received faster, more like pictures."[93] Despite its iconicity and relatively easy decodification, visual vocabulary is also culture based. According to McCloud, "The longer any form of art or communication exists, the more *symbols* it accumulates.  The modern comic is a young language, but it already has an *impressive array* of *recognizable symbols.*"[94] Lines can, for example represent smoke or smell, the former a visible phenomenon, the latter an invisible one. In the first case the lines are a picture, in the second case a visual metaphor, or, in other words, a symbol. The readership has to learn to recognise and interpret these symbols because without the participation of the addressee, they remain empty. A symbol is given life both by its creator and its receiver. Whenever a new way of representing the invisible is invented, there is a chance it might be taken up by other artists and eventually enter the language for good. Thus, every experienced comic reader knows that ripped edges of panels indicate past memories, nightmares or drug-induced trips.[95] Similarly, costume colours of superheroes are fixed and symbolise characters in the reader's mind.[96] Also the shape of word balloons changes according to the sound that is being conveyed: the outline of 'whisper balloons' is broken into small dashes, 'thought balloons' have uneven, cloudlike shapes with bubble tails whereas the balloons for electronic transmissions

[92] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994)
[93] McCloud, p. 49.
[94] McCloud, p. 131 (emphais in italics in the original).
[95] Paul Gravett, *Graphic Novels: Stories to Change Your Life* (London: Aurum Press Limited, 2005), p. 110.
[96] McCloud, p. 188.

(phones, radios, TVs) have tails shaped like lightning bolts.[97] All these conventions are part of the comic language.

To some extent, graphic novels combine painting (image-making) and poetry (word-assembling). The connection between poetry and painting goes back to ancient times. Already Simonide of Keos saw poetry as a verbal picture and painting as silent poetry.[98] Both arts are ways of representing perception, but the relatively fixed meaning of poetry, which can be an advantage in precisely conveying an idea, finds its limits in the boundaries of language and vocabulary. Painting with its infinite shades and variations, which allow for creative visual representation, on the other hand, finds its limits when it comes to express everything that is outside the visual realm, as for example emotions, spirituality or philosphical thoughts. McCloud asserts that

> Pictures can induce *strong feelings* in the reader, but they can also lack the *specificity* of words.  Words, on the other hand, offer that specificity, but can lack the immediate emotional charge of pictures, relying instead on a gradual *comulative* effect. [...]  Together, of course, words and pictures can work miracles."[99]

Graphic novels mostly rely on language when it comes to character interiority. As Rothschild explains,

> In comics, character is largely a matter of dialogue; no artist, no matter how skilled, can create three-dimensional individuals. The writers are more like playwrights or scriptwriters than novelists. They supply dialogue and narration, but the settings and descriptions are the artists' responsibility.[100]

However, when it comes to representing the face, invisible emotions can to some extent be conveyed in pictorial terms as well, since some indicators of feelings are visually based. The introduction of close-ups on facial expressions or zooming in on details focuses the reader's attention on the visually expressed emotions. Body language, mainly hands, can convey feelings and are fundamental to heighten the emotional impact. Also simple lines have their own expressive power and can create both visual and verbal characterisation. The direction, shape and character of a line can convey strength, vitality, warmth, stability, or weakness.[101] Similarly, backgrounds can visually

[97] Daniel Cooney, *Writing and Illustrating the Graphic Novel* (London: A&C Black Publishers, 2011)
[98] Simonides of Keos, "poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens" as quoted in Plutarch, *De Gloria Atheniensium*, 3.347a
[99] McCloud, p. 135 (emphasis in italics in the original).
[100] Rothschild, p. xv.
[101] McCloud, p. 125.

indicate invisible ideas or emotions and thus represent "the *landscape* of the characters' *minds*."[102]

In addition to their characterising function, dialogue and language in general give the single comic panels a temporal dimension. As Wolk explains, "Time is the domain of poetry (or language), because language takes time to experience, and because it can describe time, or describe change over time, easily in a way that pictures can't."[103] To put it differently, words, mainly dialogue, introduce time by representing sound which can only exist in time. Wolk continues, "Without language as a 'timer' or contextual cue for understanding the image, every visual change causes the reader to stop and assess what exactly is happening, and how long it's supposed to take."[104]

However, according to McCloud, comics mostly rely on 'closure' – the human ability of mentally completing the fragments of our perception – when it comes to conveying change, time and motion. 'Closure' is not only limited to comics: storytellers trying to create suspense, the transformation of still pictures into a story in motion as in film, or the single pixels of a digital image all require 'closure,' either perceptively or inperceptively. In comics, this 'closure' happens in the so-called 'gutter', the space between two panels. As McCloud explains,

> In the *limbo* of the gutter, *human imagination* takes two separate images and *transforms* them into a single idea.  Nothing is *seen* between the two panels, but *experience* tells you something *must be* there. [...]  Comics panels *fracture* both *time* and *space*, offering a *jagged, staccato rhythm* of *unconnected moments*. But closure allows us to *connect* these moments and *mentally construct* a *continuous, unified reality*.  If *visual iconography* is the *vocabulary* of comics, *closure* is its *grammar*. And since our *definition* of comics hinges on the *arrangement* of elements, then, in a very real sense, *comic IS closure*![105]

Comics require voluntary closure in order to simulate time and motion. Everything put on paper by the artist must be completed in the reader's mind. The reader decides how to link the pictures and to imagine the intensity of what is happening within the blank space. In McCloud's rather poetic rendering of the idea, the reader is asked to "join in a *silent dance* of the *seen* and the *unseen*."[106]

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[102] McCloud, p. 132 (emphasis in italics in the original).
[103] Wolk, p. 129.
[104] Wolk, p. 129.
[105] McCloud, pp. 66-67 (emphasis in italics in the original).
[106] McCloud, p. 92 (emphasis in italics in the original).

In comics, the single panel indicates that time or space are being divided. The shape of the panel influences the reading experience. There is a relationship between the time depicted by the comic and the time perceived by the reader. Comics readers have learned to perceive time spacially since, as McCloud argues, "in the world of comics, *time and space* are *one and the same*."[107] Duration is conceived through comics-specific conventions. Sometimes, 'pause panels' are introduced, or the space between panels is broadened. Long panels as well as borderless panels can take on a timeless quality. Moreover, because of the reader's peripheral vision, more than one panel is perceived at the same time which allows for an almost contemporary experience of past, present and future. Consequently, in comics the past is more than just a memory, since it is still in the field of vision when the reader's eyes are focused on the now. The same can be said about the future which is more than a possibility, since it is already real and visible when the reader is still focusing on the present. Whereever the reader's eyes are focused, the present is surrounded both by past and future.[108] This co-presence of the different time spheres is another element the graphic novel shares with the novel, but the use of panels to convey duration and motion is unique to the comic medium.

#### 1.4.2.3 Graphic Novel and Film

One of the most important aspects graphic novels and movies share is the fact that both are team projects and not the work of one single artist. Graphic novels are the result of the collaborative efforts of writers, editors, artists, pencillers, inkers, colorists, letterers and people responsible for the layout. The paradox of the comic medium is that it attempts to tell stories by conveying movement, sound and the passing of time by using static means of expressions. As Wolk states,

> Comics suggest motion, but they're incapable of actually showing motion. They indicate sound, and even spell it out, but they're silent. They imply the passage of time, but their temporal experience is controlled by the reader more than by the artist. They convey continuous stories, but they're made up of a series of discrete moments. They're concerned with conveying an artist's perceptions, but one of their most crucial components is blank space.[109]

[107] McCloud, p. 100.
[108] McCloud, p. 104.
[109] Wolk, p. 125.

Even though comics make use of some typical filming techniques such as unusual camera angles, close-ups or full shots, light and shadow or the use of effective colours, not all the visual elements of comics can be reproduced on screen.

One of the major differences between the semiotic systems of novel, graphic novel and film is the fact that only the latter can simulate motion. The main question is how motion can be shown in a static medium such as comics. Whereas novels describe motion through words, comics have to resort to visual devices. Although motion can also be depicted as a single image (as for example Boccioni's *Dynamism of a Soccer Player*, 1913 or Giacomo Balla's *Girl Running on a Balcony*, 1912 prove, just to mention two of many more futurist examples), in comics it is generally produced by 'closure' between different panels. The most common strategy is that of multiple images in sequence, but also 'motion lines', sometimes referred to as 'zip-ribbons,' are very frequent. According to McCloud, the comics' 'motion line' is something in between "the futurists' *dynamic* movement and Duchamp's[110] diagrammatic *concept* of movement."[111] These lines have developed over time from wild and messy to more refined and stylised. The idea behind the use of these lines is that of increasing the drama in action scenes. American comics are known for widely using action lines whose path of motion is imposed over the scene. Another possibility to represent motion is the use of multiple images or photographic streaking effects with the blurring of either the object or the background, or the use of a so-called 'polyptich,' a moving figure which is imposed over a continuous background.[112]

As has been explained above, the panel to panel transition is significant for the general reading experience, but also for conveying the visual rhythm of pacing. There are different strategies that can be applied in order to play with pace. For example, the number of panels per page and their form can slow down or accelerate pace. According to Daniel Cooney, the author of *Writing and Illustrating the Graphic Novel* (a handbook for ongoing graphic novelists), horizontal panels (mainly used for vistas, for establishing locations or for epic, dramatic actions), a conspicuous number of panels per page, more words per panel, a larger amount of detail or more conversation and less

[110] Duchamp's first use of a diagrammatic arrow to represent movement can be seen in his painting *Coffee Grinder*, 1911.
[111] McCloud, p. 110 (emphasis in italics in the original).
[112] McCloud, pp. 110-14.

action are all ways of slowing down the pace, whereas the use of vertical panels which create a sense of claustrophobia and speed, a limited number of panels per page, fewer words and details per panel accelerate the pace. The longer it takes the reader to capture the information contained in a panel, the slower the pace. He explains, "The decision to use wide horizontal panels gives the sense of time passing slowly. Aesthetically, it takes the reader's eye longer to travel across each panel."[113] Slanted or diagonal panels, on the other hand, imply speed and action.

A fundamental aspect comics share with film is the use of camera angles and shots which are chosen according to how the reader is meant to see the story unfold. The terminology comes from film theory, although, of course, the camera is only an imaginary one. In a similar way to film, 'establishing shots' are used to set the scene and are introduced every time a scene changes. 'Long shots' or 'full shots' show the figure in full and put emphasis on the background, thus giving the impression of the imaginary camera placed in a certain distance. The 'medium shot' pictures the subject from the waist up whereas a 'close-up' shows the character's facial expression, sometimes including hand gestures. An 'extreme close-up' focuses on eyes or mouth of a figure or other details which consequently fill the whole panel. Sometimes, 'over-the-shoulder shots' are used for scenes in which two characters have a discussion. The back shoulder and head of one figure is used to frame the image. Also 'point-of-view' shots are used in order to create more reader involvement. The reader sees the scene as if looking through the eyes of a character. Camera angles are used to create certain effects. A low camera angle can distort a scene and make the subject look more powerful, whereas its opposite, the high camera angle, makes the character look vulnerable. Dynamic camera angles, on the other hand, can heighten the drama of a scene. Often, the 'tilt angle' also called 'Dutch tilt' is used. Cooney explains,

> This is a cinematic tactic often used to portray the psychological uneasiness or tension in the subject matter. A Dutch angle is achieved by tilting the camera off to the side so that the shot is composed with the horizon at an angle to the bottom of the panel.[114]

Also another film strategy, the 180-degree-rule, is widely used by comic artists in order to avoid confusion in the reader. As Cooney states, "two or more characters or

[113] Cooney, pp. 51-57.
[114] Cooney, p. 99.

objects should always have the same left-to-right orientation within a scene in order to maintain narrative clarity."[115]

'Closure', which is fundamental in reading comics, and has already been explained above, bears resemblance with what has become fundamental in film, namely montage. As in film, there can be moment-to-moment transitions (the same subject in adjacent instants) which require little closure, action-to-action transitions with the focus on a single subject in two separate, consecutive actions, subject-to-subject transitions (two different subjects are displayed within the same scene) which already require more closure in order to make the transition meaningful, scene-to-scene transitions which convey leaps in time and space and consequently require deductive reasoning from the reader, aspect-to-aspect transitions which bypass time and focus on different aspects of a place, idea or mood, and finally non-sequitur transitions with no apparent connection between the panels.[116] McCloud's assumption that complete unrelatedness in the non-sequitur transition is not possible can be backed up by the Kuleshov effect. The Russian filmmaker discovered that by placing two non-related pieces of film side by side the audience came to the conclusion that the shots were directly related. In other words, the audience tried to create meaning by combining the two separate images. The shot of a rather expressionless face was interpreted as sad if followed by the shot of a coffin or as hungry if followed by the shot of a plate of soup. Therefore, McCloud may be right in claiming that, "No matter how dissimilar one image may be to another, there is a kind of □ *alchemy* at work in the space between panels which can help us find *meaning* or *resoncance* in even the most *jarring* of combinations."[117] In analysing a conspicuous number of comics from different countries, McCloud has observed that in Western tradition mainly action-to-action, subject-to-subject and scene-to-scene transitions are used in straightforward storytelling, whereas the Japanese tradition is characterised by a large number of aspect-to-aspect transitions which serve to establish a mood or a setting. According to McCloud, "these quiet, contemplative combinations", "rather than acting as a bridge between *separate* moments," require the reader to "assemble a *single* moment using *scattered fragments*."[118] Consequently, there is less focus on the action

[115] Cooney, p. 95.
[116] McCloud, pp. 70-72.
[117] McCloud, p. 73 (emphasis in italics in the original).
[118] McCloud, p. 79 (emphasis in italics in the original).

and more emphasis on mood and atmosphere, thus somehow simulating slow cinematic movement.

# Chapter Two: Dystopia

## 2.1 Introduction

### 2.1.1 Utopia and Dystopia[119]

According to Northrop Frye, utopia can be seen as a myth that bears some similarities with the myth of the Golden Age which appears in many different cultures. However, whereas the superior conditions of the Golden Age refer to a distant past, the superior conditions of utopia are projected into the future, thus making it a speculative myth, in other words, a myth in predictive form.[120] The idea of utopia is strongly linked to a notion of irreversible progress. From Plato's concept of an ideal state over Thomas More's *Utopia* to the social contract of the American Declaration of Independence, utopia refers to an ideal place with just and balanced rules, material prosperity and intellectual freedom. According to Dragan Klaić, utopia is both a spatial concept (a place apart) and a temporal concept (a future in the making),[121] but is nonetheless linked to a well-known place set in a recognised time period. As a critique of the present condition, utopia requires devices in order to bridge the gap between the present world and the fantastic utopian world. Both, realistic and imaginary elements need to be merged in order to make the utopian world perceptible to the addressee. Therefore, a subtle interplay between known and unknown, between familiar and exceptional is necessary. According to Dominic Baker-Smith, in all utopian and dystopian writing, there is a strange relationship "between an imagined world and the familiar theatre of human experience."[122] Similarly, Bernard Bergonzi, talking about *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, observes that

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[119] Critical writing on utopia and dystopia is extensive. I recommend the following literature for more in-depth information about the topic: Elliott, Rober C., *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago University Press, 1970); Guardamagna, Daniela, *Analisi dell'incubo: l'utopia negativa da Swift alla fantascienza* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1980); Fortunati, Vita, *Dall'utopia all'utopismo* (Napoli: CUEN, 2003); Fortunati, Vita, *La letteratura utopica inglese: Morfologia e grammatica di un genere letterario* (Ravenna: Longo, 1979); Levitas, Ruth, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York and London: P. Allen, 1990).
[120] Northrop Frye, 'Varieties of Literary Utopias', *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Science*, 94.2 (Spring 1965), 323-47.
[121] Dragan Klaić, *The Plot of the Future. Utopia and Dystopia in Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 35.
[122] *Between Dream and Nature: Essays on Utopia and Dystopia*, ed. by Dominik Baker-Smith and C.C. Barfoot, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), p. 1

> All such works, one can say, are at least as much about the age in which they were written as about the remote futures they purport to describe. They form palimpsests in which the present is frequently visible through the imagined forms of the future.[123]

However, the link of utopias with the time of their creation deprives these works from a timeless quality typical of other works of art. Their ability to shock depends on the relevance they may have in the social realities in which they are received. Instead of being shocking, with changing circumstances they may appear simplistic and obsolete.

Utopia and dystopia are antithetical, but interdependent at the same time. The main difference between utopias and dystopias is the fact that the latter are narratives representing a nightmarish society instead of an ideal one. As Alexandra Aldrige points out, "Dystopia grew partly out of the utopic tradition; its distinguishing feature lies in the dramatization of a utopic structure, the activization of utopic ideals that become dystopic when adumbrated through their effects on the individual."[124] In Klaić's words,

> [Dystopia is] an unexpected and aborted outcome of utopian strivings, a mismatched result of utopian efforts – not only a state of fallen utopia but the very process of its distortion and degeneration as well. If dystopia is a condition that appears on the ruins of misfired utopian schemes, it nevertheless implies utopia as a subverted or suppressed desire, an initial impulse left unfulfilled.[125]

Thus, dystopia draws its material from utopia, providing a distorted image of it.

In the twentieth century, after the catastrophic outcome of World War I which showed that advanced civilisations can easily be propelled into barbaric conditions, a rise in dystopian imagination with its typical angst about the future can be observed. At the same time, dystopian thinking in philosophical works of radical pessimism with its doubts about the optimistic idea of human progress by philosophers such as Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche's rather apocalyptic prophecy of the rebirth of humans, freed from the burden of a distorted civilisation,[126] contribute to a decline of utopian works in the twentieth century. The notion of linear, irreversible progress which had its origin during Enlightenment is increasingly interrogated. In

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[123] Bernard Bergonzi, '*Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the Literary Imagination', in *Between Dream and Nature: Essays on Utopia and Dystopia*, ed. by Dominik Baker-Smith and C.C. Barfoot (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp. 211-28 (p.212).
[124] Alexandra Aldrige, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984), p. 65.
[125] Klaić, p.3.
[126] Roland Bouda, *Kulturkritik und Utopie beim frühen Nietzsche: rationale und empirische Rekonstruktion eines Arguments,* Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 20, Philosophie, Bd. 58 (Frankfurt am Main, 1980), pp. 117-49.

*Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Krishan Kumar points out that during the interwar period, in the wake of Social Darwinism, intellectuals such as Oswald Spengler in *Decline of the West* (1918) or Sigmund Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), emphasise the animal nature of man. This theory posited by Darwin is taken to extreme considering man not as a peaceful, cooperative animal, but an aggressive, murderous and predatory one, like the wolf. The world portrayed by Freud is full of pain, conflict and unhappiness. The primeval mind with its impulsive, aggressive drives is ever present in the subconscious and can only be controlled by a moral 'super-ego' imposing its laws on society.[127] In addition to these theories, historic events such as the economic crisis in the late 1920s, the rise of fascism and Nazism or experiences such as Ausschwitz, Hiroshima or the gulag, transform utopia into an absurdity. Two of the most famous dystopian novels, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) both reflect the anxieties of their time and shape the dystopian novel of the twentieth century.

Despite these generally unfavourable conditions for optimistic visions of the future, the twentieth century also produces its fair share of utopian thought. According to Kumar, the rapid economic growth of the post World War II era and its drive towards world wide industrialisation resulted in a re-evaluation of science and technology. A new evolutionary humanism theorised by Sir Julian Huxley viewed the human species as the highest achievement of the evolutionary process.[128] In the 1960s, a new utopian energy emerges out of the attempt of reinterpreting Freud's negative assumptions on human nature and connecting them with Marxism, resulting in Willhelm Reich, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse's theory that abundance and sexual liberation are the preconditions for a successful socialism. These ideas inform the student revolts of the late 1960s, the 'Black power' movements and the revival of feminism.[129]

Despite the general technological optimism of the 1960s, science fiction works of the same period show that technology with its alienating and dehumanising connotations is still perceived as a threat. J. G. Ballard's apocalyptic works such as The *Drowned World* (1962) and *The Crystal World* (1966) depict a decaying advanced industrial civilisation amidst the ruins of its technological achievements. Horror of the

[127] Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 382-85.
[128] Kumar, pp. 388-91.
[129] Kumar, pp. 393-400.

present and fear of the future are characteristics of the dystopian works of the time. William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) and Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) emphasise how easily the barbarian nature of mankind can come to the surface.[130]

Public awareness about the threat of technology, as well as the oil crisis at the end of the 1970s triggered the debate about energy and resources, resulting in a new utopia, namely, as Kumar puts it, "an ecological utopia or 'ecotopia'."[131] The focus lies on a society which is organised according to ecological principles, but without a Rousseauist return to nature and primitivism. On the contrary, utopian technology and renewable energy are at the basis of these revolutionary proposals, although their strength lies mainly in the social and moral sphere. As far as literary ecotopian works are concerned, there is a limited range, inasmuch as the movement focuses on concrete, feasible changes and finds its expression in political movements such as the Green Party. However, Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) are worth mentioning.[132]

Although some utopian energy can also be detected also in the twentieth century, it has declined as a literary genre at the expense of dystopian works. According to Kumar, utopia can still flourish in social theory and can be found in social movements, but it has lost its role as a central symbol capable of addressing society as a whole.[133] As far as artistic expressions of ideas of the future are concerned, twentieth and twenty-first century works of art prevalently picture dystopian rather than utopian visions.

### 2.1.2 Apocalypse and Post-Apocalypse

In *A Guide to Apocalyptic Cinema*, Charles P. Mitchell distinguishes between apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic cinema. According to him,

> [Post-apocalyptic cinema] concentrates on survivors of a catastrophic event struggling to establish a livable society. In order to be classified as an apocalyptic film, the event threatening the extinction of humanity has to be presented within the story. If this catastrophe occurs prior the events depicted

[130] Kumar, pp. 402-5.
[131] Kumar, p. 405
[132] Kumar, pp. 405-15.
[133] Kumar, p. 420.

> on the screen, the film is post-apocalyptic. Naturally, there can be a blurring of the lines of these two genres.[134]

In terms of the films selected for this study, it is not always easy to determine whether they are apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic. Sometimes the post-apocalypse is the new apocalypse. As far as *Children of Men* is concerned, the disaster threatening the extinction of humanity has been going on for eighteen years. Infertility as apocalyptic symbol forms the backdrop for the story of a pregnant girl who represents hope for the future, thus becoming the one leading humanity towards a new post-apocalyptic world. *The Road* focuses on a post-apocalyptic landscape, in that 'the disaster' as such is not shown. However, the dangers the two main characters encounter are of apocalyptic dimensions. Similarly, the regime in *V for Vendetta* has gained power because of civil wars, social unrest and biomedical attacks. These apocalyptic aspects are only hinted at in the film, which sets the movie in the post-apocalyptic genre. Nevertheless, the totalitarian politics of the regime provide an apocalyptic undertone throughout the film. *28 Days Later* is more clearly apocalyptic, since the life-threatening catastrophe is on-going. Its sequel *28 Weeks Later* is more difficult to classify since it begins as a post-apocalyptic narrative with the re-population of Britain by the US army and changes into an apocalyptic narrative half way through the film with the second outbreak of the virus.

The term apocalypse stems from the Greek term '*apocalypsis*' meaning 'uncover' or 'disclose.'[135] In her article "Everyday Apocalypse," Elana Gomel states that

> Despite its many guises, the narrative of the end of time is surprisingly uniform across the immense range of apocalyptic literature, both religious and secular. No matter how the end is visualized, whether brought about by divine wrath, the inexorable law of history, the hidden workings of nature, or any combination thereof, it proceeds along the same welltrodden path. This path, the apocalyptic plot, has been summarized by cultural scholars, literary critics, and students of religion in very similar terms. It consists of two stages, destruction and renewal.[136]

According to Kirsten Moana Thompson in *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millenium*, "the apocalyptic encompasses the following meanings: the

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[134] Charles P. Mitchell, *A Guide to Apocalyptic Cinema*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. xi.
[135] *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. by Barnhart Robert (London: The HW. Wilson Company, 1988)
[136] Elana Gomel, 'Everyday Apocalypse: J. G. Ballard and the Ethics and Aesthetics of the End of Time', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 8.1 (January 2010), 185-208 (p. 186).

revelatory (prophecy), the destructive (cataclysm/disaster), the grandiose (wild predictions) and the climactic (decisive)."[137] She regards apocalypticism as a religious, historical and sociocultural fear formation which in the last decade of the twentieth century found its expression as *millennial dread*.[138] The consciousness of the end of the world relies on the interpretation of signs. Whereas in the past, disasters such as the plague or the threat of an Islamic invasion in the sixteenth century prompted the fear of a coming apocalypse, the end of the second millennium had its own signs regarding the end of the world. Thompson argues that

> Many fundamentalist, evangelical, or Pentecostal groups interpreted geopolitical events (particularly war and unrest in the Middle East) as signs of the coming of the end of the world. Natural disasters (storms, floods, volcanic eruptions, global warming) and man-made crises (monetary collapses, scandals, coups, and revolutions) were the second staple source for eschatological interpretations.[139]

In recent years, US society, and Western society in general, has seen an increase in apocalyptic and prophetic literature which goes hand in hand with a growing cultural conservativism. Religious fundamentalism, and the re-emergence of a 'culture of life' with campaigns against euthanasia and abortion, as well as the introduction of 'intelligent design' presented as an alternative to evolutionary theories in some conservative schools, are a few examples which illustrate the point. Moreover, in the USA, the evangelical media industry has a growing influence on the film industry, and tries to promote Christian values through mainstream films.

According to Thompson, "apocalypticism has long had a close connection to the science-fiction genre, for both are concerned with a fantasy about the future and a dread that the world will end."[140] Fear of alien invasion, of nuclear annihilation and of natural disasters reflects the anxiety of the audience. The focus of films has changed throughout history according to the preoccupations of the historical period in question. There have been an increasing number of disaster movies from the 1990s onwards, with a more global scope compared to disaster movies of previous decades. In recent years, films have started to blend disaster, horror and action genres with a dystopian narrative focus on the end of the world. The late 1990s also featured a rise in theological themes with

[137] Kirsten M. Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread. American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 4.
[138] Ibid., p. 3.
[139] Thompson, p. 5.
[140] Thompson, p. 11.

messianic figures, angels, ghosts and devils. Thus, the apocalyptic theme with both its religious and end of the world characteristics has been present since the late 1990s. As the first decade of the twenty-first century has passed, the current media hype connecting the year 2012 with Mayan doomsday prophecies amplifies apocalyptic terror again.

Western eschatology is influenced both by a cyclical and linear notion of time. According to Mircea Eliade, myths about the creation of the universe follow certain patterns: from chaos to order, a collapse of the order and a subsequent re-establishment of order. The idea of time evolves between a distant gloomy start from nothingness and a certain ending due to some sort of catastrophe in a distant future, with the idea of an ending containing the seeds of a new beginning.[141] On the other hand, there is also the idea of a linear and apocalyptic future, as in Jewish Messianism or Christian apocalypticism. The end of the world is also the end of history which is accomplished by divine intervention. According to Revelation, Jesus will return to the world to separate the faithful and just from the wicked and sinful.[142] Far from being the peaceful Redeemer from the Gospels, he will come as an angry god to shatter the Earth with most fearsome disasters[143] and fight and defeat Satan.[144] Finally, he will come as a king who will lead the chosen ones into the new eternal kingdom, a New Jerusalem full of harmony, prosperity, and joy.[145] Matthew writes about the time of confusion and misery with an invasion of false prophets that will precede Christ's second coming.[146] Similarly, Mark warns of hate and rage, wars, earthquakes and false prophets that precede Christ's return.[147] Catastrophic imaginations go hand in hand with projections of a miraculous future. The future will be devastating: full of suffering, but eventually eternal glory will come after the world's end in flood and fire. The destruction of the apocalypse is dynamic and temporal, whereas the utopia of Paradise or any other ideal world is stationary and eternal. According to Gomel, "Narrative representation of this 'eternal present' is, of course, not an easy matter because it militates against the very

[141] Mircea Eliade, 'Eschatology and Cosmology' in *Myth and Reality*, trans. by Willard R.Trash (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 54-74.
[142] Revelation 14.
[143] Revelation 15-18.
[144] Revelation 19-20.
[145] Revelation 21.
[146] Matthew 24.15-25.
[147] Mark 13.

nature of narrativity, its temporality. Even in *The Divine Comedy*, the Paradise is far less memorable than the Inferno."[148] This may be the reason why there are limited films depicting an ideal world.

## 2.2 Contemporary Issues

As previously discussed in the introduction of the chapter, dystopian narratives are more concerned about the present than the future. The films selected for analysis deal with issues important to our present-day society. These include issues such as the fear of terrorism, anxieties regarding immigration, infectious disease, environmental issues, and preoccupations about the misuse of science and technology. These topics will be discussed in further detail. However, two major issues for our time, the fear of terrorism and anxieties about infectious disease deserve a more in depth analysis.

### 2.2.1 Terrorism

Whereas the turn of the millennium was characterised by an impression of apocalyptic threat, the early years of the twenty-first century were marked by terrorism and its consequences. The 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers with its images haunting our collective memory introduced a new era of mass-mediated terrorism. As Jean Baudrillard observed, the event has been anticipated and has to some extent been specifically constructed. He writes:

> The countless disaster movies bear witness to this fantasy, which they clearly attempt to exorcise with images, drowning out the whole thing with special effects. But the universal attraction they exert, which is on a par with pornography, shows that acting-out is never very far away, the impulse to reject any system growing all the stronger as it approaches perfection or omnipotence.[149]

Similarly, Brigitte L. Nacos observes that the terrorists outperformed Hollywood:

> The most outrageous production of the terrorist genre was beyond the imagination of the best special effects creators. This was not simply two hours

[148] Gomel, p. 194.
[149] Jean Beaudrillard, 'The Spirit of Terrorism', in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 1-34 (p. 7).

> worth of suspense. Real terrorists had transformed Hollywood's pseudo-reality into an unbearable reality, into real life.[150]

Historically, terrorists have always required publicity for their acts, or, in other words, "propaganda of the deed."[151] In her *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, Brigitte L. Nacos quotes Margaret Thatcher's famous statement that "publicity is the oxygen of terrorism,"[152] pointing out that what has changed in the last ten to fifteen years is mainly "the increased availability of the sort of oxygen Mrs. Thatcher warned of and upon which mass-mediated terrorism thrives."[153] It is the goal of the terrorists to reach the attention of the general public and the political élite. In *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media*, Alex P. Schmid and Janny De Graaf claim that in a terrorist act,

> The immediate victim is merely instrumental, the skin of a drum beaten to achieve a calculated impact on a wider audience. As such, an act of terrorism is in reality an act of communication. For the terrorist the message matters, not the victim.[154]

Similarly, Sisela Bok underlines the link between the entertainment industry and real life violence. In *Mayhem: Violence as Public Entertainment*, she points out that the mass media's preoccupation with terrorist violence is echoed within movies, TV series or novels.[155] Further, Brigitte L. Nacos emphasises the mediatic strategies of contemporary terrorism and its affinity with mainstream entertainment:

> Terrorism fits into the infotainment mold that the news media increasingly prefers and offers villains and heroes the promise to attract new audiences and keep existing ones. Here the news is not different from the entertainment industry which thrives on villains and heroes in its search for box-office hits.[156]

As the terrorist acts at the beginning of the twenty-first century prove, the terrorists were aware of the importance of choosing landmarks such as the Twin Towers in order to generate intense publicity. Instead of counterbalancing this strategy by focussing on matter-of-fact information, the infotainment industry dwells on the shocking images of drama, anger, fear and panic, thus transforming news reports into breathtaking thrillers

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[150] Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2002), p. 36.
[151] Alex P. Schmid and Janny De Graaf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982), pp. 11-14.
[152] Nacos, p. 27.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Schmid and De Graaf, p. 14.
[155] Sisela Bok, *Mayhem: Violence as Public Entertainment* (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1989), pp. 6-7.
[156] Nacos, p. 4.

which manage to captivate and stir up audiences.[157] Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn go further and compare the enactment of terrorist acts to the production requirements of theatrical engagements inasmuch as

> Terrorists pay attention to script preparation, cast selection, sets, props, role playing, and minute-by-minute stage management. Just like compelling stage plays or ballet performances, the media orientation in terrorism requires a fastidious attention to detail in order to be effective.[158]

The media hype about terrorism keeps the population in a heightened state of apprehension and leads to increasing government intrusion in the name of national security. In the United States, the introduction of laws such as the Patriot Act result in the erosion of fundamental civil rights, such as freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of information and many more.[159] But Europe also faces similar restrictions in its civil rights with thorough airport controls and increasing surveillance in public areas.

In addition to the impact on individual freedom, the events of 9/11 were also used to advance U.S. war needs. The media cooperated with the state apparatus in order to enforce the interests of the ruling class. According to Christopher Sharrett, "Two months after the 9/11 attacks, White House political operative Karl Rove met with Hollywood executives to discuss the direction of film and television during the 'war on terrorism.'"[160] This would eventually create a propaganda strategy that fuses anger, militarism and disinformation with popular culture.[161]

All these aspects, the fear of terrorism, the role of the media in scaremongering, and the use of fear for government purposes, form the backdrop of two films in this study, namely *Children of Men* and *V for Vendetta*.

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[157] Nacos, p. 29.
[158] Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn, *The Theatre of Terror: Mass Media and International Terrorism* (New York: Longman, 1994), p. 52.
[159] Wheeler W. Dixon, 'Teaching Film After 9/11', *Cinema Journal, 43* (Winter 2004), 115-18 (pp. 115-16).
[160] Christopher Sharrett, '9/11, the Useful Incident, and the Legacy of the Creel Committee', *Cinema Journal, 43* (Summer 2004), 125-31 (p. 126).
[161] Sharrett, p. 127.

### 2.2.2 Illness as Metaphor

Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*, as well as *AIDS and Its Metaphors* precede the dystopian film narratives selected for this study. However, her discussion of the disease metaphor to talk about the evil of the time is relevant insofar as infectious disease is the main topic of *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*. Disease is also an issue in both *Children of Men* and *V for Vendetta*. According to Sontag, presently new, adequate metaphors are required in order to understand 'radical' and 'absolute' evil, since there is no longer the religious or philosophical language to talk about evil.[162]

AIDS is considered a disease of sexual excess and perversity, a calamity one brings upon oneself. As Sontag points out, "Infectious diseases to which sexual fault is attached always inspire fears of easy contagion and bizarre fantasies of transmission by nonvenereal means in public places."[163] Even though the virus in *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later* is not sexually transmitted, it bears similarities with the AIDS virus, mainly because of its dehumanising effect. According to Sontag, what makes some diseases more terrifying than others is not their high incidence of mortality, but the dehumanisation that goes hand in hand with these ailments. Sontag explains that the hysteria about rabies in nineteenth-century France was mainly due to the popular conviction that infection would transform people into maddened animals, unleashing their most terrible sexual or blasphemous drives. Similarly, cholera, in spite of being less fatal than smallpox, was more feared because of the indignity of its symptoms consisting in fulminant diarrhoea and vomiting, reminding those affected of the horror of post-mortem decomposition.[164] Diseases which disfigure the face are generally more feared. Sontag argues that

> The most dreaded are those that seem like mutations into animality [...]. Underlying some of the moral judgments attached to disease are aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean, the familiar and the alien or uncanny. [...] What counts more than the amount of disfigurement is that it reflects underlying, ongoing changes, the dissolution of the person.[165]

[162] Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 85.
[163] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), p.27.
[164] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, pp. 38-39.
[165] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, pp. 40-41.

Throughout history, collective calamities such as the plague or other epidemics have been viewed as an inflicted punishment on a community by a higher power. According to sociologist William A. Rushing, the bubonic plague, for example, was attributed to various causes: divine punishment, planetary alignment or poisoning by Jews.[166] The origin of an illness in a foreign place, or due to immigrants who are considered bearers of the disease links the epidemic to the idea of an invasion. Moreover, as far as AIDS was concerned, its African origins, its possible transmission from animals, and its high incidence among the gay community activated a set of clichés about animality, sexual licence and Blacks.[167] Consequently, scapegoating was based on sexuality, race and individual behaviour and led to condemnations from the political and religious Right.

There are two types of viral diseases, those which have rapid effects such as influenza or rabies, and those which act slowly such as the degenerative diseases of the brain. According to Sontag, "Notions of conspiracy translate well into metaphors of implacable, insidious, inifinitely patient viruses."[168] Viruses are considered a very primitive form of life, but complex in their working: they are capable of transforming cells, and they are capable of evolving. At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, when there was still little knowledge about the origin of the ailment, a number of conspiracy theories arose. James R. Keller claims that "In the social climate of the early to mid eighties, it was easier to believe that the clandestine apparatus of the American government could conceivably manufacture a devastating virus that had escaped the lab to create panic among the general population."[169] According to Paula A. Treichler, the international community saw the rapid spread of AIDS in the USA as a sign that the disease was a result of a weapons programme or the payback for the country's immoral aggressive political and economic strategies abroad. The Soviets saw it as a proof of Western decadence.[170]

[166] William A. Rushing, *The AIDS Epidemic: Social Epidemic of an Infectious Disease* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1995), p. 139.
[167] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 52.
[168] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 68.
[169] James R. Keller, *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche. A Critical Study of the Graphic Novel and Film* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008), p. 195.
[170] Paula A. Treichler, 'AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification', in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activisim*, ed. by Douglas Crimp (MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 31-70.

Whereas anxieties about ailments such as cancer are linked to the fear of a polluting environment, the apprehension about infectious diseases is linked to the fear of polluting people. AIDS anxiety results in fear of surgery, and fear of contaminated blood or other bodily fluids. As Sontag points out,

> Epidemics of particularly dreaded illnesses always provoke an outcry against leniency or tolerance – now identified as laxity, weakness, disorder, corruption: unhealthiness. Demands are made to subject people to 'tests,' to isolate the ill and those suspected of being ill or of transmitting illness, and to erect barriers against the real or imaginary contamination of foreigners.[171]

In the preface to *V for Vendetta*, Alan Moore recalls that at the time of publishing his graphic novel in Britain "the tabloid press [were] circulating the idea of concentration camps for persons with AIDS."[172]

The discourse around AIDS has evoked an end-of-world rhetoric which is fuelled by a rise in apocalyptic thinking as the millennium comes to an end. According to Sontag, Western society's taste for worst-case scenarios is linked to the need to master the fear of something uncontrollable. She even insinuates that there might be an imaginative complicity with disaster, somehow a desire for a clean sweep, a tabula rasa which would provide a chance to begin again.[173] This links the epidemic discourse to the apocalyptic discourse. Similar to the missiles circling the earth and looming over the United States during the Cold War, the AIDS epidemic was another looming apocalypse which has been substituted by the terrorist threat in recent years. However, there are also some real catastrophes such as the Third World debt, overpopulation and ecological disasters.[174] As Sontag puts it, "Apocalypse is now a long-running serial: not 'Apocalypse Now' but 'Apocalypse From Now On.' Apocalypse has become an event that is happening and not happening."[175]

Modern society is aware of the most unthinkable, but nevertheless probable disasters and these events are haunted by their representation as an image. According to Sontag,

> There is the event and its image. And there is the event and its projection. But as real events often seem to have no more reality for people than images, so our

[171] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 80.
[172] Alan Moore, 'Introduction', in *V for Vendetta,* by Alan Moore (w.) and David Lloyd (a) (New York: DC Comics, 2005), p. 6.
[173] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 87.
[174] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, pp. 87-88.
[175] Ibid., pp. 87-88.

> reaction to events in the present seeks confirmation in a mental outline, with appropriate computations, of the event in its projected, ultimate form.[176]

The future-mindedness of the twentieth century allows for some anticipation of how things may evolve. However, the former vision of linear progress has turned into a vision of disaster.[177] Taking into consideration the visual impact of recent disasters, Sontag's evaluation of the role of the image in relation to the event proved foreboding.

## 2.3 Dystopian Style

Inspite of differences in style due to the fact that the five films in this study bear the signature of five different directors, there are some aspects which all of these contemporary dystopian film narratives share, which will be addressed in more detail in the close analysis of each single film.

First of all, as the term dystopia ('*topos*' for place) implies, the settings of the films play an important role. Four of the films are set in London, whereas *The Road* is set in an unspecified area in Northern America, which could, however, be anywhere in the Western world. The settings are not simple backgrounds to the unfolding events, but become almost a character of the narrative and often acquire a symbolic meaning. When disaster strikes, the environment is affected as much as its inhabitants. Moreover, there are certain genre conventions requiring the destruction of landmarks, which the films respect to different degrees. However, acting in accordance with these conventions or overcoming them is significant for the films in question.

Furthermore, all the film directors use the documentary style in order to give the narrative a realistic edge. Shaky camera movements, the introduction of news footage and of realist lighting all contribute to providing the films with a rough feel which suits the topics and places them in a reality which is not too far from that of the audience. However, at the same time distancing effects are introduced which add a slight touch of fantastic to the overall realistic picture. The almost surrealist, deserted hospital in *28 Days Later*, the twilight atmosphere in *28 Weeks Later*, or the grey hue that seems to cover the images in *The Road* are only a few examples of these techniques which will be addressed in the single analyses of the films.

[176] Ibid., p. 89.
[177] Ibid., p.89.

Moreover, on an iconographic level, all the films introduce well known, historic imagery in order to heighten the horror of the dystopia they portray. These are evident intertextual references to the Holocaust, but also visual allusions to more recent atrocities. These images, which are part of a common historical background, trigger conscious or subconscious associations in the viewer and can be seen as a visual short cut that serves to increase the horrific experience.

Similarly, the introduction of paintings, music and other works of art in some of the films creates intertextual references for a more intellectual audience. In addition to these references which add more layers to the reception of the film, the presence of static works of art such as painting or sculpture in movie narratives portraying worlds in which culture has lost its significance allow for interesting considerations about the role of art in general. The works of art in *Children of Men* and *V for Vendetta* are allusions to lost civilisations, lost happiness and a long-gone way of life, but also reminders of what great civilisations can achieve.

## 2.4 Film Analyses

### 2.4.1 *Children of Men*

#### 2.4.1.1 Synopsis

*Children of Men*[178] is set in Great Britain in 2027 and explores the implications of a twenty-year long world-wide infertility on a society robbed of its future. The result is the collapse of society, social unrest and violence. Britain is one of the few countries with a working government and attracts a great number of asylum seekers who are, however, kept in inhuman conditions in refugee camps.

Theo Faron, the male protagonist, who is related to Nigel, a government minister, is kidnapped by the Fishes, an underground organisation fighting for the rights of immigrants. The terrorist group ask him to use his government connections to organise transit papers for Kee, a young refugee. Julian, Theo's ex-wife and the head of the Fishes, is the initiator of the expedition. On their way towards the coast, the group

[178] *Children of Men*, dir. by Alfonso Cuarón (Universal Studios, 2006)

consisting of Julian, Theo, Kee, Luke (a member of the Fishes and the driver of the car) and Miriam, a former midwife, are ambushed and Julian is fatally killed.

The remaining members of the group manage to flee and reach a safe house where Theo finds out about Kee's pregnancy. Moreover, he also realises that the Fishes themselves were responsible for Julian's death, because of differing strategies within the group concerning Kee's pregnancy. Whereas Julian wanted to hand over Kee to the 'Human Project,' an organisation carrying out research on infertility, the majority of the Fishes wanted to use Kee's pregnancy for political purposes. Theo flees the organisation with Miriam and Kee, finding shelter at a friend's place in the woods. Jasper Palmer, Theo's friend, who lives secluded in the woods with his catatonic wife, arranges a meeting with Syd, who is a camp guard at the refugee camp in Bexhill and is willing to smuggle Theo, Kee and Miriam inside. From there they hope to reach the 'Tomorrow,' the ship of the 'Human Project' which is expected to arrive offshore from the Bexhill refugee camp.

Jasper is eventually killed by the Fishes who are looking for Theo and the two women. As they approach the camp as fake prisoners, Kee has her first contractions. Miriam tries to distract the guards and is taken away. Theo and Kee manage to enter the refugee camp which is overcrowded and whose conditions are appallingly chaotic and violent. Theo and Kee meet Maruchka who gives them shelter in a shabby room where Kee gives birth to a baby girl. The following morning, the two protagonists and the newborn baby, have to run from Syd, who wants to hand them over to the police, and The Fishes who, looking for Kee, initiate riots inside the camp. Whereas they manage to fight off Syd, Kee is captured by the Fishes and taken to an apartment building which is heavily under fire by both the army and the insurgents. Theo is injured, but manages to escape together with Kee and the baby. Maruchka leads them to a boat and Theo rows out into the sea where Theo dies of his injuries before seeing the 'Tomorrow' approach through thick fog.

#### 2.4.1.2 Analysis

As with most dystopian fiction, more than a depiction of a future world, *Children of Men* functions as a mirror of contemporary society, a comment about the state of things. It thus stands in the tradition of great works of art, which go back as far

as Plato's *Republic*, to include other works such as Thomas More's *Utopia* or Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. More recent dystopian fictional works, for example Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), respectively adapted by Volker Schlöndorf in 1990 and by Michael Radford in 1984, anticipate some of the topics that inform the film *Children of Men*, including female infertility due to pollution, government propaganda and state control.

Alfonso Cuaròn, in the tradition of dystopian artists, wants to "explore the things that are shaping the perspective of the 21st century"[179] which required some changes from the novel that the film is loosely based on. In contrast to the above mentioned works and to P.D. James' *The Children of Men* (1992), the British government depicted in the film is not a totalitarian one. Britain is still a democratic state, but as the director points out, "Being a democracy doesn't mean people are choosing the right thing or what is just." He is critical of the twenty-first century's blind faith in democracy and wants his work to explicitly portray a tyranny disguised as democracy, in which democracy has become a mere "instrument to justify a system."[180] In Cuaròns's documentary "*The Possibility of Hope,*"[181] in which different scholars explore the themes of *Children of Men*, Naomi Klein mentions the risks of any sort of utopia including democracy. According to the Canadian anti-globalisation activist, people fall in love with a seemingly perfect set of rules, but they hate everything that interferes with this perfect system. The danger of utopias is that they cannot coexist with contrary ideas.[182]

Other contemporary issues *Children of Men* addresses, and are explored in their contemporary relevance by different scholars in the above mentioned documentary, are pollution, infertility, immigration and terrorism. Our present-day society struggles with the effects of global warming and desperately tries to find ways to reduce its impact. According to the philosopher and economist John Gray, the climate change cannot be

[179] Annie Wagner, 'Politics, Bible Stories, and Hope: An Interview with *Children of Men* Director Alfonso Cuaròn', *The Stranger*, 28 December 2006 <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Content?oid=128363> [accessed 28 January 2012]
[180] Voynar, Kim, 'Interview: Children of Men Director Alfonso Cuaron', *Cinematical*, 26 December 2006 <http://cinematical.com/2006/12/25/interview-children-ofmen-director-alfonso-cuaron/> [accessed 27 January 2012]
[181] 'The Possibility of Hope', in *Children of Men*, dir. by Alfonso Cuarón (Universal Studios, 2006) [on DVD]
[182] Naomi Klein, 'The Possibility of Hope' [on DVD]

reversed: we can only prevent it from accelerating.[183] So far humanity seems to be more concerned with overpopulation than with infertility, but Western countries appear to experience a steadily decreasing birth rate, which, in addition to socio-economic reasons may also be traced back to environmental factors, such as an increasing exposure to chemicals. The Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek sees infertility figuratively as a result of global capitalism and fear. There is no meaningful experience of reality in our world, Žižek believes, in that there is a lack of cultural and linguistic roots.[184] According to the human geographer Fabrizio Eva, over the last thirty years, migration has taken on global dimensions, and it will become uncontrollable, unless the political and economic reasons for it are eliminated.[185] Saskia Sassen, a sociologist of human migration, predicts an increase in environmentally driven migration due to global warming.[186] This will result in the creation of new frontiers, of what Naomi Klein calls 'green zones' which will delimit the areas for those who have technology and infrastructures from the poor, chaotic areas without the basic facilities. This results in an inequality, mainly of opportunity, which has caused and still causes violent reactions all over the world. Tzvetan Todorov explains that the new contact of populations is dominated by two major passions which are a result of this inequality: humiliations experienced by the powerless and fear by those in power. Fear is as much a source of violence as is humiliation, and may result in an acceptance of torture and make people accustomed to transgressing the rules concerning normal ways of living together.[187]

The society the film depicts is the result of unspecified past events that have caused many governments worldwide to collapse and their population to migrate. A government-sponsored TV advertisement makes it clear from the very beginning of the film: "The world has collapsed, only Britain soldiers on." Britain is one of the few countries that still has a working governmental system and tries to come to terms with the huge number of immigrants seeking refuge in the country. The dominant society in *Children of Men* puts into practice what Naomi Klein calls the creation of green zones. Although London appears to be a rather grim city, and due to frequent terrorist attacks

[183] John Gray, 'The Possibility of Hope' [on DVD]
[184] Slavoj Žižek, 'The Possibility of Hope' [on DVD]
[185] Fabrizio Eva, 'The Possibility of Hope' [on DVD]
[186] Saskia Sassen, 'The Possibility of Hope' [on DVD]
[187] Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Possibility of Hope' [on DVD]

not exactly a save haven, the difference between British citizens and immigrants are evident. All foreigners are outlaws and thus, as Jasper states, “hunted down like cockroaches” and kept in cages along the streets, like animals. Despite the fact that British citizens have to carry around their IDs in order to get access to certain areas, they seem to have all the commodities necessary to lead a comfortable life. However, there is also a smaller number of people who live in real prosperity. Theo’s short excursion into the gated government district gives the viewer insight into a three-tier class system, which sees the political élite and their families at the top of the hierarchy, living a life of luxury. Nigel, Theo’s cousin, owns a collection of the most famous works of art, including Michelangelo’s *David* (an allusion to the unarmed hero fighting a giant, in this case a despotic system) and Picasso’s *Guernica* (foreshadowing the government bombing of Bexhill and referring to the cave paintings at the end of the film). The film portrays a world in which there are new borders within a country with areas destined to first class and second class citizens and areas dedicated to outlaws.

The frequent panoramic shots of landscapes and cityscapes indicate to what extent humanity has laid violent hands on nature throughout the years. Although at first glance the stretches of green British countryside are still recognisable, with a closer look we can see how nature has been violated: burnt cows along the road, foamy sewage coming out from the ground, smoke everywhere and animals mutilated in order to fit the machinery. Even the wood, where Jasper’s house stands and which seems an oasis of peace and nature, is covered with withered foliage that reminds us of the waste land the film represents. Although the film never explicitly states what the reasons for worldwide infertility are, the insistence on a polluted environment suggests that nature is fighting back by preventing humanity, the most threatening species, from procreating.

Reminiscent of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the subtle violence that can be seen in the government’s manipulation of its citizens, which is exemplified by the huge number of TV screens throughout the film. The population is continuously bombarded with, and mislead by, state propaganda, which on the one hand increases fear of immigrants and evokes hatred, and on the other tries to hide its atrocities behind euphemisms, which are indicative of the use of Newspeak in Orwell’s novel. For example, the use of the term ‘Quietus’ for a suicidal drug distributed by the government is rather misleading, but a more striking instance is the recording that greets the captured immigrants when

entering the refuge camp: "Britain supports you and provides you shelter. Do not support terrorists." The visual translation of what the government considers support and shelter can be seen in a subsequent shot, which visualises the hell of Bexhill. What is more, the government even resorts to violent measures against its own citizens in order to create a climate of fear and hatred. Thus, able to convince the population of the necessity for a strong surveillance system, it limits individual rights in the name of safety.

This dehumanised fascist world is best presented by Syd, the immigration cop, who wants to be addressed as 'fascist pig.' He always speaks about himself in the third person and does not care about what is going on. He is an opportunist without a real identity. His uniform is his only identity, but he is quick to change into a different one if the circumstances require it: when the uprising starts he appears in Middle Eastern clothes in order to better mingle with the rebels and hence to be able to trade Theo, Kee and her baby.

However, the biggest form of dystopian violence can be seen in the way the dominant society treats the immigrants. Whereas animals run freely, humans are kept in cages. The director resorts to the use of images of common historic memory in order to portray the dehumanising totalitarian system of *Children of Men* and to provide the viewers with what Žižek calls "a meaningful historic experience."[188] According to Sarah Schwartzman, this "draw[s] the viewers out of their individual viewership and into a collective, historical recognition of structural injustices."[189] In the first part of the film, Theo and the viewer are witnesses of a scene, in which a building is forcefully liberated from its inhabitants. Suitcases and other objects are being thrown out of the windows, and the inhabitants are guarded on the street by heavily armed policemen. This scene strongly recalls the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto by the Nazis. It is only one of many references to the Holocaust, which include black uniforms, the German shepherd dogs, the humiliating attitude of the immigration cops, the procedures the captured immigrants have to endure when entering the camp in Bexhill, or the pile of suitcases and clothes near the entrance of the camp. However, other aspects of prisoner

[188] Slavoj Žižek, '*Children of Men* Comments by Slavoj Žižek', in *Children of Men*, dir. by Alfonso Cuarón (Universal Studios, 2006) [on DVD]
[189] Sarah Schwartzman, '*Children of Men* and a Plural Messianism', *Journal of Religion and Film*, 13.1 (April 2009) <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol13.no1/ChildrenMen.htm> [accessed 1 September 2010] (para.19 of 23)

humiliation recall recent atrocities committed by state authorities or their officials in prisons, such as Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib, as for example the kneeling prisoners with their covered faces in cube-like cages, or the humiliated naked prisoners being barked at by ferocious dogs.

The response to all these forms of violence is terrorism. With Julian's murder the initially peaceful strategy of the Fishes changes drastically. Part of the terrorist group has always been sceptical about non-violent resistance and has opted for the violent elimination of its leader. The individual has to be sacrificed for a greater aim, which for the majority of the Fishes is that of fighting for equal rights and dignity for everyone by shedding blood. The ambush scene which will be discussed in detail in a subsequent chapter (see 3.2) represents the turning point in the tragic course of events. As in Shakespeare's tragedies, the tragic event is introduced by a playful scene, in this case Julian and Theo playing with a ping pong ball in front of the rather disgusted but also amused girl. This provides the spectator with some comic relief before the fatal event occurs. Julian, the head of the initiative is eventually killed by her own people and the responsibility passes on to the rather reluctant Theo. This individual act of violence is orchestrated by the Fishes to eliminate an inconvenient leader. The assassination gives way to a new strategy, which includes the elimination of all of those who stand in the way of their cause, resulting in a violent uprising against the government. As with all terrorist groups, they see themselves as soldiers, as a guerrilla fighting an army. As with all institutionalised forces, they need a symbol "to put on their flag" to convince their followers: this is represented by Kee's baby.

Cuaròn's film respects the tradition of dystopian narratives also from a stylistic point of view. As a genre, dystopian films are traditionally speaking science fiction. However, *Children of Men* has a predominantly present-day look and thus emphasises the relevance of the content for our time. Its documentary style with its long shots and few cuts, ugly locations, a shabby, dusty, grim look as well as the anonymous, contemporary rather than futuristic looking clothing allow the viewer to recognise the present in the future. The aim was to create an "anti-*Blade Runner*"[190] movie. However, there is accuracy in the details, mainly in the use of newspapers from 2027 or the recent past (from the film's point of view) with plausible headlines, and there is some minor

[190] 'Futuristic design', in *Children of Men*, dir. by Alfonso Cuarón (Universal Studios, 2006) [on DVD]

inventiveness in the design of some items, such as cars, computer screens or computer games, to give the film a slightly futuristic touch. The overall impression is nevertheless that of a future world that has stopped progressing. In a world without prospective heirs, there is no need for maintenance or even technical development.

The filming style largely contributes to the general feeling of a violent environment. Mainly the action scenes, predominantly shot in long takes, allow the director to focus on the background and to create a rhythm which recalls that of documentary films. Some scenes appear to be filmed hand-held and recall the quality of live reports from war zones. At a certain point, when Theo has to run away from Patric, a member of the Fishes, blood ends up on the camera lens and stays there until the end of the sequence. All these aspects add a realistic touch to the whole film and heighten its violent impact.

In addition to that, referencing reality is a mechanism to create a strong link between present and future. As Schwartzman aptly observes in her article "*Children of Men* and a Plural Messianism," the director "deliberately uses haunting iconic images to tap into the viewers' collective memory, in order to make 'real' this apocalyptic dystopia."[191] The film is full of references from media images that have become part of the human consciousness. As Cuaròn explains, "the exercise was not only to transcend reality, but also cross-reference within the film to the spiritual themes of the film."[192] For instance, his way of using well known works of art and their symbolic significance enable him to create certain associations and expectations in the viewer.

Moreover, the insistence on long takes is meant to highlight the importance of the background, in order "not to favour character over environment."[193] According to Žižek, the true focus of the film is the background. The individual hero can be seen as a prison through which one views the background more sharply.[194] In a dystopian work of art the environment and its dynamics are as important as the individual character. The very few close-ups, such as the insistence on the protagonist's feet or his drinking problem, tend to emphasise some symbolic aspects of the character.

[191] Schwartzman, (para. 19 of 23)
[192] Voynar
[193] Ibid.
[194] Žižek, '*Children of Men* Comments by Slavoj Žižek' [on DVD]

### 2.4.2 *The Road*

#### 2.4.2.1 Synopsis

*The Road*[195] is set in the near future and represents a post-apocalyptic world: the product of a non-specified cataclysm which could be either man-made or naturally induced. Both the film, and the homonymous Corman McCarthy novel on which it is based, describe the struggle for survival of a man and his son in this hostile environment.

Father and son are walking South with a shopping trolley containing all their belongings, hoping to find better conditions near the coast. During their journey they have to fight against the climate, hide from gangs of cannibals, and constantly look for food and shelter, trying to keep their inner fire burning. Cannibalism is their greatest fear and a gun with two bullets is the only weapon they possess and which they are willing to use when caught by cannibals.

Flashbacks and dream sequences give insight into their family life prior the cataclysm and during the first years of the catastrophe until the boy's mother, unable to continue a life of suffering, decides to commit suicide.

On the road, the father has to kill a man in order to protect his son and remains with only one bullet. When looking for food, father and son enter a house inhabited by a gang of cannibals who keep human beings as lifestock in the cellar. They risk being caught and the man almost shoots his son, but eventually they manage to escape. At a certain point during their journey they find an underground shelter filled with all the commodities of a long-past life which allows them to recharge their batteries. It is a short glimpse of paradise, with plenty of food and water. However, they consider it is too dangerous to stay there for long.

Along the road, they also meet an old, blind man. The boy is desperate for human contact and convinces the rather reluctant father to start talking to the man and share some food with him before parting again. When they finally arrive at the coast, they are robbed of their belongings. The man finds the thief and humiliates him in front of the boy, asking him to strip naked and leave behind everything he has. The boy is shocked by his father's cruelty and wonders whether they are still the good guys. In a

[195] *The Road,* dir. by John Hillcoat (Dimension Films and 2929 Productions, 2009)

town, the protagonist is attacked and injured by an arrow. He fights back with a flare and fatally injures the attacker who has been hiding in one of the buildings with his wife.

They go back to the coast. The man's state of health deteriorates. Before dying he reminds his son to keep alive the inner fire, in other words, what makes a person human. After the father's death, the boy decides to trust a family with two children and a dog and joins them in their struggle for survival.

#### 2.4.2.2 Analysis

As in most dystopian narratives, there are references to contemporary social and political issues on a thematic level: the prospects of climate refugees due to global warming and its resulting natural catastrophes, the fear of terrorism or nuclear war destroying civilisation and concerns over possible shortages of food, fuel and energy sources. On a visual level, the world depicted in the film – with its references to a civilisation familiar to that of the audience – is still recognisable, but unlike many other more mainstream dystopian narratives, a futuristic element is absent. Moreover, the director consciously evades the representation of well-known American landmarks in his creation of urban decay. Despite the use of real footage of the aftermath of catastrophes such as hurricane Katrina or the attack on the Twin Towers, and the introduction of recognisable consumer items – a can of coke or tinned food placing the narrative in a Western context – the story could take place anywhere. Society has collapsed and so have its pillars. From the beginning, the viewer realises that most things that have survived the cataclysm, such as vehicles or buildings, are achievements of the past which are of little use in the present situation. There is little fuel left, no electricity and, most importantly, no food. Even nature, which, according to John Hillcoat, the director of the film, is one of the characters of the film, seems to have been overpowered and left at the mercy of primordial forces such as earthquakes, torrential rain, fire and cold temperatures, all reminiscent of the biblical Apocalypse. The frequent long takes of the darkened sky and the deserted landscapes, with only the two lonely travellers on their road, represent the insignificance and impotence of humanity faced with the threat and ascendancy of nature.

The dystopian atmosphere is interrupted by flashbacks of past happiness in the form of dreams. In addition to their significance as reminders of the protagonist's approaching death ("when you dream about bad things happening, it shows you're still fighting. You're still alive. It's when you start to dream about good things that you should start to worry."[196]), the dream sequences function as further reminders of a long-gone utopian world characterised by warmth, colour and music. The female in its ideal form, with its connotations of sunshine and fertility, is only present in these dream sequences, before reappearing in a somehow less striking and enfeebled way at the end of the film, as mother and daughter of the boy's future foster family.

An integral part of the vision of lost utopia is conveyed by the choice of music in the film. The intra-diegetic piano music is always linked to recollections of the female figure as lover, wife and mother. One of the protagonist's erotic memories starts with the couple at a concert of classical music. Later, the woman's sad notes on the piano before giving birth to their child anticipate the suffering of the delivery, but also the tribulations the child will have to endure. The birth scene enacts God's punishment of humankind after the fall of man ("I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour you will give birth to children."[197]) and foreshadows the afflictions of a life far from Eden. Not only is music associated with the female, but the piano is portrayed as a symbol of art and civilisation. One dream shows the man playing the piano with his wife, followed by a flashback in which he is forced to destroy the piano for fuel. Survival has predominance over art. Before discovering the bunker with the food, an apparent hidden oasis from the hell outside, the man finds a piano inside the house and plays a few notes which bring him to tears. Again, the piano triggers memories of his past life with his wife before the catastrophe.

The choice of the extra-diegetic music underlines the contrast between the utopian and dystopian worlds portrayed. Hillcoat speaks about two major modes: the first employed to create suspense in a representation of the pervading fear of the raw primitivism (including cannibalism), and the other more delicate, according to the director "something between folk and classical, a lot of Bach and other classical

[196] *The Road*
[197] Genesis 3:16.

music,"[198] refers to the end of the world that the man left behind. The delicacy is linked to loss and the beauty of the past, a tinge of melancholy related to the loss as part of the internal process. The music becomes a reminder of the world as we know it and a cinematic means to the expression of the internal life of the character.[199]

Another reminder of civilisation and the past is the bath. Bathing scenes punctuate crucial moments throughout the film, presenting the few moments of happiness. In the first part of the film, father and son take a freezing bath under a waterfall. It provides one of the rare moments in which the boy sees colours in the otherwise bleak surroundings. Before the mother's suicide, she bathes the boy for the last time, mirroring the bathing scene in the bunker which highlights the father's role as nurturer of the boy. The warm bath in the bunker is real luxury: hair cutting and beard trimming become signifiers for civilisation as do the whiskey, cigarettes and canned food. They are symbols of a different world, as the man aptly observes: "You think I come from another world, don't you?"[200] According to Hillcoat, the cleansing process is important inasmuch as it enables the characters to "*wash* away all the filth and the history of the struggle they are carrying with them."[201]

### 2.4.3 *V for Vendetta*

#### 2.4.3.1 Synopsis

*V for Vendetta*[202] is set in Great Britain in a not too distant future. After years of civil wars and environmental damage, the Norsefire Party wins the elections and the leader of this fascist party, Adam Sutler imposes his totalitarian rule on the population. Thus, Great Britain becomes a police state in which minorities such as homosexuals, Muslims and immigrants are persecuted. The population is kept under control by the secret police and manipulated by the state-controlled media. There is peace, but at the expense of civil rights.

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[198] John Hillcoat, 'Audio Commentary by Director John Hillcoat' in *The Road*, dir. by John Hillcoat (Dimension Films and 2929 Productions, 2009) [on DVD]
[199] Hillcoat, 'Audio Commentary' [on DVD]
[200] *The Road*
[201] *The Road*
[202] *V for Vendetta*, dir. by James McTeigue (Warner Bros, 2006)

The whole system is attacked by V, an anarchic disguised as Guy Fawkes. V is the result of bio-medical experiments which the regime carried out on political dissidents and other unwanted people at the Larkhill facility, a detention centre. His mission is both personal and political. He wants to take revenge on his torturers and wake up the population from its passive acceptance of the regime.

V meets Evey, a young woman who works at the British Television Network, the evening before Guy Fawkes Night. He rescues her from the Fingermen, the secret police, who threaten to rape and arrest her for not respecting the curfew. He takes her on top of a roof to assist in the spectacle he has organised for midnight, namely blowing up the Old Bailey, the symbol of justice, to the music of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Ouverture. The regime tries to conceal its vulnerability by claiming that the destruction of the building was a controlled demolition, but V, after taking over Jordan Tower, the headquarters of BTN, exposes it as a lie. Moreover, he invites the population to join him on 5 November the following year in order to assist in the demolition of the Houses of Parliament. Evey helps V to escape and thus becomes an accomplice of the terrorist.

V takes Evey to the Shadow Gallery, his hiding place somewhere underground. The vaults are filled with works of art, both high and low brow, taken, or in V's terms 'reclaimed,' from the Ministry of Objectionable Material. V wants Evey to stay there in hiding, but when she finds out that V is behind the murder of Lewis Prothero, a famous TV presenter and former commander at the Larkhill facility, she takes the first opportunity to flee. She promises to help V with the murder of Bishop Lilliman, a paedophile and another of V's acquaintances from Larkhill, but instead tries to warn the bishop and runs off to Gordon Dietrich, her superior at BTN.

Gordon is a famous talk show host who owns a treasure of forbidden works of art and books, among others a Quran. He is a homosexual, but cannot be open about his sexual orientation due to the regime's restrictive politics. After Gordon publicly mocks the regime in his show, he is arrested by the Secret Police and eventually executed.

Evey is taken to prison as well. She is interrogated about V and his location, she is tortured and suffers all kinds of atrocities. Only a letter written on toilet paper by Valerie Page, a lesbian and former internee, gives her the strength to stay true to herself. Valerie's autobiography, mostly told in flashbacks, gives insight into the rise to power of the Norsefire regime and the persecution of homosexuals. Eventually, Evey is

released because of her resolution not to give away any information about V, and her willingness to face death. She finds out that her imprisonment was only staged by V in order to help her overcome her fears. Her initial hate is finally transformed into a cathartic understanding of the necessity of V's deed. Evey is now a different person and decides to leave V's Shadow Gallery, but with the promise to come back for Guy Fawkes Night.

In the meanwhile, the investigations of Inspector Finch bring to light the regime's involvement in a bio-medical attack that cost the lives of about 80,000 people and helped the government to win the elections.

V becomes increasingly popular and his actions shatter the population's support for the Norsefire regime. By distributing Guy Fawkes masks to every household, he prepares the population for the great event on 5 November. On the eve of the great day, Evey meets V who shows her a train loaded with explosives, ready to blow up Parliament. He decides that it is up to Evey whether to complete his plan or not. V leaves in order to meet Creedy, the head of the Fingermen, who has decided to hand over Sutler in exchange for V's surrender, hoping to seize power. Creedy kills Sutler in front of V, but V does not surrender and is shot several times by Creedy's men. However, V manages to kill Creedy and his men and to reach Evey who is waiting for him near the train with the explosives. V dies in her arms after professing his love to her.

Evey places V's body on the train, thus getting ready for his 'Viking funeral.' Inspector Finch reaches her, but does not prevent her from sending the explosives. He knows too much about the crimes of the regime and understands this terrorist act. Meanwhile, outside the Parliament, the population of London disguised as Guy Fawkes approaches Parliament. The army, now without a leader, since all government officials are dead, do not know what to do and simply watch the explosion of the Houses of Parliament.

#### 2.4.3.2 Analysis

As with most dystopian films, *V for Vendetta* addresses issues important to the time of its making, and thus, takes from its source text what is meaningful for the audience of the twenty-first century.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent bombings in Madrid and London, the fear of terrorism has become a major issue and has had a deep impact on the policies of most Western countries, resulting in increased security measures, which have progressively limited civil liberties. Government intrusion, surveillance and the loss of civil liberties are justified in the name of national security. It is mainly the fear of the population, its xenophobia in particular, that enables governments to undermine some of the pillars of democratic society. In our society, as well as in Sutler's England, the media play an important part in the creation of scapegoats, and in fuelling fear within the population.

The homonymous graphic novel the film is based on, on the other hand, is informed by the Thatcher era and its conservative politics on AIDS, homosexuality and the introduction of a wide-spread surveillance system in order to tackle crime. According to James R. Keller,

> Moore and Lloyd's graphic novel was partially inspired by protests over CCTV, a video surveillance system installed in public areas throughout Britain in the 1980s, forming the most extensive network of popular surveillance in the world, and while the crime rate has decreased as a result of this scrutiny, many believe that it constitutes an infringement on the population's right to privacy.[203]

Although the social climate around AIDS and homosexuality has slightly improved in recent years, the introduction of CCTV in public space has increased in recent years because of the terrorist threat. Thus, issues relevant at the time of the novel's making are still prominent nowadays.

All these contemporary concerns play a pivotal role in the world the film creates. *V for Vendetta*'s England is a police state. According to William D. Perude, a police state "dominates through fear by surveillance, disruption of group meetings, control of news media, beatings, torture, false and mass arrests, false charges and rumors, show trial killings, summary executions, and capital punishment."[204] Sutler's state apparatus employs all these measures in order to control the population.

However, the regime, as it is presented in the film, also uses strategies important to Western democracies, namely the media, to consolidate its power. Exploitation and manipulation of the media with a control of both words and images are central to the

[203] Keller, p. 52.
[204] William D. Perude, *Terrorism and the State: A Critique of Domination through Fear* (Westport: Praeger, 1989), p.42.

regime's scheme of creating a heightened state of apprehension. Disinformation is vital in order to keep the population frightened. Thus, the news continuously emphasises the threat that comes from who is different. In *V for Vendetta*'s England, there is "Strength through Unity, Unity through Faith." Therefore, religious, sexual and political uniformity are fundamental in defending the country from the threats of civil unrest, disease and anarchy, which have destroyed countries such as the United States. The regime presents itself as an advocate for the safety of the population, demonstrating strength and inspiring awe and fear, in order to stay in power. Therefore, censorship and propaganda are necessary in order to manipulate the population. The government cannot allow the media to tell the truth about V's successful attacks on the system. According to Keller, this attitude is reminiscent of the fearmongering of American and British media. He explains,

> The preponderance of bad news may be a satire of American and British media and culture, through which the population are conditioned to fear all the wrong things. This practice detracts from the real threats and problems in their lives whose solutions could prove inconvenient or unprofitable to political or financial establishments.[205]

In addition to this, the film also deals with the performativity of terrorism. As Michael Stohl argues in his article "Demystifiying Terrorism," "political terrorism is theatre" with "the world" as "its stage."[206] In other words, a terrorist act needs a huge audience. The more news coverage it gets the better. In their terrorist activities at the beginning of the twenty-first century, terrorist groups such as Al Quaeda chose their targets according to their symbolic value and the media impact they would achieve. V also aims for a huge media hype and consequently puts the regime in a difficult position. On the one hand, the regime needs to appear strong and invulnerable, on the other it also needs to create a bogeyman image. V's first attack on the Old Bailey, a visually and acoustically well crafted prelude to his subsequent TV broadcast, is reported as a planned destruction of an old building with the fireworks as a surprise treat for the population. In order to avoid granting the terrorist media hype, the first reaction of the regime is to give the terrorist no publicity at all. Consequently, V needs to move a step further and take hold of Jordan Tower, the national broadcasting building, in order

[205] Keller, p. 71.
[206] Michael Stohl, 'Demystifying Terrorism: The Myths and Realities of Contemporary Political Terrorism', in *The Politics of Terrorism*, ed. by Michael Stohl (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1988), pp.1-27 (p. 1).

to directly address the population, a population that is, similar to contemporary society, glued to the television all day. In this way, V is able to enter all the English homes and public spaces and deliver his message to a vast number of people. This time the regime cannot conceal the terrorist act, but uses the event for its scapegoating strategies, depicting V as pure evil and as a threat to the whole society.

Performativity and theatricality is what inform most of V's acts. His Larkhill experience has forced him behind a mask. But not only is he an actor, he is also a conductor, an artist and a dramaturge. His major terrorist acts are thoroughly composed like a piece of music, his dominoes are perfectly placed to represent a circumscribed 'V,' his red and black signature logo, and finally, the staging of Evey's imprisonment is perfectly executed. All in all, his terrorist activity is a complete work of art, with all the details taken care of and the red roses representing his signature, symbolizing both death and love (black and red like his dominoes, like his logo).

Respecting the tradition of many dystopian narratives, in order to increase the addressees' dislike of the regime, the film introduces several similarities with the German Nazi regime. Primarily, the way the Norsefire party and Sutler seized power can be compared to Hitler's rise to power in Germany. In both cases a fascist party restores order after a period of civil unrest and gives the population the illusion of security. The fact that the leader of the country is called 'Chancellor,' his way of addressing the population, his attitude, his name 'Sutler,' which, according to Keller, "is a synthesis of Susan (the name of the high Chancellor in Moore and Lloyd's graphic novel) and Hitler,"[207] all recall the German dictator. In addition to this, many of the regime's strategies to terrorise the population are reminiscent of the Nazi regime, but also many South American dictatorships. Similar to the Gestapo, Creedy's Fingermen irrupt into homes in the middle of the night. They torture prisoners to extract information and, as in South America, some of them disappear without a trace as happened to Evey's parents. To her it was "as if those black bags erased them from the face of the world."[208] Unwanted people such as political dissidents, homosexuals or anyone considered a danger to the national security end up in concentration camps where doctors such as Delia Surridge carry out scientific experiments, comparable to Josef Mengele in Nazi Germany.

[207] Keller, p. 56.
[208] *V for Vendetta*

Similar to other films in this study, *V for Vendetta* introduces visual shortcuts in order to heighten the horrific experience of the audience. Primarily, the Norsefire colour scheme with its flag picturing a red double cross on a black ground is evidently inspired by the Nazi Svastica. The black uniforms of the soldiers and their marching style, as well as Prothero's attitude and uniform in Larkhill recall the German SS. The references to the Holocaust are most evident in the frames displaying the disposal of naked, bruised, haggard corpses in mass graves. Moreover, the white tiled rooms in which the prisoners are shaved and examined recall the showers used for gassing the Jews. However, there are also some contemporary pictorial references. The use of black hoods to capture prisoners and their orange prison garbs remind the audience of recent atrocities committed by democratic countries in the name of national security and consciously violating international treaty. The internment camp of Guantanamo Bay and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal with the images of humiliated nude and hooded prisoners come to mind.

In addition to the above mentioned issues, illness as metaphor is present in the film. V, the protagonist of the film, is the result of medical experiments gone wrong. As an internee in Larkhill, V becomes a victim of the experiments, but does not die like his fellow prisoners. He develops heightened abilities and manages to flee the same night the structure is destroyed by a fire. According to Keller, there are similarities between the Larkhill virus and the AIDS virus. The Larkhill virus caused immune system pathologies that are usually linked to blood disease. The patients presented various symptoms such as an abnormal development of kinesthesia and reflexes, or skin leasons. The virus seems to kill rapidly and can progress from infection to death in a matter of hours. Unlike AIDS, however, it is an airborne pathogen.[209]

The fact that the Larkhill experiments served political and military purposes evokes contemporary fears about biological terrorism in the wake of 9/11 and the London tube bombings. In *V for Vendetta*'s England, the Norsefire party secretly orchestrated bio-terrorist attacks upon a school, a water treatment plant and a tube station, which resulted in the death of 80,000 people, and led to the definite rise to power of Sutler and his associates. Scaremongering and false accusations prove effective in helping totalitarian authorities to reach their goals.

[209] Keller, p. 198.

The virus metaphor can also be viewed on another level. 'V' does not only stand for vengeance but also for virus. His campaign is both personal and political. According to Keller, "V is the personification of a virus that escaped the lab to plague its inventors."[210] V's vengeance is a vendetta against the state which he puts into action after a lengthy incubation period. The English state can be seen as a highly efficient organism consisting of different body parts: Sutler is its brain, Heyer, who is responsible for the video surveillance, is the Eye, Mr Etheridge, monitoring audio activity, is the Ear, the investigator Mr Finch is the Nose, Dascomb, responsible for the circulation of official (dis)information represents the Voice and Mr Creedy, responsible for the elimination of the disruptive elements is the Finger. V, on the other hand, is the virus infecting the body. Similar to the incubation period of HIV which from seropositive becomes symptomatic, V's revenge takes about ten years to become effective. He starts as a single avenger, but the virus of revolution and anarchy proliferates. According to Keller, "The replication of V the virus is literalized in the proliferation of masks, specifically Guy Fawkes masks."[211] There is another parallel with HIV. The masks obscuring the identities of the political dissidents correspond to the disguising strategies of HIV.[212] As Keller puts it, "HIV's ability to disguise itself is embodied literally in V's propensity for masquerade."[213]

In this sense, it is interesting to see how the mask invented by David Lloyd has become a symbol of protest in contemporary society. The mask demonstrates how dystopian works of art not only reflect social and political issues of the time of their creation, but how certain key aspects take on a life of their own. They are developed further and adjusted to the needs of a time far from their original creation. This is not limited to the Guy Fawkes mask taken from *V for Vendetta*. For example, the idea of 'Newspeak' in George Orwell's 1984 has been used by scholars in order to analyse the language of George W. Bush. The language of the former US president is reminiscent of the impoverished vocabulary and elementary syntax typical of Newspeak, the language of eternal fascism, which has been introduced by the regime in order to limit

[210] Keller, p. 207.
[211] Keller, p. 214.
[212] Catherine Waldby, *AIDS and the Body Politic: Biomedicine and Sexual Difference* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 69.
[213] Keller, p. 215.

the instruments for complex and critical reasoning.[214] Thus, Newspeak has become a term used to refer to expressions which have become void and meaningless because they have been falsely appropriated or misused. Similarly, the Guy Fawkes mask worn by the male protagonist in *V for Vendetta* has become a widely used symbol for modern forms of protest. Even though generally speaking Alan Moore is not satisfied with contemporary adaptations of his graphic novel, he is pleased that the emblematic mask of his dystopian comic has become a contemporary symbol for anarchy and civil disobedience. In a recent interview he admits that, when writing V for Vendetta, deep down, he may have thought: "wouldn't it be great if these ideas actually made an impact? So when you start to see that idle fantasy intrude on the regular world… It's peculiar. It feels like a character I created 30 years ago has somehow escaped the realm of fiction."[215]

The Guy Fawkes mask had first been introduced by the Anonymous movement in addition to their other symbol – a suit without a head – which signifies leaderless organisation and anonymity. The term stands for an internet subculture that mainly fights against censorship and for freedom of speech on the internet. Their main aim is to raise awareness of these issues.[216] When the protesters leave the virtual world behind and organise protests on the street, they tend to wear Guy Fawkes masks in order to safeguard their anonymity.[217] Similarly, the mask is being used by the Occupy Wallstreet Movement in its intent to protest against social and economic inequality, corruption and the power of corporations and the financial markets. Also the Indignants Movement which in the wake of the Arab Spring has spread from Spain all over Europe by using social media to organise protests, uses the mask.[218] In addition to the mask, the Occupy protesters have taken up the slogan 'We are the 99%,' which is, in Tom Lamont's words "a reference, originally, to American dissatisfaction with the richest

[214] Henry A. Giroux, 'Representations of the Unreal: Bush's Orwellian Newspeak', *Afterimage*, 33.3 (November/December 2005), 18-27.
[215] Tom Lamont, 'Alan Moore – Meet the Man Behind the Protest Mask', *The Guardian*, 26 November 2011
[216] Jason Slater, 'Who or What is Anonymous?', *Technology with Jason Slater*, 11 May 2011 <http://www.jasonslater.co.uk/2011/05/11/who-or-what-is-anonymous/> [accessed on 6 January 2012]
[217] Jürgen Ziemer, 'Netz Angriff der Namenlosen', *Die Zeit*, 14 April 2011 <http://www.zeit.de/2011/16/Anonymous> [accessed 6 January 2012]
[218] 'Tahrir Square in Madrid: Spain's Lost Generation Finds Its Voice', *Spiegel Online*, 19 May 2011 <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,763581,00.html> [6 January 2012]

1% of the US population having such vast control over the country."[219] The idea of a significant number of people wearing a Guy Fawkes mask recalls the final scene of the film version of *V for Vendetta* in which the population of London defies the regime and its army wearing Guy Fawkes masks. Alan Moore points out that "when you've got a sea of V masks, I suppose it makes the protesters appear to be almost a single organism – this '99%' we hear so much about."[220] According to Moore, the protesters' choice of the mask is significant in that "It turns protests into performances. The mask is very operatic; it creates a sense of romance and drama."[221] But what is more, the mask stands for *Vox populi*, which is also the title of the last volume of the original comic series. By hiding their face, the protesters can voice the needs for change.

Even though at the time of writing Alan Moore had no idea about the possibility of computer-based dissent, the seeds of it have already been fictionalised in the graphic novel. Moore explains,

> The reason V's fictional crusade against the state is ultimately successful is that the state, in *V for Vendetta*, relies upon a centralised computer network which he has been able to hack. Not an obvious idea in 1981, but it struck me as the sort of thing that might be down the line.[222]

However, there are additional similarities between the tactics of the anarchic hero in *V for Vendetta* and the Anonymous movement. According to Lamont, their videos seem to be inspired by V's speech patterns. Moreover, the fact that the end result is more important than the individual behind the deed is reminiscent of *V for Vendetta*. As Evey tells Finch at the end of the film, V is every one of us, every person who is ready to fight an unjust system. Also, the aim of changing institutions by spreading a little well-aimed chaos and fear is both present in the film and the graphic novel, and also a characteristic of many internet-based protest movements.[223]

According to Jonathan Jones, however, many protesters are not even aware of the origin of the mask. For them it is simply a very strange mask. As he puts it, the mask "has taken on a life of its own, and its meaning is not fixed by its origins. Images slip their moorings. The Guy Fawkes mask is not Guy Fawkes. It is, in fact, the

[219] Lamont
[220] Lamont
[221] Lamont
[222] Lamont
[223] Sam Jordison, 'V for Vendetta: Political Resonance', *The Guardian,* 14 November 2011

quintessence of a mask,"[224] and as such it is part of the carnival tradition in which the world is turned upside down and the rules of society are mocked.[225] In the end, the creator of the mask has no control over its possible use and the symbology it may acquire. Nevertheless, the anarchic origin of the Guy Fawkes mask is kept alive, whether or not those who wear it are aware of it.

### 2.4.4 *28 Days Later*

#### 2.4.4.1 Synopsis

*28 Days Later*[226] is a low-budget movie set in contemporary Britain. It tells the story of several characters struggling with the effects of a devastating epidemic. The outbreak of the disease occurs after a group of animal rights activists release some infected chimpanzees from a science laboratory where they are kept for experiments with a 'rage' virus. Contagion happens through blood or saliva within twenty seconds and the effects on human beings is devastating. They are immediately transformed into uncontrollable, rabid beings.

Jim, the male protagonist of the film wakes up from his coma in a hospital twenty-eight days after the outbreak of the epidemic. He walks through a deserted London, viewing the signs of the catastrophe. He enters a church full of corpses and Infected hiding among them. He is attacked by some Infected, but is rescued by Selena and Mark, two survivors, who take him to their hiding place and tell him everything he needs to know about the infection. Selena and Mark take Jim to his parent's place where he finds out that his parents committed suicide. They spend the night there, but a candle lit by Jim attracts some Infected. Mark is injured and eventually infected and Selena has to kill him with her machete. Selena and Jim, running from the Infected, end up in a block of flats where Frank and his teenage daughter Hannah are hiding.

Frank has a recording of a radio broadcast apparently sent from a military blockade near Manchester which promises the 'answer to infection' and invites

[224] Jonathan Jones, 'Occupy's V for Vendetta Protest Mask Is a Symbol of Festive Citizenship', *The Guardian,* 4 November 2011
[225] Jones
[226] *28 Days Later,* dir. by Danny Boyle (20th Century Fox, 2002)

survivors to join them. After some reluctance, Selena and Jim decide to join Frank and his daughter on their trip north. They take Frank's cab, travel through London, escaping a bunch of Infected in a tunnel, do some grocery shopping and spend some idyllic moments along the road. Jim has his first close encounter with an infected boy and has to kill him with a baseball bat. When they finally reach the military blockade outside Manchester they find out that it is deserted. Frank is infected by a drop of blood falling from a corpse into his eye. He manages to warn the other survivors before being shot by the approaching soldiers.

The soldiers take Jim, Selena and Hannah to their headquarters, a Victorian mansion which is secured by landmines, floodlights and barbed wire. Major Henry West, the commander of the small group of soldiers, initially appears to be very friendly and shows Jim around. Major West has managed to capture Mailer, one of his soldiers who has been infected, and wants to observe him in order to find out how long it takes to starve them to death. Jim eventually discovers that one of the reasons behind the radio broadcast was to attract female survivors in order to be able to guarantee the survival of the species. Jim realises that the two girls risk being raped by the soldiers and tries to escape with them, but he is knocked out by the soldiers, together with Seargent Farrell who disagrees with the major's plan. The two men are taken to a cellar where Farrell reveals Jim his theory about Britain as a quarantined space separate from the rest of the world. Later, when the two men are escorted outside the secure area in order to be executed, Jim sees a jet stream in the sky, thus knowing that Farrell's theory may be true.

While Farrell is shot, Jim manages to escape his execution and run back to the mansion in order to rescue Selena and Hannah from being raped. He unleashes Mailer who attacks and infects the soldiers. Jim kills the soldier who is in charge of looking after Selena with his bare hands. His rage is similar to that of the Infected and Selena raises her machete in order to kill him, but hesitates. The two kiss when Hannah enters the room. The three survivors are reunited and run towards the cab where they find Major West who shoots Jim in the stomach. Hannah manages to start the car and drive through the gate while West is being dragged out of the rear window by Mailer.

The two women take Jim to a hospital where Selena manages to save his life. The final scene shows the three survivors in a cottage in Wales, the two women sewing

huge letters from cloth in order to signal the jet fighters that fly over the country that there are some survivors.

### 2.4.4.2 Analysis

Like all dystopian narratives, *28 Days Later* is a product of its time. One of the issues addressed in the film concerns the responsibility of modern science in creating new dangerous viruses, which, despite the initial purpose of curing diseases, may be misused for biological warfare. In other words, the film hints at science's potential both as salvation and doom for society. The fear of totalitarian regimes possessing and using biological weapons of mass destruction was definitely an issue in 2001 (the year in which the filming started) and subsequently led to the Iraq war only a few years later. Moreover, the spread of infectious diseases in the UK, notably a serious outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001, as well as BSE (better known as Mad Cow Disease) in the mid 1980s triggered a general fear of pandemics in the Western world. Cases of humans infected with Creutzfeld-Jakob, the human variant of BSE in the late 1990s steadily grew due to the increase of international travel. Mainly diseases such as Creutzfeld-Jacob and HIV, both transmitted from animals to humans – either through the consumption of infected meat with the former, or in both cases through blood transfusions – may have inspired the makers of *28 Days Later* in creating an animal based virus which can be passed on to humans as cause of the pandemic in the film. According to some scientists interviewed for the documentary "The Making of *28 Days Later*," the idea behind a lethal virus is not too far fetched. Andy Coghlan, who writes for the *New Scientist Magazine*, points out, "The threat to us, at the moment, from infectious diseases is probably as big as it's ever been and getting worse."[227] Professor Brian Duerden of the Public Health Laboratory Service states that "The threat of infection to human mortality on a world wide scale is still very great. We have to anticipate that there will be a major pandemic at some stage and that there will be many deaths associated with that."[228] Moreover,

> In the last year of the twentieth century, communicable diseases accounted for an estimable twenty-five per cent of deaths world-wide. Every day the human body is coming under attack from disease causing microbes. No-body is

[227] Andy Coghlan, 'Pure Rage: Making of *28 Days Later*' in *28 Days Later,* dir. by Danny Boyle (20th Century Fox, 2002) [on DVD]
[228] Brian Duerden, 'Pure Rage' [on DVD]

> immune. The idea of a new killer epidemic infecting the country is not far fetched at all.[229]

Professor John Stanford of the University College of London explains, "If you forget about a disease and consider it beaten, then the organism will take the opportunities which you increasingly offer it."[230] The wide-spread use of antibiotics, for example, may make bacteria resistant and therefore uncontrollable. Similar to the HIV virus, the virus in *28 Days Later* is primate based. According to Danny Boyle, the director of the film, "It's hideously virulent. It's spread by contact with the blood. [...] It leads to a permanent, appalling state of aggression."[231]

The responsibility of science is only briefly addressed at the beginning of the film. As the scientist in the film points out, the researchers at the Cambridge primate research centre seek understanding only find cures, and thus are willing to take certain risks in the name of science. At a first glimpse, the motivations of the animal rights activists are justified. The laboratory appears to be a torture camp with chimpanzees held in small cages, fastened to an operating table and forced to watch human atrocities on TV screens. The scene, to a certain extent, recalls Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, in which protagonist Alex is submitted to the cinematic montage of clips of violence in order to cure his ultra violent attitude. However, the idea of the scientist creating a monster in the name of progress indeed goes back to Paracelsus who claimed to be able to create an artificial human being. The most famous fictionalisation of scientist playing God is found in Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. Yet, throughout human history anxieties have existed between the discovering of nature's nature, and crossing boundaries that ought not to be crossed. The role of science in the development of the atomic bomb or the medical experiments carried out by Josef Mengele in Nazi Germany proved such sceptics right. In *28 Days Later*, the scientist, but also the animal rights activists are the first victims of their deeds, which result in a virulent epidemic that destroys a whole country.

The film director tries to create a post-apocalyptic landscape that shows the aftermath of the epidemic coming to terms with a low budget, whilst at the same time trying to reach a mainstream audience. It was therefore important to find iconic images

[229] Ibid.
[230] John Stanford, 'Pure Rage' [on DVD]
[231] Danny Boyle, 'Pure Rage' [on DVD]

which would do the work of a huge budget. It is a standard trope of many mainstream disaster movies to show the destruction of important recognisable landmarks, as in *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) or *Godzilla* (1998). Danny Boyle wanted to create a completely deserted image of London. The use of digital video made this task easier as it took less of the necessary preparation time, given that the streets of the city remained closed only for a limited time for filming. In addition to this, digital video gives the movie a rough edge and emphasises the urban feel of the film. According to the director, digital video is beautiful for urban work. Its grittiness makes it ideal for city movies, while at the same time recalling the way in which everyday life is recorded by city wide DV cameras.[232] The first part of the film highlights the emptiness of the metropolis, opening with a completely deserted hospital. Jim, the main character of the film, wakes up from his coma and realises that he is utterly alone. There are no corpses in the hospital, but it is clear from the very beginning that something has gone completely wrong. In his commentary to the film, Boyle points out that the emptiness of the place was meant to be symbolic and that, at that stage in the film, atmosphere and surrealism took precedence over plot requirements.[233] Jim's lonely walk through the deserted streets of London is heightened by a visual play on the small human figure among huge buildings, achieved by a high angle camera and bird's-eye view. It is as if the environment has taken control over mankind, or perhaps as if someone is watching from above. The protagonist's first journey takes him across the centre of the British capital, including all its major sights: the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben, the London Eye and St. Paul's Cathedral. The streets are littered with rubbish and small Big Ben souvenirs. London's iconography is laid bare. The overturned red sightseeing bus is a symbol of a world that has turned upside-down, in which junk food like Maltesers and Coke keep people alive, and where churches have been turned into hell.

Already at this stage, the director introduces some indirect references to recent historical events, which is common practice in dystopian films. The scene in which Jim collects money from the street is based on a well-known photograph taken in Cambodia when Pol Pot was driven out of Phnom Penh and money had become completely worthless. The handwritten notes for missing relatives around the statue of Eros at

[232] Boyle, 'Pure Rage' [on DVD]
[233] Danny Boyle, 'Audio Commentary with Danny Boyle and Alex Garland' in *28 Days Later*, dir. by Danny Boyle (20th Century Fox, 2002) [on DVD]

Piccadilly Circus, is inspired by photographs taken after an earthquake in China in which people tried to contact one another after all normal communication systems had broken down. The church scene is also a reference to recent events. Boyle noted that during the civil war in Rwanda, churches were used as "a dumping house for corpses, some kind of mortuary or makeshift cemetery for the corpses."[234] In addition to this historic reference, the church scene also visualises the hell the catastrophe has created. When Jim enters the church, he is greeted by graffiti on the wall saying 'The end extremely fucking nigh.' The staircase, rather than leading towards a safe place to look for shelter and support, appears as if it is a staircase to hell. The church hall is crammed with corpses, but not everbody is dead. The protagonist is attacked by an infected priest, only to be rescued by Selena and Marc who throw Molotov cocktails at Jim's pursuers, and in doing so blow up a nearby petrol station.

A good portion of Jim's walk through London was shot in the London Docklands with its modern buildings. As the film is set in present-day Britain, it does not require any futuristic elements. Boyle does, however, point out that the film is meant to have a modern touch rather than looking backwards. Nevertheless, some older buildings and sights do appear throughout the film, and seem to be connected with hope. For instance, the picnic area they choose on their way to Manchester is the ruin of an abbey. There, Jim and his fellow travellers are having their meal of tinned and packed food surrounded by the past. The peaceful family of horses near the river serve as a contrast to the humans turned ferocious animals. Despite the idyllic setting, the ruins also hint at a previous civilisation that has collapsed. Furthermore, the British country house which Major Henry West has chosen for his military base initially represents hope, before revealing the darker vaults beneath the beautiful facade. While the perfectly trimmed green lawns hide landmines to protect the soldiers from incursions of the Infected, dinner parties of expired eggs and chips keep alive a sense of civilisation in a time of utter debasement, and beautifully dressed women are intended to keep up the appearance of consensual sex for recreation, rather than rape for procreation. The final scene of the film, a lonely cottage in the Lake District, is the emblem of hope. In this idyllic setting, a safe haven far from the destroyed and haunted cities of London and Manchester, the three survivors await their rescuers. It seems a

[234] Boyle, 'Audio Commentary' [on DVD]

kind of Eden in an otherwise hellish Britain. The place also represents some sort of return to the wild, a life in harmony with nature, without the need for Valium to endure the situation.

### 2.4.5 *28 Weeks Later*

#### 2.4.5.1 Synopsis

*28 Weeks Later*[235] is the sequel to Danny Boyle's film *28 Days Later*. After quarantining the British Isles for twenty-eight weeks, international forces led by the US army intend to repopulate the country starting from a secure area in the centre of the completely devastated city of London.

The film starts with a sequence showing Don and Alice, the parents of the two child protagonists, hiding out in a cottage together with a small group of other survivors. They give shelter to a boy who is running from his infected parents. However, this humanitarian act attracts more Infected to the cottage. They force their way into the building and apparently kill or infect all the survivors except Don who manages to flee by boat but has to leave his wife behind who refuses to abandon the formerly rescued boy.

After this initial reminder of the violence of the virus, the film focuses on the re-population of London by the US army. The Isle of Dogs has been cleared of all the remnants of the epidemic and is considered an ideal place to welcome the settlers. Amongst the first people reaching British soil are Tammy and Andy, Don and Alice's children, who were abroad on a school trip when the virus struck. After being examined by Major Scarlet Ross, a medical officer who notices Andy's differently coloured eyes – a trait he shares with his mother – they are reunited with their father Don who has survived the epidemic and has become an important caretaker of the safe area called District One.

One day, the two children manage to escape the heavily patrolled safe zone and reach their home in the outskirts of London where they want to gather some photographs and other items of their dead mother. To their surprise, they find their

[235] *28 Weeks Later*, dir. by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo (20th Century Fox, 2007)

mother in the room in the attic in bad conditions but still alive. The children and their mother are found by a rescue team and taken back to District One where, after a thorough medical check up, Scarlet finds out that Don's wife is a carrier of the rage virus but does not present its symptoms.

Don, feeling guilty for abandoning his wife in the cottage, secretly enters her isolation cell to ask for forgiveness. As they kiss, Alice's saliva infects Don who, in a first outbreak of rage, savagely kills his wife before attacking everyone he encounters.

District One is locked down and the civilians are sent into safe rooms, but Don manages to enter one of the rooms and starts a domino effect of infection. The commander orders Code Red, an extreme procedure that signifies that the soldiers have to shoot at everyone, infected or not. Scarlet manages to rescue Tammy and Andy and leave the containment zone together with Doyle, one of the soldiers unwilling to shoot civilians. The commander of District One orders the bombardment of the area, but some Infected, including Don, manage to escape.

Scarlet's main goal is it to take the two children to safety, because she thinks that Andy's genetic trait may help science develop a vaccine against the virus. During their flight towards Wembley Stadium, where Doyle's friend Flynn is waiting to rescue them, Doyle is killed. Scarlet and the children continue their flight first by car, then on foot through the underground. There they encounter Don who kills Scarlet and attacks and infects Andy before being killed by his own daughter. Andy does not present the typical symptoms of the rage virus, but Tammy can see the signs of the infection in his eyes. Nevertheless, she takes her brother to Wembley Stadium where Flynn picks them up and flies them across the Channel to France.

The last sequence of the film shows a group of Infected running towards the Eiffel Tower. Infection has spread to Europe.

#### 2.4.5.2 Analysis

*28 Weeks Later* has many similarities with the preceding film. However *28 Days Later* mainly focuses on the apocalyptic extermination of a whole population, whereas the sequel represents an attempt to re-establish the world order in a post-apocalyptic environment.

As a post-apocalyptic film, *28 Weeks Later* is part of the dystopian genre and uses a number of its classic tropes, such as addressing issues important to the moment in time in which it is created. In this case, it is the same fear of lethal viruses and infectious diseases that informed *28 Days Later*. Moreover, the military regime attempting to rebuild the country and guaranteeing the safety of the population recalls the efforts of the US army in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their use of circuit cameras to control the secure area hint at contemporary surveillance systems employed in all major public areas. It also conveys the idea of a city under control, whilst at the same time creating an uneasy feeling that, in the end, the city may not be under control at all. Moreover, the surveillance system, and the general's order to follow Code Red procedure after the outbreak of infection, both allude to the potential seeds of totalitarianism that often go hand in hand with the creation of a new order.

On a visual level – similar to the Danny Boyle film – London plays an important part in the movie and can almost be considered a character. However, unlike in *28 Days Later*, the director Juan Carlos Fresnadillo decides to focus on modern London, namely the Isle of Dogs. He points out that the part of London he has selected as a setting for the film is far from the iconic idea of Britain's capital city. The city is a character which is presented gradually, first through aerial shots, then by landing on the roof tops where the snipers are positioned before descending to the ground. From a military point of view, the Isle of Dogs as District One is ideal because of its vertical structure which allows the army to bring a lot of people into a rather small, easily controllable area. Moreover, Danny Boyle, the co-producer of the film, emphasises its function as a contemporary "Garden of Eden."[236] It is a place to start rebuilding a society repopulating the country. It is an almost sterile area which serves as a contrast to the disaster outside the secure area which is being cleaned up by the soldiers.

Despite its main focus on modern London, there are some views of the iconic London as well, seen mostly through the eyes of the kids. When Andy and Tammy ride through the city on a motorbike we get a glimpse of some of the most important sights of London, such as the Tower Bridge. Nevertheless, these images are linked to their trip into the past to gather some souvenirs to bring into their new sterile home.

[236] Boyle, 'Code Red' [on DVD]

As has already been mentioned, a characteristic of most contemporary dystopian films is their documentary-inspired style. The director tries to be as realistic as possible. Despite the rather implausible idea of a highly infective virus which transforms human beings into "rage-filled monster killing machines"[237] within twenty seconds, the documentary style of the film with the use of hand-held cameras and the interspersed timeline in the form of credits at the beginning give the whole movie a realistic feel. According to the director, the documentary style is the best way to portray the implications of a big war, in this case the war between infection and human beings.[238] Fresnadillo's aim is to enable the audience to "smell the characters and the environment" as if the story "happen[ed] really close to [the audience]."[239] He intends for the movie to be a mirror, a reminder of big disasters such as natural catastrophes and wars.[240] Moreover, the different cameras and viewfinders through which the audience sees the action add to the realism of the movie and place the film in a time in which everything is recorded by close circuit cameras and looked at indirectly on monitors and through viewfinders.

In order to increase the realistic touch, the film is mainly shot with natural light except for the night scenes which are shot with day-for-night technique because of the practical impossibility of filming in a completely dark London. The impression is that of a landscape lit by a full moon which creates a scary twilight feeling.

[237] Andrew MacDonald, 'Code Red' [on DVD]
[238] Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 'Director and Producer Commentary' in *28 Weeks Late,* dir. by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo (20th Century Fox, 2007) [on DVD]
[239] Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 'Getting to Know Featurette' in *28 Weeks Late,* dir. by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo (20th Century Fox, 2007) [on DVD]
[240] Fresnadillo, 'Director and Producer Commentary' [on DVD]

# Chapter Three: Violence

## 3.1 Film Violence

### 3.1.1 Introduction

The following chapter will provide a short overview of the issue of film violence, starting with a definition and a short outline of the historical development of film violence. Since dystopian violence has already been analysed in Chapter 2, this chapter will only address the most pertinent critical approaches regarding the action and horror genre before moving on to an in depth analysis of violence in the films in question. The in depth analysis will focus on the action movie elements in *V for Vendetta*, *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*. A thorough analysis of a key action sequence of *Children of Men* is part of the chapter "The Adaptation of Violence" (3.2). As far as horror tropes are concerned, this chapter will be limited at the analysis of some aspects of *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*, inasmuch as the key horror sequence in *The Road* finds room in Chapter 3.2.

#### 3.1.1.1 Definition

From its beginnings, cinema has always been associated with immorality and considered as inherently violent. Already D. W. Griffith was aware of the terrifying power of the new medium and its "appetite for violence,"[241] considering violence as both innate to film and human beings. Also Sergei Eisenstein believed in the power of montage and its capacity to force its violent effects on the viewer.[242] Even the simple expression 'to shoot a film' likens the camera to a tool capable of a violent act. According to J. David Slocum in his "Introduction" to *Violence and American Cinema*, "from the technical nature of the medium itself to the pleasures and anxieties it evokes in the viewers, from its layered narratives to frequently graphic spectacles, cinema is

[241] William Rothman, 'Violence and Film', in *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. by J. David Slocum (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 39.
[242] Ibid.

thoroughly violent – even as the violence is difficult to explain simply."[243] Film violence is visceral, grabs the viewers' attention, talks to their senses and touches their emotions. Even though film violence is artificially fabricated by special effects, montage, acting, make-up and sound and consequently only a representation of violence (as opposed to real violence), it is sometimes perceived as real violence inasmuch as it often leads to psychological distress and even bodily reactions. Images such as the cannibal scene in *The Road* can be physically felt like a punch in the stomach.

In spite of the obviousness of film violence, it is a notion that is difficult to define. Whereas it is easily agreed upon that violence is harmful behaviour and that there are several forms of violent action ranging from physical over psychological to social violence, it is difficult to find out by which cultural processes some actions are considered as violent and others not. What is considered violent largely depends on how a certain generation or a certain culture perceives the represented violence. As James Kendrick states in *Film Violence: History, Ideology, Genre*, "Different cultures and generations construct their own definitions of film violence, so that a film that is deemed extraordinarily violent in one time or place may not be viewed as such elsewhere."[244] Once innovative and shocking techniques become mainstream, the acting style evolves and the historical and social context changes the perception of what is acceptable or not. Also the viewer's individual sensibility and viewing experience influence the perception of violence. A teenager who is used to violent computer games is not as easily shocked by gory images as someone who only watches romantic comedies. Thus, different audiences view film violence differently.

There have been various critical approaches to understand film violence, ranging from social, institutional and policy debates (mainly concerned with regulations and censorship) over cultural and ideological interpretations (analysing how violent images and narratives both show up and structure social dynamics), to representational analyses interested in narrative and spectacle, spectatorship and reception. This work focuses, on the one hand, on the representational aspect with its emphasis on means of expression, and on the other hand on the deeper link between violence as shocking human

[243] J. David Slocum, 'Introduction: Violence and American Cinema: Notes for an Investigation', in *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. by J. David Slocum (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-36 (p. 4).
[244] James Kendrick, *Film Violence: History, Ideology, Genre* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2009), p. 10.

experience and primordial instinct and its sublimation through myth resulting in a possible cathartic experience. This is in line with the two main components of film violence theorised by Stephen Prince in his *Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1968*. According to Prince, these two elements are the referential components, or in other words, the behaviour depicted, and its cinematic treatment.[245] To put it simply, film violence is a question of style and content. Kendrick argues that throughout the history of film, mainly the cinematic treatment with its technical achievements in special effects, slow-motion and montage has developed and rendered film violence increasingly graphic whereas the content has remained fairly consistent.[246] Nevertheless, the way violent content is linked or not to archetypal patterns determines the quality of the cathartic experience in the viewer.

However, it is simplistic to assume that the more graphic the violence is the more shocking it is. Some films can have hardly any visually explicit gore and be perceived as utterly violent. Slocum argues that "the *threat* of harm or injury can often be as disturbing as the act itself."[247] Therefore, the impression of danger largely depends on the narrative and does not necessarily require onscreen violence in order to convey a feeling of relentless threat. In addition to narrative strategies, there are other components, such as the impression of realism, that play a role. According to Kendrick, "Realism is a cinematic construct, a merging of stylistic devices with audience preconceptions to produce a sense in the individual viewer that what is being viewed is closely, if not exactly, analogous to their knowledge and experience of external reality."[248] Paradoxically, however, what is perceived as realistic has often little in common with real life violence. Sometimes, the more stylised violence is conveyed the higher the impression of realism. For example, Sam Peckinpah's use of slow-motion and fast editing in *The Wild Bunch* (1969) resulted in a highly stylised representation of violence, which, according to Stephen Prince, is however "the most realistic motion picture yet conceived."[249] Also the use of documentary film devices can create a heightened sense of realism. Contemporary dystopian films recur to these techniques in

[245] Stephen Prince, *Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1968* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 34-35.
[246] Kendrick, p. 14.
[247] Slocum, p. 2 (emphsis in italics in the original).
[248] Kendrick, p. 15.
[249] Stephen Prince, 'Beholding Blood Sacrifice in *The Passion of the Christ*: How Real is Movie Violence?', *Film Quarterly*, 59.4 (2006), 11-22 (p. 12).

order to bridge the distance between audience and image. Excessively marked style, on the other hand, can distance the viewer from the depiction of the violence and almost create an alienation effect. Then, the experience of the violence becomes an aesthetic pleasure with lower emotional appeal.

Devin McKinney's distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' violence goes in a similar direction. Strong violence "often has the physical effects of the body genres", but "also acts on the mind by refusing it glib comfort and immediate resolutions,"[250] whereas weak violence "thrives on a sterile contradiction: it reduces bloodshed to its barest components, then inflates them with hot stylised air."[251] Consequently, weak violence focuses on style, entertainment and excitement. Strong violence, on the other hand, tries to equally focus on style and content, thus providing food for thought. Whether the possible cathartic effect of film violence is melodramatic or tragic largely depends on this distinction and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

#### 3.1.1.2 Historical Overview

Violence has been an integral part of the cinema from its beginnings when it was often related to humour. Early slapstick and attraction films could not do without it. That sort of violence subsequently entered the cartoons and can now be found in contemporary action films which often have a comic touch since violence linked to comedy is more palatable. Moreover, violence and humour heighten each other's effects. As Leo Charney puts it, "The violence renders the humour more surprising and the humour makes the violence more startling."[252]

Up until the mid sixties, due to the Production Code, Classical Hollywood cinema, despite containing sex and violence, avoided their graphic depiction. Similar to the conventions of Greek tragedies, violence was left to the imagination of the audience. However, not only physical violence, but also to representation of psychological violence, though lacking in visual cruelty, can be similarly shocking and devastating, both for the character and the audience. Only after the dismantling of the Production Code did the filmmakers start to depict violence more graphically and enter, what

[250] Devin McKinney, 'Violence: The Strong and the Weak', *Film Quarterly*, 46.4, (1993), 16-22 (p. 17).
[251] McKinney, p. 19.
[252] Leo Charney, 'The Violence of a Perfect Moment', in *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. by J. David Slocum (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 47-62 (p.48).

Thomas Schatz calls "a period of unprecedented innovation, experimentation, and accomplishment,"[253] and at the same time trigger a thorough discussion on the effects of screen violence with a great number of articles in the popular press decrying this new tendency in film.[254]

The ideas about the immorality of films go hand in hand with scholarly discussions about the consequences of film violence on the real world. Discussions arise in the wake of acts of copycat violence after the screenings of *Taxi Driver* (1976) or *Natural Born Killers* (1994), but also more recently, after the Columbia High school shooting or shootings in European schools, and raise questions about whether appetite for film violence can change into appetite for real violence. Can film really stimulate an appetite for violence that can be more fully gratified by performing or suffering real acts of violence than by merely watching it on film? The empirical findings on this issue are contrasting and often depend on the ideological framework behind the research. A thorough analysis of the findings of both psychological and sociological research projects would exceed the scope of this work, inasmuch as its focus is on cinematic violence as stylistic and thematic elements and their aesthetic reception. However, two voices serve to illustrate the two main positions. According to Richard B. Felson's "Mass Media Effect on Violent Behavior," the exposure to media violence can have a short-term effect on aggressive behaviour, but he also admits that "media violence may increase or inhibit the violent behavior of viewers, depending on their initial predisposition."[255] Other scholars downplay the effects of media violence on the viewer. In *The American Cinema of Excess: Extremes of the National Mind on Film*, Mike King quotes the Buddhist saying "He who has no wound on his hand, may touch poison"[256] in order to support his point: "People who are not themselves psychologically damaged or wounded can contemplate the dark sides of the human condition without being adversely affected."[257]

[253] Thomas Schatz, 'Introduction', in *New Hollywood Violence*, ed. by Steven Jay Schneider (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 1-10 (p. 5).
[254] Kendrick, p. 23.
[255] Richard B. Felson, 'Mass Media Effects on Violent Behavior', in *Screening Violence*, ed. by Stephen Prince (London: Athlone Press, 2000), pp. 237-61 (p. 247).
[256] Buddha, *The Dhammapada*, trans. by Eknath Easwaran (London: Arkana, 1986), p. 110.
[257] Mike King, *The American Cinema of Excess: Extremes of the National Mind on Film* (Jefferson: Mc Farland, 2009), p. 234.

The 1990s saw a new development of film violence often referred to as "ironic" or "new" violence and linked to film directors such as Quentin Tarantino or Oliver Stone.[258] Recent scholarship tends to set up a binary between film violence of the 1970s and film violence of the 1990s. The former is seen as "complex and socially meaningful" whereas the latter is considered "more explicit, but also more simplistic and socially meaningless."[259] Henry A. Giroux claims that, "violence has become increasingly a source of pleasure," or, in other words, "a site of voyeuristic titillation and gory spectacle."[260]

### 3.1.1.3 The Action Genre

Action film as a distinctive genre is a development of the past few decades, but action elements have been an indispensable ingredient of most other genres since the beginnings of cinema. The films in this study are not pure action films, but most of them contain action film elements. James Kendrick underlines the affinity of action and violence. He claims that

> The term *action* when used in a cinematic context is little more than a euphemism for *violence* that does not carry the latter's negative connotations. *Action* is excitement, movement and velocity, while *violence* suggests something unauthorised, unruly, even vehement and vulgar.[261]

In *Genre and Hollywood*, Steve Neale points out the major characteristics of the action genre which are an emphasis on spectacular physical action, a narrative focus on fights, chases and explosions, a proliferation of stunts and special effects as well as the display of spectacular male bodies.[262] In recent years, with the arrival of "the Big Loud Action Movie,"[263] a term coined by Larry Gross, plots have been simplified and are dominated by image, technology and humour (as distancing device), resulting in a "super-kinetic cartoon-type action movie."[264] According to Leo Charney's article "The Violence of a Perfect Moment," there are two fundamental characteristics of contemporary film violence, the enduring appeal of singular exciting moments such as

[258] Kendrick, p. 28.
[259] Kendrick, p. 29.
[260] Henry A. Giroux, *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence and Youth* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p.58 (emphasis in italics in the original).
[261] Kendrick, pp. 89-90 (emphasis in italics in the original).
[262] Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 52.
[263] Larry Gross, 'Big and Loud', in *Action/Spectacle Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. by José Arroyo (London: British Film Institute, 2000), pp. 3-8 (p. 3).
[264] Gross, p. 5.

explosions, shootings or car crashes, and the decontextualisation of those moments from a linear story.[265] In other words, there is an increasing focus on kinetic sensation, on spectacle at the expense of the other important element of the medium, namely storytelling. This increasing need for spectacle can be compared to the effects of a drug addiction: an excessive consumption of violent images leads to a sense of insatiability. The consumer needs more, but the effect is lessened. Charney explains this tendency with "a sense of lost intimacy with present moments,"[266] typical of the cinema of attractions of the beginnings, but taken over by cartoon violence and the contemporary action cinema. He explains,

> The force of violence externalizes and renders as kinaesthetic effect the rolling hunger to face the present, to feel and see it and re-present it. [...] Violence becomes more and more intense in the effort to restore the possibility of having an effect, creating a shock, provoking a response.[267]

Contemporary action films combine the need for sensation with the need for narrative continuity, a goal which already the cinema of attraction tried to achieve. Tom Gunning claims that the alienated environment of modern life creates human beings in need of thrills which are, to a certain extent, satisfied by the cinema of attractions.[268] Charney claims that

> The shocks of cinema and other forms of distraction, typified by the cinema of attractions, are enlisted to compensate for the perceived loss of the possibility of intimate experiences of tangible, sensory presence that could testify to the existence of a coherent, legible reality.[269]

In other words, cinematic action and violence help to compensate for the contemporary feeling of alienation from reality.

In his article "Aristotle V. the Action Film," Thomas Leitch points out, that despite the apparent conformity of action movies to some of the prescriptions for tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics* with their emphasis on action at the expense of characterisation, other aspects are remote from Aristotle's conception of tragic action. Tragedy is supposed to be an imitation of an action of a certain magnitude and distinct from the other events preceding and following it. First of all, the emphasis of

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[265] Charney, p. 48.
[266] Charney, p. 49.
[267] Charney, p. 49.
[268] Tom Gunning, 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator', *Art and Text*, 34 (spring 1989), 31-44 (p. 41).
[269] Charney, p.55

contemporary action films on violent destruction is far from Aristotle's idea of 'magnitude'. What are considered action sequences in action films, in Aristotle's terms would be dismissed as mere spectacle, the least artistic of the six parts of tragedy.[270] Most contemporary action films are constructed around a consistent number of spectacular set-pieces. Nevertheless, a number of expository scenes are required in order to root the spectator's interest in the central conflict. Moreover, these scenes are interspersed with comic, romantic or sentimental sequences which provide some sort of relief.[271] According to Leitch, "The roots of the action film remain in Aristotelian dramaturgy; what twentieth-century cinema adds is a change in emphasis that substitutes spectacular elements [...] for the teleological, ethically consequential associations central to Aristotle."[272]

Action intended as expression of human agency implies both bringing about change and doing so with the help of special skills. Indeed, heroism largely depends on the extraordinary skillfulness of the hero. Moreover, Aristotelian action is based on conflict. All these aspects can be found in the contemporary mainstream action hero as well.[273] However, the main difference lies in the nature of the action itself. Whereas the Greek tragedy invited its audience to reflect upon the problematic nature of action, contemporary action films limit themselves to displaying frightening and at the same time entertaining spectacles. As Leitch observes, the average action movie fan goes to the cinema to see "a melodramatic victory of good over evil, and the maximum number of maximally destructive set-pieces along the way."[274] Consequently, the purification of emotions through pity and fear that goes hand in hand with the contemplation of problematic actions is lost in most contemporary action films. As my analysis will show, the cathartic potential of a film can be increased by the presence of a tragic hero in combination with mythological elements.

Another interesting reading of the action film genre can be found in Marsha Kinder's article "Violence American Style: the Narrative Orchestration of Violent

[270] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. and intr. by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p.13, "Spectacle is attractive, but is very inartistic [...]."
[271] Thomas Leitch, 'Aristotle V. the Action Film', in *New Hollywood Violence*, ed. by Steven Jay Schneider (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 103-25 (pp. 103-07).
[272] Leitch, p. 109.
[273] Leitch, p. 113.
[274] Leitch, p. 122.

Attractions,"[275] in which she focuses on Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) in order to analyse the role of violence and narration in films of the 1960s and 1990s. According to Stephen Prince, Peckinpah is "the crucial link between classical and postmodern Hollywood, the figure whose work transforms modern cinema in terms of stylistics for rendering screen violence and in terms of moral and psychological consequences that ensue."[276] Kinder emphasises the role of violence as both a stylistic and narrative means of determining the viewer's emotional response. Peckinpah's strategy of alternating rhythmic eruptions of violence with moments of pause heightens the effect of the violent outbursts and makes the audience realise their desire for it.[277]

In order to explain the role of violence, Kinder resorts to René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*[278]and his thesis that the only function of all kinds of sacrificial violence in art, myth or religion is to prevent reciprocal violence, thus making it essential to uphold social order. According to Kinder, "Girard treats violence as a performative language that speaks through an elaborate set of conventions that are codified by the social order it seeks to uphold."[279] These assumptions, together with the question about what kind of conventions defend the social order make the representation of violence significant for the exploration of cultural mechanisms.

In line with Leitch's critique of contemporary action movie spectacle, Kinder distinguishes between "cathartic" and "orgasmic" violence, implying that the first is revelatory whereas the latter is erotic inasmuch as the spectator rather desires than fears the eruption of violence.[280] Consequently, the spectators are confronted with their visceral response to violence and their desire to see violent images and actions. Moreover, this violence is often accompanied by comic elements. In contemporary mainstream action films, action sequences function like performative numbers interrupting the linearity of the plot with their sensational audio and visual spectacle, thus undermining the narrative's traditional function of contextualisation. According to Kinder it is precisely this tension between a unifying narrative and the inserted comic

[275] Marsha Kinder, 'Violence American Style: the Narrative Orchestration of Violent Attractions', in *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. by J. David Slocum (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 63-100.
[276] Stephen Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 2.
[277] Kinder, p. 65.
[278] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (1972, reprint Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 1-34.
[279] Kinder, p. 66.
[280] Kinder, p. 66.

violent attractions that is characteristic of the American orchestration of cinematic violence.[281]

### 3.1.1.4 The Horror Genre

With its generally gory depiction of severed bodies, blood and torn flesh, violence, or at least the threat of violence, seems to be the essential element of the horror film genre. Nevertheless, there are differing views about the degree of graphic explicitness necessary to comply with the requirements of the genre. This discussion is often carried out along the divides of low culture and high culture. There are valid arguments against the need for graphic verisimilitude, such as that by Ivan Butler, the author of *Horror in the Cinema*, who claims that indirect horror is more effective than direct horror, inasmuch as "the unseen is often more frightening than the seen."[282] On the other hand, the transgression of visual taboos is part of the essence of the genre. Whereas indirect horror films rely on technical means, such as sinister music, light and shadow, or distorted camera angles in order to generate suspense, direct horror films with their explicit visualisations address the body rather than the mind and are hence considered lowbrow.[283]

One of the early scholarly works on horror film, namely Carlos Clarens' *An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films* focuses on the mythical aspects of horror. Talking about horror films, he underlines that "there are myths in these films, ancient and modern, that are as relevant to modern living as the myths of right-thinking, of comfort, and of middle-class patience."[284] He also claims that horror films "reflect something of the collective unconscious of the audience."[285] Even though he considers violence as an important characteristic of the genre, he also points out that it distracts from horror's "myth, tradition, and legend."[286] In other words, the focus on gory details detracts from the underlying mythical themes. The comparative analysis of *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*, both containing similar mythical aspects but differing degrees of graphic explicitness will corroborate his thesis.

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[281] Kinder, p. 70
[282] Ivan Butler, *Horror in the Cinema* (New York: Paperback Library, 1971), p. 13.
[283] Kendrick, p. 80.
[284] Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Film: The Classic Era, 1895-1967* (New York: De Capo Press, 1967), p. xviii.
[285] Ibid., p. xx.
[286] Ibid., p. 37.

One of the questions that arise in connection with horror films regards its appeal to a large number of spectators. In the foreword to the above mentioned book, Clarens talks about the pleasure people paradoxically find in nonpleasurable forms. His observation is in line with Friedrich Schiller's famous quote taken from his essay "On the Tragic Art":

> It is a phenomenon common to all men, that sad, frightful things, even the horrible, exercise over us an irresistible seduction, and that in presence of a scene of desolation and of terror we feel at once repelled and attracted by two equal forces.[287]

This attraction towards the dark sides of human existence is at the basis of many great works of art, ranging from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* over Edgar Alan Poe's short stories to Surrealist art, just to mention a few. The taboo aspect of violence and gore, its way of graphically showing what is normally hidden and thus reminding the audience of the fragility of their bodies is part of the pleasure the horror genre exerts on the audience. Moreover, this insistence on the vulnerability of the body and the frequent involuntary physical responses to certain horrifying scenes in the form of nausea, abdominal discomfort or muscular tension threaten cultural norms based on restraint and decorum and confirm the genre's transgressive potential.[288] Thus, aggressive, archaic forces irrupt into the seemingly secure space of polite society and shake its boundaries.

However, in addition to this, there is another important aspect worth mentioning. According to Walter Kendrick in *The Thrill of Fear: 250 Years of Scary Entertainment*, the horror film aficionados are a tight group of experts "who makes a cult of the whole business and revels in arcane information that only fellow fans share."[289] Horror films are specialised products for an audience that knows what to expect. They do not simply take the violence literally, but have learned how to appreciate the creativity and artistry behind it.

The horror genre is generally considered inherently misogynistic in that the plots are mainly constructed around male perpetrators and female victims. This tendency

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[287] Friedrich Schiller, 'On the Tragic Art', in *Project Gutenberg*, prod. by Tapio Riikonen and David Widger (26 October 2006) < http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6798/6798-h/6798-h.htm#2H_4_0046> [accessed 12 January 2012]
[288] Kendrick, p. 86.
[289] Walter Kendrick, *The Thrill of Fear: 250 Years of Scary Entertainment* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), p. 255.

seems to be most evident in the slasher movie in which a usually psychopathic killer first stalks and then gruesomely kills a conspicuous number of prevalently young female victims. The apparent misogynist ideology behind these films based on a dominant male character victimising helpless damsels has been challenged by Carol J. Clover in her groundbreaking *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992). Slasher movies are governed by the above mentioned conventions, but what is interesting and fundamental for Clover's point is the fact that the only person escaping the psychopath is a girl. Clover coined the term 'Final Girl' and elaborated certain characteristics for the female heroine which will be addressed in more detail in the analysis of the female characters in *28 Days Later*. However, since violence is vital for the genre because it creates victims, and the identification with a victim is necessary for the film to succeed in its task of captivating the audience, the fact that the final victim is a girl allows for interesting considerations about gender identification. Generally speaking, in the slasher movie gender is not clear cut inasmuch as the psychopath, in spite of being male, has female characteristics and needs phallic weapons in order to ascertain his masculinity. The 'Final Girl,' on the other hand, has masculine characteristics and uses similar phallic weapons in order to heighten her masculine side. Thus, the slasher movie buff, who is predominantly young and male, is forced to identify with a female surrogate, who combines, as Clover puts it, "the functions of suffering victim and avenging hero."[290] The combination of these functions is not new, inasmuch as the action film traditionally relies on theses conventions. Rambo and the likes undergo all sorts of pain and suffering before rising to their heroic qualities. What is new in the slasher genre is that the protagonist is female. Moreover, the shift of the subjective camera towards the end of the film from the point of view of the killer to the point of view of the 'Final Girl' signifies a shift in power and control and completes the girl's evolution from victim to hero.

[290] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 17.

### 3.1.2 Applied Analysis

#### 3.1.2.1 *V for Vendetta*: An Action Movie

Despite its many intertexual references and layers of meaning, *V for Vendetta* is mainly an action film aimed at an adolescent audience. Thus, it introduces a number of action movie tropes, including those of the superhero genre, mainly in the scenes depicting violence. V presents some of the characteristics of the classical superhero, ranging from his initial invulnerability over his acrobatics to his fighting skills. For instance, the way he jumps onto the roof of the building where Bishop Lilliman expects young girls for his sexual entertainment is reminiscent of superheroes such as Superman or Spiderman, both comic superheroes adapted into movies. However, similar to the character in the graphic novel, the protagonist of the film does not meet all the typical conventions of a superhero. As director James McTeigue states, he wanted to consciously play against audience expectations when deciding not to let the hero take of his mask.[291] Moreover, despite his almost superhuman powers which may be one of the side effects of the Larkhill experiments, V is vulnerable and dies at the end of the film. More importantly, unlike many other superheroes, V has a darker side, too. He is rather cruel in his enactment of revenge, and the way he chooses to educate Evey by torturing her, makes it difficult for the audience to fully subscribe to him as a hero.

As any action film worthy of the term, *V for Vendetta* uses special effects to increase the impact of the explosions and fighting scenes. It seems as if action movie film crews and terrorists employ the same strategies in order to get their messages across. Like a film director, V accompanies the explosion scenes with music.

All the fighting scenes are choreographed like a ballet and their effect is increased through slow motion. Mainly the final encounter between V and Creedy and his men seems more like an acrobatic act in the tradition of the Hong Kong action film than a realistic fight. The continuous kinetic movement is reminiscent of computer games and appeals mainly to a young male audience. The director does not intend to make these scenes seem realistic. The colour of the fake blood is chosen to match with the red roses and the red colour in the Norsefire flag. There are fountains of red blood

[291] James McTeigue, 'Freedom! Forever! Making of *V for Vendetta*', in *V for Vendetta*, dir. by James McTeigue (Warner Bros, 2006) [on DVD]

springing from the bruised body, and V's injured figure leaves traces of red blood in the form of a V on the wall. This overall stylization somehow distances the viewer from the fighting, but does not distract from the tragedy of V's end. A heroic albeit tragic life requires a matching death scene.

Moreover, the visual impact of some of the scenes heightens the dramatic experience of the narrative. Mainly V's rise from the Larkhill flames, a frame which is repeated throughout the film in crucial moments, requires this strong visual element in order to comply with its mythic function. Fire is not only heat, but also light. Not only does it destroy, it is also connected to the beginning of civilisation. Consequently, the Larkhill fire signifies the beginning of the end of the Norsefire regime, an end which is necessary in order to allow for a new beginning.

The duality of the element fire, which is also part of V's innermost nature, culminates in the final destruction of the Houses of Parliament. It is V's final act and at the same time his Viking funeral which conveys almost mythical status to the character. Similar to Berenice's hair, V ends up in the sky in the form of a firework constellation representing his signature. The people in their Guy Fawkes masks approach the Houses of Parliament like the dominoes V had placed and toppled in a previous scene and witness, together with the audience, the spectacle which both signifies the end and the beginning of an era. The explosions are both destructive and creative: dynamite transforms into rubble old, ramshackle structures whereas the fireworks symbolise the joy and hope of a new beginning as well as V's sacrifice. This is all a visual and auditory feast that, in V's words, "only celluloid can deliver."[292]

#### 3.1.2.2 *28 Days Later*: Horror and Action

It is very difficult to categorise a film like *28 Days Later* insofar as it presents elements of the action, disaster and even the horror of a slasher movie. There are frequent intertextual references to notable films: George Andrew Romero's *Dead Trilogy* (1968, 1978, 1985) in its zombie theme, Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) in a focus on civilisation and primitivism, and even to some extent Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), all demonstrating multiple influences on Boyle's film.

[292] *V for Vendetta*, dir. by James McTeigue (Warner Bros, 2006)

There is, however, one characteristic which all these different genres share, namely their focus on violence, thematically and visually in their graphic portrayals.

*28 Days Later* relies on several stylistic conventions of the horror and slasher genre which serve to convey the exhilaration of danger and which will be addressed in detail in the comparative analysis of the film and the homonymous comic series (see 3.2). On the level of character functions, *28 Days Later* introduces two female characters who, despite being at some point transformed into frightened 'damsels'[293] in red dresses before eventually being rescued by the male hero, present some of Clover's 'Final Girl'[294] characteristics which are typical of the slasher movie, but seem to inform also this apocalyptic horror tale. According to Clover, one of the characteristics of the Final Girl is her masculinity which goes hand in hand with a certain sexual reluctance and an active investigating gaze. Moreover, the Final Girl fights back with ferocity using mainly pretechnological weapons.[295] Selena's short haircut and her sporty clothes, her resolute attitude, her sexual abstinence, her pragmatism about life ("staying alive is as good as it gets"[296]), her rational concern about Frank and Hannah slowing them down and finally the coldness in her killing of Marc with a baseball bat, all confirm the abovementioned Final Girl elements. Hannah, despite her young age and her initial shyness, also appears as a tough young woman throughout the film. She is an experienced driver, the one who manages to stay calm and change the flat tyre in the tunnel as they are attacked by a group of Infected, and she even attacks Jim when she mistakenly takes his kissing Selena as biting.

Horror movies rely on sinister places in order to increase the impression of threat. The terrible locations in which the characters of *28 Days Later* find themselves, and whose horror is heightened by the presence of certain animals or the forces of nature, are both common for the genre but also vital elements of the *katabasis* which will be explored in the chapter dealing with the mythical elements of the films (see 4.2.1). The first horrific setting is the laboratory, in which the imprisoned chimpanzees set the violent tone of the film. Later, Jim enters the church with its decaying corpses and an apparently possessed priest. The dark tunnel, which features at the beginning of

[293] Carol J. Clover, 'Her Body Himself: Gendeer in the Slasher Film' in *Screening Violence*, ed. by Stephen Prince (London: Athlone Press, 2000), pp. 125-74 (p. 150).
[294] Ibid.
[295] Clover, 'Her Body, Himself', pp. 125-74.
[296] *28 Days Later*

the journey up North, with hundreds of rats running from the Infected – initially only appearing as shadows on the walls – is another horror movie cliché. Common horror movie locations are scattered throughout the film: the deserted military road blockade which, according to the director, is reminiscent of the ghost ship 'Mary Celeste', in which a crow eats the flesh of a corpse whose blood will eventually infect Frank; the wood that functions both as hiding place for the Infected and mass grave for the dead; the backyard of the mansion in which Mailer, the infected soldier, is kept (evocative of the primates in the opening). Even nature responds to the horror taking place in the mansion after Mailer's liberation: thunder, lightning and torrential rain serve as backdrop to the climactic scenes of the film.

However, the film also presents some typical action movie characteristics. According to Steave Neale, action films have several common elements, such as the insistence on spectacular physical action, a certain emphasis on fights, chases and explosions as well as the use of special effects.[297] There are frequent physically intense fight and chase scenes, mainly when the Infected are involved. The taxi ride through the tunnel over the abandoned cars is almost conveyed like a roller coaster experience. One of the action film highlights is the explosion of the petrol station after Jim's rescue by Selena and Marc. According to Boyle, this was the most expensive shot of the whole film, but violent, noisy and explosive spectacle was needed in order to cater to the taste of a mainstream audience acclimatised to Hollywood special effects.[298] The result is a beautiful and well edited scene of the brightly lit explosion in the middle of a darkened London skyline. In addition to this, the choreography of the defensive action by the soldiers after an incursion of infected people is reminiscent of violent computer games, the soldiers' excitement about the killing of people somehow hinting at the violence within every human being.

#### 3.1.2.3 *28 Weeks Later*: Horror and Action

After the violent opening of the film, which links *28 Weeks Later* to its prequel and quickly reminds the audience of the extent of the tragedy, there is an important portion of the film set in the sterile and supposedly safe area of Canary Wharf, called

[297] Steve Neale, p. 52.
[298] Boyle, 'Audio Commentary' [on DVD]

District One. This place serves as stark contrast to the initial violence and the violence to come during the second part of the film.

However, in addition to its function of informing the audience about the main issue, namely the threat of the infection, the opening scene also sets the ground for some of the important secondary issues of the film. The survivors seem to be quite safe in the little cottage, but their life is put in danger by a child who has to flee from its infected parents. The mother instinct of Alice, Don's wife, to help the child and Don's survival instinct, which makes him leave his wife behind, are at the basis of the latter's feeling of guilt which will later trigger the second outbreak of the disease. Moreover, also the role of a child in bringing the disease to an apparently safe place is already hinted at in the opening scene.

The opening scene already presents the violent details that are typical of the visual representation of the Infected. According to the movement advisor Paul Kasey, the movement of the Infected is not supposed to be like that of zombies or creatures, but rather animalistic, and the sound of the Infected is meant to be similar to a human growl.[299]

Compared to *28 Days Later*, the sequel presents more gory details throughout the film. At times, the graphic violence looks rather surreal and does not meet the director's requirements of realism, as for instance in the helicopter scene at the end of the film, where a bunch of infected people are beheaded by the skids of the helicopter. Nothing is left to the imagination of the audience. In general, the fast cutting of the scenes involving the Infected underlines the danger of the disease and parallel editing in crucial moments increases the tension. Moreover, the director Juan Carlos Fresnadillo points out that "when the infection is around, the camera is infected as well."[300]

In addition to this, Fresnadillo also plays with sound in order to heighten the violence of certain scenes. John Murphy's theme, used also in the prequel, is introduced in significant moments throughout the film as a reminder of the danger. During Don's flight from the cottage, the contrast between the loud music drowning out the screams of the Infected and the subsequent silence when Don finally manages to get away on the

[299] Paul Kasey, 'The Infected Featurette', *28 Weeks Later*, dir. by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo (20th Century Fox, 2007), [on DVD]
[300] Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 'Director and Producer Commentary', *28 Weeks Later*, dir. by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo (20th Century Fox, 2007), [on DVD]

boat effectively underline both the threat and the loneliness of the survivor. The director emphasises the importance of the right balance between silence and intensity in that the silence is meant to deliver the idea of emptiness whereas the moments of intense music should convey the feeling of danger.[301]

The most significant scene of violence, however, is Don's transformation from a loving father and husband into a cruel monster. Unlike in *28 Days Later*, this time the disaster is triggered by an act of love. Ironically, it is the kiss of a loving couple that initiates the violence. The way this transformation into a monster is conveyed is discussed in more detail as part of the discourse on the adaptation of violence in Chapter 3.2.

The violence of the panic after the outbreak of the disease is shown by shaky cameras and the impression is that of a scene filmed by a mobile phone. This technique recalls contemporary YouTube videos directly recording disasters, violations of human rights or other catastrophic events. In the movie, the close-ups of the faces of the Infected combined with their noise increases the horror. Torches are the only source of light. According to Fresnadillo, the idea was to create a kind of 'strobe effect' or 'flashlight effect' which is very horrific and increases the panic.[302]

The violence of the Infected is counterbalanced by the violence of the military procedure. Very soon, the general in charge of the repatriation programme realises that the only way to stop the infection is Code Red, resulting in the extermination of any living being, infected or not. It is the so-called legitimate violence of those in power in order to protect the system, in this case the military. From a visual point of view, the urban war film scenes resemble a computer game. The snipers on the rooftops almost enjoy the thrill of their aiming at real targets. Only Doyle is not willing to shoot at innocent people, among others children, and decides to help them out from District One which has become a place of either secure death or infection. The inital Garden of Eden has changed into true hell in which all means available to modern warfare are used. The target shooting by the snipers is followed by the air bombing of the city. Fire, the typical element of hell, seems to be the only way to clean the city from the infection. The fire even enters the underground tunnels. Later, however, also chemical weapons together with flame throwers are used in order to exterminate the last surviving Infected,

[301] Fresnadillo, 'Director and Producer Commentary'
[302] Fresnadillo, 'Director and Producer Commentary'

but also our hero Doyle. The shock of the hero burning alive can be seen in the facial expressions of the children.

In certain instances throughout the film the audience sees the violent action indirectly through video recordings, gun spotters or night sensing equipment. According to J. David Slocum, the role of representation and perception of violence through these means lessen the impact of the images. He claims that

> Increasingly impersonal technologies and the distanced gaze through which one sees images of destruction empty those images of meaning; in the process, the viewer becomes less active, simply another component of the media landscape.[303]

Thus, modern modes of perception imply the risk of voiding violent images of their meaning. This may be one of the reasons why the emotional impact of *28 Weeks Later* is short lived.

## 3.2 The Adaptation of Violence

### 3.2.1 Introduction

In the introductory paragraphs I will shortly dwell on the idea of adaptation as an act of violence before discussing the differences between showing and telling in the different media and the role of the recipient in completing the missing information. The main body of this chapter will deal with a close analysis of significant aspects of the adaptation process as applied to the transposition of violent imagery from the novels *The Children of Men* and *The Road* and the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* to film as well as from the films *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later* to the graphic novel *28 Days Later: The Aftermath* and the comics series *28 Days Later*.

#### 3.2.1.1 The Violence of Adaptation

This chapter deals with the adaptation of violent elements in dystopian narratives, but strictly speaking, adaptation as such could be seen as a form of violence committed on the original text. In addition to the violation of an individual artist's work and the usurpation of his/her ideas by another artist, adaptation always implies change,

[303] Slocum, 'Introduction', p. 16.

but often these changes are all but soft and subtle. The source material is being bent and twisted in order to fit a new medium. Consequently, the original work of art has to be cut into manageable parts, and certain parts need to be amputated, re-arranged and forced into a new form. The limits of the new medium both shape and constrain the source material.

The violent act that takes place when adaptation occurs can be compared to the primordial act of eliminating the father in order to acquire his power as explained by Freud in his *Totem and Taboo* (1913):

> One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in what would have been impossible for them individually. [...] Cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying they devoured their victim as well as killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared end envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength.[304]

Like a father, the source text is an authoritative figure exerting power upon its children. The derivative text, by devouring its progenitor does not simply get rid of the feared and envied model, but digests and transforms parts of it into new material which derives its strength partly from the greatness of the source, but foremost from the transformative act it undergoes. The fact that authoritative figures do not like to be overpowered explains why adaptations are often considered as lacking compared to the original.

Adaptation can also be compared to infection which is another act of violence. Infecting parasites use the resources of a host to reproduce, thus weakening the host organism. In order to survive the infecting agent needs to leave the host and attack other organisms. This aggressive but also regenerative act can be seen in the epidemics certain adaptations cause. Resources taken from the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* have been reproduced as film, but the infection does not stop here. The iconographic Guy Fawkes mask has infected contemporary anti-corporate protest. Ironically, who is profiting from the sale of thousands of these masks is the corporation that stands behind the *V for Vendetta* trade mark. As the aggressive virus in *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later* shows, epidemics are difficult to predict and to control.

[304] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 141-42.

### 3.2.1.2 Showing – Telling – Imagining

According to Umberto Eco, any form of adaptation is an interpretative act which consists in making explicit what is only implicit in the original text.[305] Similarly, when quoting Roman Ingarden's[306] theory of the role of *Unbestimmtheitsstellen*[307] in works of art, Nicola Dusi points out that the degree of indeterminateness is the main difference between semiotic systems. Whereas a real object is always well defined, any literary object has a certain level of vagueness.[308] Consequently, any work of art tries to find the suitable balance between explicitness and concealment.

When it comes to the representation of violence, the degree of explicitness both depends on the medium and a conscious choice of the creative mind. Novel, graphic novel and film use different means to convey violence inasmuch as every medium has its own limits and its own strong points. The novel relies on the evocative power of words and the imaginative skills of the human mind which can transform words into pictures. However, the collaboration of the reader is fundamental in order to complete this act of 'closure' resulting in an unlimited variety of transformations of the written word into images in the readers' minds, which can only partially be influenced by the writer. The graphic novel, on the other hand, has its vantage point in graphically presenting violence and gore. However, the artist is limited in that he has to create a precise and unique image in order to convey an idea. Nevertheless, it is the artist's choice of how much detail he/she wants to include in a panel. As Douglas Wolk points out,

> Comics omit far more visual information than they include. They're a series of deliberately chosen visual fragments that don't represent the time between or the space around panels. And because they're cartoons, they omit most of the details of the things they actually do depict in a panel.[309]

Therefore, despite the relative preciseness of the visual sign, some important imaginative work by the reader is still required. The addressee may not be able to decide

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[305] Umberto Eco, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienza di traduzione* (Torino: Bompiani, 2003)
[306] Roman Ingarden, *Das literarische Kunstwerk: Eine Untersuchung aus dem Grenzgebiet der Ontologie, Logik und Literaturwissenschaft* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1931), p. 256.
[307] Degrees of indetrminatedness.
[308] Nicola Dusi, *Il cinema come traduzione. Da un medium all'altro: letteratura, cinema, pittura* (Torino: UTET, 2006)
[309] Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 2007), pp. 132-33.

how much detail to perceive, but the movement from one panel to the next and the closure that occurs between panels allow the reader to choose his/her own rhythm and to decide whether or not to linger on the details of a panel or to quickly move on to the next. Film, with its moving images and sound, its multi-sensory creation of an impression of reality, on the other hand, does not give the audience much autonomy in their viewing experience. The explicitness of the images and the rhythm of their perception are governed by the choices of a film director and his/her crew. The degree of explicitness of violent images changes according to what the film wants to achieve and ranges from discreet allusiveness to extreme graphic depiction. Nevertheless, the audience does not simply passively receive information, but has to actively transform this information into a coherent message. Any film viewing experience requires interpretation, and despite the higher degree of determinateness, also film allows for a number of different readings. Moreover, also film can rely on the imaginative power of the human mind by consciously omitting certain information, mainly when it comes to gory details, leaving the rest to the audience's imagination.

An interesting point regarding the different semiotic systems has been made by Christian Metz in his essay "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema." In comparing photography, theatre and cinema, he attributes photography little 'impression of reality' in that it can convey neither movement nor corporality. Theatre, in spite of using real space and real time as well as movement and corporality, however, does not result in a higher degree of impression of reality. On the contrary, the artificiality of the mise en scène even lessens the impression of reality. Cinema, on the other hand, as a combination of the real irreality of photography and the apparent reality of theatre achieves a high degree of impression of reality. The images are immaterial like in photography, but at the same time perceived as real, because their movement provides an illusion of corporality.[310]

All these aspects need to be kept in mind in adapting narratives into different media. As Alan Moore points out in an interview explaining his dissatisfaction with the adaptations of his graphic novels into film,

> There is something about the quality of comics that makes things possible that you couldn't do in any other medium. [...] Things that we did in *Watchmen* on

[310] Christian Metz, 'On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema', in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. by Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 3-15.

> paper could be frankly horrible or sensationalist or unpleasant if you were to interpret them literally through the medium of cinema. When it's just lines on paper, the reader is in control of the experience – it's a tableau vivant. And that gives it the necessary distance. It's not the same when you're being dragged through it at 24 frames per second.[311]

The same can be said about any adaptation. The effects which a medium can or cannot achieve are fundamental in the adapting process and govern the choices an adapter has to make since they largely influence the reception of the derivative text.

## 3.2.2 Close Analysis

### 3.2.2.1 From Novel to Film

In this study, the two films based on novels illustrate two fundamentally different ways of adapting novels into films. Whereas *The Road* tries to capture as much as possible of the imagery, the plot and the spirit of the work it is based on, *Children of Men* is only loosely based on P.D. James' novel. This allows for a more detailed comparison of the expressive means used in the two versions of *The Road*. *Children of Men*, on the other hand, does not really adapt any particular scenes to the screen, but transposes the world created in the novel and uses some of its elements, including the Christian undertones, to tell the basic plot of the novel, it is to say the effects of general infertility on an ageing society and the implications of an unexpected pregnancy for both the society and the individuals involved. Consequently, there will be a slight imbalance in the way the two adaptations are analysed, resulting in a more thorough analysis of *The Road*.

#### 3.2.2.1.1 *Children of Men*

*Government atrocities*

One of the aspects that have been adapted to the screen is the violence the government is capable of, which ranges from state-sponsored euthanasia, over exploitation and discrimination of immigrants to inhuman treatment of criminals. In the

[311] Steve Rose, 'Alan Moore: An Extraordinary Gentleman', *The Guardian*, 16 March 2009, < http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/mar/16/alan-moore-watchmen-lost-girls> [accessed 14 January 2012]

novel, there is a strong focus on the Quietus movement: a form of assisted suicide which resembles a rite of passage for the ageing population. In the film, this aspect is only hinted at in a TV spot. In addition to this ethically questionable practice, the government, besides being a dictatorship disguised as democracy, is guilty of crimes against humanity mainly in the way it treats criminals and immigrants. The novel only gives sparse information about how immigrants – called Sejourners in the novel – are treated, but the pamphlet created by 'The Five Fishes' in order to wake up the British population provides insight in the limited rights of workers from abroad. "Give the Sejourners full civil rights including the right to live in their own homes, to send for their families and to remain in Britain at the end of their contract of service"[312] is what the underground organisation demands from the government. Julian feels very strongly about the injustice done to the immigrants. She complains, "We import Omegas[313] and the young from less affluent countries to do our dirty work, clean the sewers, clear away the rubbish, look after the incontinent, the aged."[314] She continues,

> They have to be strong, healthy, without criminal convictions. We take the best and chuck them back when they're no longer wanted. [...] They work for a pittance, they live in camps, the women separate from the men. We don't give them citizenship; it's a form of legalized slavery.[315]

This description of the situation of the Sejourners is a clear reference to the socio-economic situation of immigrant workers in the 1990s, when the novel was written, but also nowadays.

The other aspect of government atrocity regards the way criminals are treated. Even people guilty of petty crimes like Henry, Miriam's little brother, are sent to the Isle of Man, a prison camp left to the prisoners themselves. Henry managed to flee and tell his sister about his traumatising experience before being executed. Miriam describes the island as "a living hell."[316] She continues,

> Those who went there human are nearly all dead and the rest are devils. There's starvation. [...] Now, when people die, some get eaten too. [...] The island is run by a gang of the strongest convicts. They enjoy cruelty and on Man they can beat and torture and torment and there's no one to stop them and no one to see. Those who are gentle, who care, who ought not to be there, don't last long.[317]

[312] P.D. James, *The Children of Men* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 158.
[313] The last generation of children born before the general wave of infertility.
[314] James, p. 83.
[315] James, pp.83-84
[316] James, p. 90.
[317] James, p. 90.

The film uses this information together with the account of how immigrants are treated to create its own depiction of the refugee camp in Bexhill. Film, as a text based on images, relies on the evocative power of certain iconography linked to recent history such as the Holocaust or human rights infringements in Guantanamo Bay or Abu Ghraib in order to convey the cruelty of the regime and the hell of the camp. Similar to the novel's references to cultural and social issues of the time of its creation, this use of recent historically relevant imagery roots the film in the time of its making.

*The ambush scene: source text*

A climactic event in both novel and film is the ambush scene. In the novel, the car with Theo, Rolf and his pregnant wife Julian, their friend Luke and Miriam, a former midwife, is attacked by a group of Omegas. In barbaric fashion, they carry out a ritual dance, first around the car, then around their captives, which eventually leads to the ritual murder of Luke, the biological father of Julian's child. Tension is slowly built over eight pages. In spite of a third person narration, Theo's point of view is expressed. Descriptions of the Omegas with their painted faces, their "expressionless eyes, gleaming, white-rimmed, in a mask of blue, red and yellow swirls,"[318] a flaming torch in one hand, a club in the other are intercut by Theo's thoughts about possible ways of escaping their ritual murder. The description of the ritual dance is very cinematic. Theo describes their movements, their chanting, and their looks:

> And then the ritual dance began. With a great whoop the figures slowly pranced round the car, beating their truncheons on the sides and the roof, a rhythmic drumbeat to the high chanting voices. They were wearing shorts only, but their bodies were unpainted. The naked chests looked white as milk in the flame of the torches, the rib-cages delicately vulnerable. The jerking legs, the ornate heads, the patterned faces slit by wide, yodelling mouths, made it possible to see them as a gang of overgrown children playing their disruptive but essentially innocent games.[319]

Theo also provides additional information about what is behind these Omega activities: they usually choose only one sacrificial victim and sometimes are satisfied by simply burning the car. There is no way to reason with the 'Painted Faces', the only hope of

[318] James, p. 253.
[319] James, p. 253.

Theo and the group of people around him is that by leaving the car Julian and Theo will manage to run away and hide in the woods.

The ritual dance consists of different stages. First the car is surrounded, then the windows are smashed and the captives, who by now have left the car, are included in the ritual dance which has become "more ceremonial, the chanting deeper, no longer a celebration but a dirge."[320] During this part of the dance, with most of the dancers absorbed and ecstatic, Julian and Theo manage to run away, but only because Luke offers himself as victim. The description of Luke's ritual killing is again very detailed and graphic.

> A terrible silence fell as they closed around him, ignoring Theo and Miriam. At the first crack of wood on bone, Theo heard a single scream but he couldn't tell whether it came from Miriam and Luke. And then Luke was down, and his murderers fell upon him like beasts round their prey, jostling for a place, raining their blows in a frenzy. The dance was over, the ceremony of death ended, the killing had begun. They killed in silence, a terrible silence in which it seemed to Theo that he could hear the crack and splinter of every single bone, could feel his ears bursting with the gushing of Luke's blood.[321]

From a distance Theo and Miriam observe the end of the ritual.

> And now the killing looked less like a frenzy of blood-lust than a calculated murder. Five or six of the Omegas were holding their torches aloft in a circle within which, silently now, the dark shapes of the half-naked bodies, arms wielding their clubs, rose and fell in a ritual ballet of death. Even from this distance it seemed to Theo that the air was splintered with the smashing of Luke's bones.[322]

*The ambush scene: film adaptation*

In the film, the scene loses its ritualistic quality and becomes an elaborate action movie scene. Theo, Julian (who in the film is not the pregnant woman, but the head of The Fishes), Miriam, Luke, and Kee, the pregnant girl, are driving through the woods. The atmosphere is cheerful, birds are singing, music is playing from the radio and the passengers are in a good mood when they suddenly see a burning car rolling from the wood onto the road. A large number of yelling people with clubs attack the car. Luke, the driver, manages to drive backward, but two men on a motorbike follow them and shoot at the car. Julian is injured, bleeding everywhere, and eventually dies of her

[320] James, p. 257.
[321] James, pp. 259-60.
[322] James, p. 260.

injuries. Moreover, during their flight, Luke has to kill two police men in order to guarantee the safety of the group.

In addition to its function as a turning point in the narrative, the scene is memorable from a technical point of view because it is mostly filmed in tracking shots. The camera is placed inside the car and provides a 360 degree shot, thus creating a full range of vision, first of the cheerful conversation in the car, and then providing point of view shots from within the car through the windows of what is going on outside: the group of Omegas attacking the car, the two men on the motorbike shooting at Julian, Theo opening the door of the car in order to get rid of the two bikers and the desperation of the women inside the car because of Julian's death. The director insisted in using this elaborate technique in order to add realism to the scene. Throughout the whole film, he deliberately opted for long takes with a limited amount of cuts in order to take advantage of real time and to achieve a specific style, making the whole movie look raw and real, with real light entering through the windscreen. The overall impression should convey the way people would film with their own DV cameras in the year 2027.[323]

This example illustrates how a pivotal scene of the source text can be reduced to its bones, maintaining only the basic plot elements and the feeling of action. A too literal translation of the episode with its ritualistic elements and the gore of the sacrificial murder would have changed the agenda of the film.

3.2.2.1.2 *The Road*

Both novel and film present violence on several levels: there is the striking violence of the environment, the violence of the 'bad guys' who inhabit this hostile environment, violence as self-preservation as well as self-violence as a reaction to the violence of the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road.* As already mentioned above, the film tries to capture the mood and the imagery of the novel, but has to introduce some changes in order to keep up with the spirit of the book.

*The violence of the environment*

The setting of the novel is bleak: "Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming

[323] Alfonso Cuarón, 'Men Under Attack', in *Children of Men* (Universal Studios, 2007) [on DVD]

away the world."[324] In the film, this glaucoma metaphor appears at the end of the opening scene. The film opens with colourful, idyllic images of family life in the country which are, for a short moment, viewed through a grey mosquito net that adds a dark hue to the brightness of the idyll. This grey layer will cover the rest of the film, with the only exception of the dream sequences. Both in the novel and the film, a layer of ash seems to cover everything. Even the snow falling from the sky is grey because of the ash in the atmosphere. Darkness and silence are predominant. There is ash, dust, soot and trash everywhere; "charred and limbless trunks of trees"[325] line the road. The country is "barren, silent, godless."[326] Only the sound of distant thunder or "the wind in the bare and blackened trees"[327] can be heard. This bleakness is matched by the predominantly grey tones of the film which give the impression of a "charcoal drawing sketched across the waste."[328] The simple, essential syntax of the descriptions in the novel are paralleled by rather long establishing shots that give the landscape the role it deserves in this post-apocalyptic tale. The man and the boy are only small figures on the road which leads them past uprooted trees, lakes filled with driftwood and falling trees. The camera lingers on the lake filled with dead tree trunks. Sad piano music accompanies the first images and the man's voice over account of life in this world at the end of all times.

Both film and novel, however, alternate long, bleak sequences with more colourful short inserts, thus achieving strong contrasts which in both cases increase the sadness of the post-apocalyptic environment. In the novel, the descriptions of beautiful memories of things lost from the old world or of dreams are linguistically more elaborate, the sentences more complex and the vocabulary more poetic. In the film, bright colours, sunlight and classical music characterise the dream sequences.

However, the general bleakness of the narrative is the backdrop for the cosmic violence that occasionally irrupts into the post-apocalyptic landscape when nature shows its threatening side.

> He was fast asleep when he heard a crashing in the woods. Then another. He sat up. The fire was down to scattered flames among the embers. He listened. The long dry crack of shearing limbs. Then another crash. He reached and shook the

[324] Corman McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), p. 3.
[325] McCarthy, p. 8.
[326] Ibid., p. 4.
[327] Ibid., p. 15.
[328] Ibid., p. 8.

> boy. Wake up, he said. We have to go. [...] It's the trees. They're falling down.[329]

The use of simple sentences heightens the tension of the approaching danger. The dialogue between the man and the boy is kept at a minimum with short, essential sentences. Later in the passage, longer sentences with no or little punctuation give the impression of breathlessness. In spite of the third person narration, the point of view is that of the man and the length of the sentences reflects his state of mind during this short moment of lethal danger.

> He scooped up the bedding and he folded it and wrapped the tarp around it. He looked up. The snow drifted into his eyes. The fire was little more than coals and it gave no light and the wood was nearly gone and the trees were falling all about them in the blackness. The boy clung to him. They moved away and he tried to find a clear space in the darkness but finally he put down the tarp and they just sat and pulled the blankets over them and he held the boy against him. The whump of the falling trees and the low boom of the loads of snow exploding on the ground set the woods to shuddering. He held the boy and told him it would be all right and that it would stop soon and after a while it did. The dull bedlam dying in the distance. And again, solitary and far away. Then nothing. There, he said. I think that's it.[330]

The description of the power of the falling trees is very kinetic and aural, both on a denotative and onopoeic level: the low boom of the snow exploding next to the characters, the whump of the falling trees, the shuddering woods all give the scene an action movie feel. Expressions such as 'boom' and 'whump' are reminiscent of the sound effects in graphic novels.

In spite of providing a different context for the tree falling scene (in the film the two characters are not asleep as in the novel but are running from a cannibal gang who are hunting down a mother and her child), the film tries to convey a similar experience resorting to different means. The man and the boy are shown as small figures in the middle of a thick wood of tall trees. Threatening noises accompany them running through the wood, now shown in medium shots and close-ups. The tree falling scene is filmed with multiple cameras which heightens the impression of danger. A shot of moving tree tops covering the whole screen is intercut with a close-up of an uprooting tree. The cracking sound of the falling trees becomes more intense and is interspersed by the sound of the screaming boy and the gasping father. There are alternating shots

[329] McCarthy, pp. 96-97.
[330] McCarthy, p. 97.

focussing on the tree tops, the roots and the two characters trying to protect themselves from the powers of nature. The fast cutting and the low angle shots heighten the threat of the falling trees and the defencelessness of the two protagonists.
In both the film and the novel, the tree falling scene occurs after the two protagonists come across the signs of ritual violence. It is as if nature were reacting against the atrocities human beings are capable of.

*Cannibalism*

Both, novel and film abound in gruesome scenes which concern cannibalism. However, comparing both versions, there is a larger number of cannibalistic references with more detailed descriptions in the novel. Whereas Corman McCarthy's novel talks about the act of endephagous cannibalism[331] which the member of the road gang, who is killed by the man in order to protect his son, becomes victim of, the signs of ritualistic cannibalism[332] reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the incident of the cellar where human beings are being kept as livestock[333] as well as the sighting of "a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit"[334] by the two protagonists, the film is more cautious with the visual depiction of cannibalism. The episode of endephagous cannibalism, for example, is only hinted at by a short close-up of human entrails on the road and the man's severed head underneath a car whereas the description in the novel is more detailed:

> Dried blood dark in the leaves. [...] Coming back he found the bones and the skin piled together with rocks over them. A pool of guts. He pushed at the bones with the toe of his shoe. They looked to have been boiled. No pieces of clothing.[335]

According to Hillcoat, it was important to cut some of the more gruesome scenes in order to keep a certain balance between the violence of the environment and its inhabitants and the loving relationship between a father and a son. He considered the baby on the spit scene as redundant in that the main cannibalism scene of the film

[331] McCarthy, pp. 70-71.
[332] Ibid., pp. 90-92.
[333] Ibid., pp. 108-15.
[334] Ibid., p. 189.
[335] McCarthy, pp. 70-71.

already says everything that there is to say about cannibalism and about how far human beings are willing to go.[336]

There are some more diversions from the book concerning the cannibal threat. A central scene in the novel is the description of the traces of ritual cannibalism, reminiscent of *Heart of Darkness*, which the man and the boy come across on their way along the road.

> Shapes of dried blood in the stubble grass and gray coils of viscera where the slain had been field-dressed and hauled away. The wall beyond the frieze of human heads, all faced alike, dried and caved with their taut grins and shrunken eyes. They wore gold rings in their leather ears and in the wind their sparse and ratty hair twisted about on their skulls. The teeth in their sockets like dental molds, the crude tattoos etched in some homebrewed woad faded in the beggared sunlight. Spiders, swords, targets. A dragon. Runic slogans, creeds misspelled. Old scars with old motifs stitched along their borders. The heads not truncheoned shapeless had been flayed of their skins and the raw skulls painted and signed across the forehead in a scrawl and one white bone skull had the plate sutures etched carefully in ink like a blueprint for assembly.[337]

They camp not far from that place and the following morning the man sees a gang followed by enslaved people, both men and women in chains walking along the road. Even though the scene works perfectly well in the novel and gives an idea about the high incidence of cannibalism, a similar scene presented on film would lead to undesirable intertextual references. As Hillcoat points out, he wanted to avoid any reference to the *Mad Max* films and their way of depicting a post-apocalyptic society. Therefore, he decided to represent the widespread cannibalism and ritual violence in a different way.

Blood and footprints in the snow – a photographic reference from the Bosnian civil war – convey the idea of organised, ritual killing. In this scene, which is not present in the novel, a mother and child are hunted down in an organised way by a group of cannibals. This example shows how strict fidelity to the source can sometimes change the whole viewing experience. In order to maintain the spirit of the novel, visual conventions from other genres have to be considered and avoided if necessary. However, the *Heart of Darkness* imagery has been maintained also in the film. As the

[336] John Hillcoat, 'Audio Commentary by Director John Hillcoat' in *The Road* (Dimension Films, 2009) [on DVD]
[337] McCarthy, p. 90.

man and the boy approach a hut in the woods, they come across a number of skulls on tree branches used as poles and a pile of skulls leaning against the trunk of a tree. The camera provides a medium point of view shot of the signs of cannibalism as seen through the eyes of the father who, the moment he sees the visual evidence of the blood cults, turns round in order to prevent his son from seeing it as well. After that, the above mentioned photographic reference to the Bosnian war is introduced. On their way back, the two protagonists come across fresh blood and footprints on the snow. The threatening soundtrack together with two reverse shots of the boy's shocked face and the traces of blood in the snow, the second being a close-up of the pools of blood, increase the tension. The boy's question "What is it?" is followed by an establishing shot showing a group of people running after someone. Again, shot (the group of people running) and counter shot (the man and the boy trying to hide) increase the tension. The shots, which focus on the two protagonists, are accompanied by the off screen sound of the screaming people. The man and the boy cannot see them, but hear them. Observing from some distance, the man eventually sees that the group is hunting down a woman and her child who are then being murdered off screen. The scene ends with the scream of the woman and a gun shot. This human atrocity is followed by the tree falling scene which has already been discussed above.

One of the most gruesome incidents in both the novel and the film occurs when father and son discover a cellar in which human beings are being kept as livestock for slaughtering – cannibalism put to extreme. These cannibals do not simply resort to eating human flesh because they are starving, but they keep and raise human beings as they would cattle. In the novel, the tension is built up slowly. The man and the boy approach the house because they are desperate to find food. The detailed descriptions of the setting are interrupted by short dialogues between father and son. From the beginning, the boy does not have a good feeling about the place and wants to convince his father to retreat. Inside the house, there are hints of human presence. "Piled in a window in one corner of the room was a great heap of clothing. Clothes and shoes. Belts. Coats. Blankets and old sleeping bags."[338] At this point of the novel, the reader has already become familiar with the signs of danger and has learnt how to read and

[338] McCarthy, p. 107.

interpret them in a similar way as the boy is. The subsequent sentence, "He would have ample time later to think about that"[339] makes it evident that the man and the boy are in danger. The boy is terrified. As the man sees a locked hatch on the floor of one of the rooms, the readers find themselves in clear horror genre territory. Leaving the mansion in order to find a tool to open the hatch, the man comes across more signs of horror which he, however, does not see.

> In the yard was an old iron harrow propped up on piers of stacked brick and someone had wedged between the rails of it a forty gallon cast-iron cauldron of the kind once used for rendering hogs. Underneath were the ashes of a fire and blackened billets of wood. Off to one side a small wagon with rubber tires. All these things he saw and did not see.[340]

The tension increases when the man manages to open the trapdoor and takes his lighter out. Climbing down dark steps, with only a lighter as his light source, is a clear horror narrative trope. Shock is guaranteed.

> He started down the rough wooden steps. He ducked his head and then flicked the lighter and swung the flame out over the darkness like an offering. Coldness and damp. An ungodly stench. The boy clutched at his coat. He could see part of a stone wall. Clay floor. An old mattress darkly stained. He crouched and stepped down again and held out the light. Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous.
> Jesus, he whispered.
> Then one by one they turned and blinked in the pitiful light. Help us, they whispered. Please help us.
> Christ, he said. Oh Christ.
> He turned and grabbed the boy. Hurry, he said. Hurry.
> He'd dropped the lighter. No time to look. He pushed the boy up the stairs. Help us, they called.
> Hurry.
> A bearded face appeared blinking at the foot of the stairs. Please, he called. Please.
> Hurry. For God's sake hurry.[341]

In addition to the visual description, the novelist describes the smell, the dampness and the desperate whispers of the people. In almost cinematic fashion, the lighter functions as a spotlight, highlighting the evidence of the human atrocity taking place in the cellar.

However, when father and son finally escape and close the trapdoor, the danger is not over yet. Through the window, the boy sees four bearded men and two women

[339] Ibid., p. 107.
[340] McCarthy, p. 109.
[341] McCarthy, pp. 110-11.

approach the house. They have to run and hide close to the mansion. The man is aware of the fact that this might be the moment he would have to kill his son. In an interior monologue he asks himself whether he would be able to kill his own child. "What if it [the pistol] doesn't fire? Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock? Is there such a being within you of which you know nothing?"[342] As darkness approaches, he starts believing that they might still have a chance to escape the cannibals. However, at night he acoustically witnesses their atrocious deeds. "In the night he heard hideous shrieks coming from the house and he tried to put his hands over the boy's ears and after a while the screaming stopped."[343] There is no need to describe in detail what is going on in the house. The readers' imagination is able to put all the pieces together and create the matching images to the hideous shrieks in their own minds.

From the point of view of the content, some significant changes have been made in the transposition of this incident from novel to film. Fear and tension are expressed differently in the two media. In the film, the scene in which the father feels compelled to kill his son takes place inside the house. According to Hillcoat, proximity to the cannibal scene is important to create fear, whereas in the book, the fear is expressed through running away. Things that work in a novel may require a few changes when they are physicalised for the film.[344]

However, there are a number of similarities between the two works. As in the novel, the boy seems to see the signs of people living in the house, whereas the father is blind to the evidence of human presence. The director uses reverse shots in order to express this difference in awareness. In addition to the close-ups of the boy's face conveying his fear, the point of view shots of what he sees slowly prepare the audience for the things to come. The close-up of a pile of children's shoes is an evident visual reference to the Holocaust which triggers a lot of associations and heightens the tension in the audience. Moreover, the pile of crockery in the sink, the sleeping bags and garments scattered around the room are clear visual signs of human presence.

When the man and the boy leave the house in order to fetch a tool to open the trapdoor, they are being filmed from a high angle which gives the impression of someone watching them from a window on the first floor. Again, outside the house,

[342] McCarthy, p. 114.
[343] McCarthy, p. 115.
[344] Hillcoat, 'Audio Commentary'

through reverse shots of the environment and the boy's face, the audience adopting the boy's point of view notices other evidence of cannibalism and danger: a medium shot focuses on a cauldron, a pile of fire wood and a trunk with a harrow on it; a tracking shot includes another cauldron with burnt wood underneath and a further shot shows a hook used for hanging up slaughtered animals.

The tension is already high when the man manages to open the hatch. The scene presents all kinds of horror movie tropes. So far only intradiegetic sound has been used. The man's lighter is the only light source when they start descending the steps into the cellar. The camera lingers on the frightened faces of the man and the boy. The background is dark, and the boy's gasping is the only sound that can be heard, which increases the tension. Only now, low but threatening background music starts. An over-the-shoulder shot following the man and the boy downstairs increases the impression of imminent danger. Now the camera focuses on bloody chains hanging from the ceiling while the music becomes louder and more threatening. The next shot shows a group of emaciated, naked people on the floor. A tracking shot provides a complete picture of the horror. There are pieces of raw meat and blood on the floor and a man with an amputated leg is lying on a blood-stained mattress. The whole scene is again reminiscent of the Holocaust, but also recalls sixteenth century iconography of hell by painters such as Hieronymus Bosch or Bruegel. In addition to the threatening music, now the screams of the imprisoned humans add to the gore of the whole scene. The screaming becomes louder while one of the men tries to grab the two intruders who are fleeing the scene.

There is, however, no respite, neither for the audience nor the two protagonists. As in the novel, the boy sees the cannibals approach the house through the window, but there is no time to leave the house. Instead, father and son hide in the bathroom on the first floor which provides more evidence of the cannibalistic practices in the house: the wash basin and the bath tub are full of blood and human entrails. This is the place where the father is torn between the love for his son and the necessity to kill him in order to spare him from more suffering. Whilst the novel resorts to an interior monologue in order to express this inner struggle, a similar strategy during an action sequence in a film would destroy the whole tension. There is no time for reasoning at this stage. The man's struggle can only be expressed by his hesitation. The frequent cuts between the

gang talking on the ground floor and the man and boy in the bathroom increase the tension. Only the two actors' facial expressions convey their fear and the father's dilemma. The scene culminates in a shot of the man pointing the gun on the boy's forehead and a close-up of the man's trembling finger on the trigger. That is the moment the gang is distracted by the noise of the prisoners who try to escape from the cellar which allows the man and the boy to flee. As in the novel, they have to hide close to the house where, at night, they witness the screams of the slaughtered humans.

In his commentary on the DVD, Hillcoat explains that in creating this horrifying scene he did not want to go overboard with the gore. He used real, skinny people and raw meat, but all in all he wanted to show restraint and only provide absolutely necessary details in order to convey the idea of what is going on. Also, the scene was slightly expanded by the scriptwriter and the dialogue between the cannibals was added.[345] However, the details shown are gory enough as not to leave too much to the imagination of the audience. What the audience can fill in, though, are the feelings and thoughts of the father while pointing the gun at his son's head.

### 3.2.2.2 From Graphic Novel to Film

#### 3.2.2.2.1 *V for Vendetta*

As already mentioned in the introduction, Alan Moore dissociates himself from the film adaptations of his novels, because he considers them too literal in their transposition which results in a change of the overall spirit of the source text. Whereas the adaptation of some action sequences, such as V's encounter with Evey facing the threat of the Fingermen, or the explosion scenes, place the movie in the action film and superhero genre – genres which the graphic novel parodies and plays with –, the rather literal transposition of the imprisonment scene, both central to the graphic novel and the film, seems to achieve a similar effect in the recipient.

*The prison scene: framing sequences*

The prison scene is fundamental for the female protagonist's growth from fearful child to strong, independent, politically conscious woman. Both the reader and the

[345] Hillcoat, 'Audio Commentary'

spectator are unaware of the artificiality of the scene. V re-enacts his own Larkhill experience with the only difference that he forces Evey to play the role of the prisoner in his stead and to experience the cathartic effect of suffering which will eventually result in her personal growth.

In the graphic novel, the prison scene covers Book Two ("This Vicious Cabaret"[346]), Chapters Ten ("Vermin"[347]), Eleven ("Valerie"[348]) and Twelve ("The Verdict"[349]). The final catharsis and self-awareness scene occurs in Chapter Thirteen ("Values"[350]).

In the graphic novel, the prison scene is framed by a dream sequence and a reconciliation scene. The dream sequence is kept in pink-purple-lilac shades and pictures Evey in a kind of Alice in the Wonderland dress, the same dress she was wearing during her encounter with the bishop. Most of the perspectives are distorted, thus heightening the dream-like quality of the sequence which is entirely narrated by Evey in first person. The dream starts with a memory of a birthday party during Evey's childhood which becomes an oedipal experience with her father who also looks like Gordon. A Punch and Judy Man show, which was meant to be staged at her birthday party, takes place in a retirement home. Some of the people on stage, whose heads are knocked off by the Punch Man, resemble members of the political establishment. Evey runs off and the whole scene becomes increasingly dynamic. Worm-eye views, bird's-eye views, close-ups and distorted perspectives alternate to create a feeling of vortex (increased by the panel picturing the spiral stairs), speed and danger. The Punch Man who is running after Evey has become V who catches her before she can take the lift to safety.

[346] Alan Moore and David Lloyd, *V for Vendetta* (New York: DC Comics, 2005), pp. 87-179.
[347] Ibid., pp. 149-54.
[348] Ibid., pp. 155-60.
[349] Ibid., pp. 161-66.
[350] Ibid., pp. 167-72.

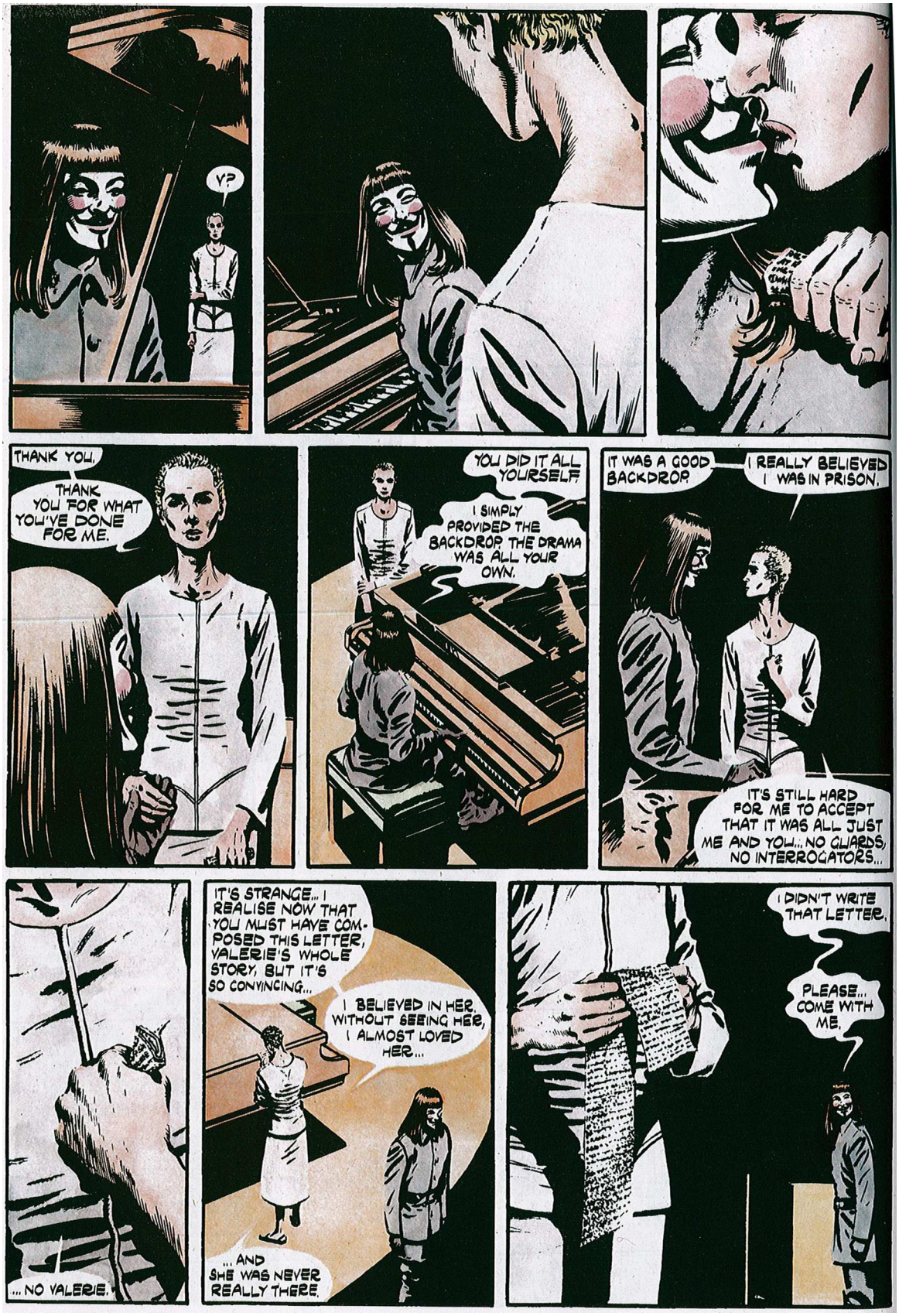

I'M VERY FRIGHTENED NOW. I DON'T RECOGNISE ANY OF THE CORRIDORS, AND THE MR. PUNCH-MAN WILL TURN THE CORNER BEHIND ME ANY SECOND.
I CAN HEAR MY HEART HAMMERING INSIDE ME. THERE IS NO OTHER NOISE IN THE WHOLE THEATRE.
EVERYBODY ELSE MUST BE DEAD, DAD, MUM, GORDON...
THEY'VE LEFT ME ALONE WITH HIM.
I TURN AND RUN BACK THE WAY I'VE COME, BUT THE CORRIDOR HAS GONE...
AND THERE'S A BIG FLIGHT OF SPIRAL STAIRS INSTEAD.
MY LEGS ARE HEAVY. I CAN HARDLY MOVE THEM. HE'S GOING TO CATCH ME.
I GET TO THE TOP OF THE STAIRS AND LOOK DOWN THE WELL.
HE'S COMING UP AFTER ME. ROUND AND ROUND HE GOES...

Picture 1

The black panels, one at the end of Evey's attempt to take revenge for Gordon's death, when she is blacked out by an unrecognisable figure, and one at the beginning of the dream sequence with no images but only captions hinting at a staging taking place, are linked with the first black and silent panel of the prison scene. The black panel at the beginning of the dream sequence (Chapter Nine, "Vicissitude"[351]) gives some hints of an enactment taking place. As Evey observes, "The air around me is completely black. I think that perhaps I'm backstage at the theatre, during the interval.  There are muffled bumpings nearby. Stage-hands are rearranging the scenery."[352] Of course, like in the film, the reader is not aware of the fact that the prison scene is only an enactment. The black panel can simply be read as part of the overall disorientation of the dream sequence.

The scene following the whole prison and catharsis incident shows Evey as a grown up, matured woman. The whole sequence is coloured in very pale, white-yellowish-salmon shades. Compared to the dream sequence, this scene is visibly more static. Even Evey's sober, linear dress indicates that she has lost the playfulness and femininity of the dream sequence. Her short hair, her emaciated features and her bony hands are proof of her atrocious prison experience. Nevertheless, she has recognised the importance of the enactment and is grateful. V explains: "You did it all yourself. I simply provided the backdrop. The drama was all your own."[353] There is no resentment any more. Evey kisses V clasping Valerie's letter in her hands, still not knowing that Valerie was real. The parallel between V's and Evey's experience becomes evident as V explains, "Valerie wrote the letter, in her own hand, while she lived. I delivered it to you as it was delivered to me. The words you wept over were those that transformed me. Five years earlier."[354]

[351] Moore and Lloyd, pp. 143-48.
[352] Moore and Lloyd, p. 143.
[353] Moore and Lloyd, p. 174.
[354] Moore and Lloyd, p. 175.


YP?
THANK YOU.
THANK YOU FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE FOR ME.
YOU DID IT ALL YOURSELF.
I SIMPLY PROVIDED THE BACKDROP. THE DRAMA WAS ALL YOUR OWN.
IT WAS A GOOD BACKDROP.
I REALLY BELIEVED I WAS IN PRISON.
IT'S STILL HARD FOR ME TO ACCEPT THAT IT WAS ALL JUST ME AND YOU... NO GUARDS, NO INTERROGATORS...
...NO VALERIE.
IT'S STRANGE... I REALISE NOW THAT YOU MUST HAVE COMPOSED THIS LETTER, VALERIE'S WHOLE STORY, BUT IT'S SO CONVINCING...
I BELIEVED IN HER, WITHOUT SEEING HER, I ALMOST LOVED HER...
... AND SHE WAS NEVER REALLY THERE.
I DIDN'T WRITE THAT LETTER.
PLEASE... COME WITH ME.
Picture 2

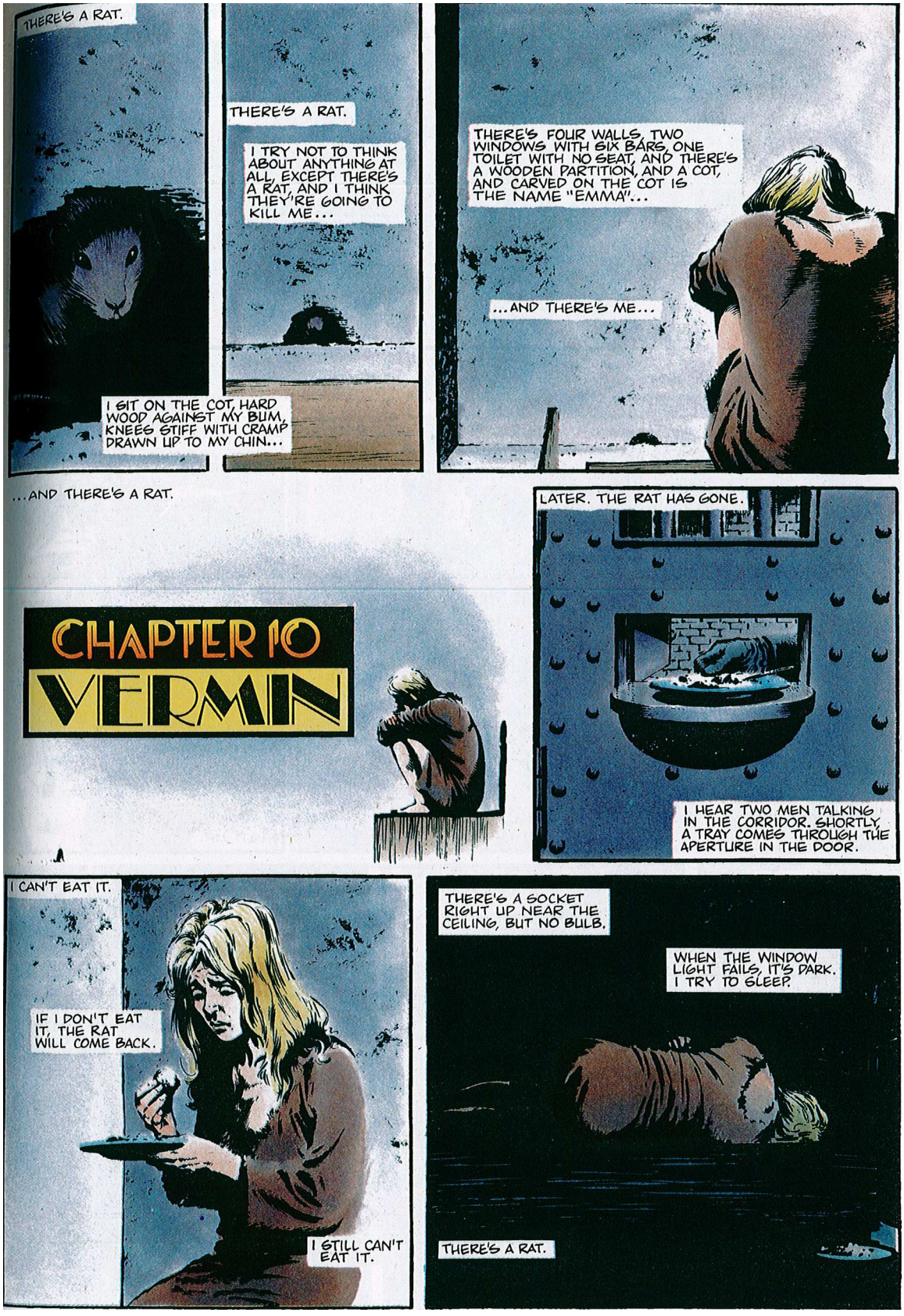
The two framing scenes are important in that they underline Evey's growth and development, from unconsciousness (dream) through annihilation (prison), painful birth and cleansing baptism to adulthood.

*The prison scene: source text*

The title of the first chapter dealing with the prison episode, "Vermin", already hints at the inhumane conditions of the main character and her vilification to a mere vegetative status. The first impression is that of grey-brownish tones, a striking linearity and utter silence on the first page. The setting is established starting with a close-up of Evey's face and a medium shot of her body, then by following Evey from behind, as with an imaginary camera, exploring the setting almost through her eyes and finally ending in a close-up again, with her face behind bars. The rest of the cell setting is illustrated through Evey's narration. Square captions are a comic's convention to indicate narration. Consequently, these are not Evey's thoughts, but the first person narration of her own experience. Here, the parallel between the rat and Evey is established. The first panel of the page shows a close-up of the rat's face and the caption "There is a rat."[355] The final panel shows Evey, a brown bundle of human flesh and bones, cowering on the prison cot and a caption saying "There's a rat."[356] The implication is clear and Evey's inhuman condition is made evident, both visually and verbally.

[355] Moore and Lloyd, p. 149.
[356] Moore and Lloyd, p. 149.


Picture 3


THERE'S A RAT.
I SIT ON THE COT, HARD WOOD AGAINST MY BUM, KNEES STIFF WITH CRAMP DRAWN UP TO MY CHIN...
THERE'S A RAT.
I TRY NOT TO THINK ABOUT ANYTHING AT ALL, EXCEPT THERE'S A RAT, AND I THINK THEY'RE GOING TO KILL ME...
...AND THERE'S A RAT.
THERE'S FOUR WALLS, TWO WINDOWS WITH SIX BARS, ONE TOILET WITH NO SEAT, AND THERE'S A WOODEN PARTITION, AND A COT, AND CARVED ON THE COT IS THE NAME "EMMA"...
...AND THERE'S ME...
CHAPTER 10
VERMIN
LATER. THE RAT HAS GONE.
I HEAR TWO MEN TALKING IN THE CORRIDOR. SHORTLY A TRAY COMES THROUGH THE APERTURE IN THE DOOR.
I CAN'T EAT IT.
IF I DON'T EAT IT, THE RAT WILL COME BACK.
I STILL CAN'T EAT IT.
THERE'S A SOCKET RIGHT UP NEAR THE CEILING, BUT NO BULB.
WHEN THE WINDOW LIGHT FAILS, IT'S DARK. I TRY TO SLEEP.
THERE'S A RAT.

Picture 4

The next panels show state violence in action. Motion is conveyed through different views of Evey's face and her moving hair. Also the distorted angle in the penultimate panel of the page with a medium shot of the prison warden and Evey underlines the aggressivity of the authorities. The black panel reflecting Evey being blindfolded puts the readers in the heroine's position forcing them to see or not see everything through her eyes.

The next two pages show Evey's encounter with the investigators. Only their shadows can be seen, which increases the threat. Sometimes, the invisible can be more threatening than the visible. The scene introduces CCCV recordings which prove Evey's encounter and alleged collaboration with the terrorist V. Again, the sequence ends with a black panel.

The next important stage in Evey's prison experience starts with another black panel introducing the prison procedure she has to undergo, which involves shaving and body examination. Even though shaving off the prisoner's hair is mainly done for hygienic reasons, long hair is also a sign of femininity, beauty and individuality. All these aspects are being taken away from the protagonist contributing to the loss of her female identity. Her vulnerability is visualised in close-ups of her face and through the high-angle view of her body lying on the cell floor like a tiny vermin. Again, the parallel with the rat becomes clear in showing Evey face to face with the rat. This parallel continues on the next page in which Evey is depicted lying on the floor in a foetal position. The high camera angle which is zooming back increases her forlornness and her being robbed of her humanity. However, as she says, "Only now, I don't mind the rat... ...because I'm no better."[357]

[357] Moore and Lloyd, p. 154.


ONLY NOW, I DON'T MIND THE RAT...
...BECAUSE I'M NO BETTER.
...IT'S DARK, AND I CRY FOR A LONG TIME...
LATER, WAKING UP... OH GOD. I REMEMBER. THEY CUT OFF MY HAIR...
WHAT WOKE ME? A NOISE... RUSTLING...
THERE'S A RAT...
I GET UP. IT'S ALMOST LIGHT AND I CAN SEE THE HOLE IN THE WALL.
THERE'S SOMETHING STICKING OUT OF IT...
NOT A RAT...
TOILET PAPER?
BUT WHY..?
THERE ARE FIVE PAGES, WRITTEN IN PENCIL.
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE. PLEASE BELIEVE. THERE IS NO WAY I CAN CONVINCE YOU THAT THIS IS NOT ONE OF THEIR TRICKS BUT I DON'T CARE. I AM ME, AND I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE BUT I LOVE YOU. I HAVE A PENCIL, A LITTLE ONE THEY DID NOT FIND. I AM A WOMAN. I HID IT INSIDE ME PERHAPS I WON'T BE ABLE TO WRITE AGAIN, SO THIS IS A LONG LETTER ABOUT MY LIFE. IT IS THE ONLY AUTOBIOGRAPHY I WILL EVER WRITE AND OH GOD I'M WRITING IT ON TOILET PAPER.
I LOOK AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LAST PAGE FIRST.
HER NAME IS VALERIE...

Picture 5

In general it can be said that significant experiences are shown directly through Evey's eyes, thus forcing the reader to identify with the heroine. The view of the Norsefire motto 'Strength through Purity. Purity through Faith' through the prison bars, the claustrophobic experience of complete darkness, the threat of the unrecognisable silhouettes of those in power, but also the first words of Valerie's letter illustrate my point. From the moment Evey starts reading Valerie's autobiography, the two women seem to become the same person. While we directly see what Evey experiences, the account of what she experiences is written in italics, like the words of Valerie's biography written on paper, which suggests a clear parallel between the two. From a visual point of view we witness more government atrocities, such as water boarding, but the heroine, feeling a strong connection to Valerie, does not seem to be affected any more. The close-ups of the water boarding are alternated with flashbacks of Valerie's youth and the discovery of her homosexuality.

Chapter Eleven focuses on Valerie's autobiography in flashbacks and Evey being tortured by the police. There is a stark contrast between the vividness of the colours in the flashbacks and the darker colours of the torture panels. Also the drawings of the flashbacks are more detailed. In addition to telling the life and love of Valerie, the flashbacks serve to tell the story of the slow rise of the Norsefire regime. As in the film, the panel showing the party marching with its banners is reminiscent of Nazi iconography. This clear reference to the Nazi regime and Evey's shaved head which recalls that of the inmates of German concentration camps heighten the horror of the torturing scene, but Valerie's words on the importance of integrity resonate in Evey's head while being tortured. Ruth, Valerie's girlfriend, could not live "with giving up that last inch [of integrity]"[358] and committed suicide. Evey is aware of the two possible choices and opts for integrity. The end of this chapter shows panels which gradually zoom into Evey's face while she reads the final words of Valerie's letter and makes them her own. The captions in italics but without quotation marks suggest that here again Valerie and Evey have become one. Evey says "I know every inch of this cell. □ This cell knows every inch of me. □ Except one."[359] The last panel expresses all her pain.

[358] Moore and Lloyd, p. 159.
[359] Moore and Lloyd, p. 180.

Chapter Twelve opens with Evey facing a mock confession and refusing to sign it. She is committed to saving her inch of integrity. The main focus of this chapter is Evey's slow and difficult rebirth. The colour scheme is almost monochromatic and mainly in salmon and pink pastel shades. There are several panels which focus on Evey's emaciated face with deep sockets for her eyes and prominent cheek bones. There are several high-angle shots which follow Evey on her slow discovery. A consistent number of panels without any captions or speech bubbles leave the reader in silence. Evey's state of disorientation, shock, wonder and hate is conveyed only visually. Step by step she discovers the props of the play that has been staged for the sake of her own catharsis. The chapter ends with a full page of V's Shadow Gallery. The huge oil paintings hanging from the ceiling, the bookcases filled with books, the jukebox and the TV set all represent culture in its various forms and are in striking contrast with the atrocity of the enactment of the prison scene.

Only at the beginning of Chapter Thirteen, both Evey and the reader realise that V was responsible for the heroine's imprisonment. Evey's hate and disappointment are best visualised in the central panel. It depicts the two main characters viewed from above, both whimsically small as if crushed by the events. It is as if God were watching his puppets. The next two panels focus on two contrasting faces and figures: Evey's face full of pain as opposed to V's motionless mask, and Evey's face covered by her thin, bony hands that have experienced so much pain in contrast to V's statuesque body completely covered by his long coat. Evey's hate is all expressed in her face and her hands. Her twisted movements contrast with V's motionlessness. The drawing style becomes more frantic the more Evey's hate increases. V explains the reasons behind his deed talking about happiness as a prison which limits people in their pursuit of freedom. Evey tries to run from V and his truth. This moment of real catharsis occurs when V tells Evey, "Woman, this is the most important moment of your life. Don't run from it."[360] The page ends with a close-up of Evey's face crying in desperation. The moment of her greatest suffering is also the moment she is reborn. She cannot breathe, she is almost suffocating and thinks she is going to die, to burst, but, as V says, "The door of the cage is open, Evey.  All that you feel is the wind from outside. Don't be afraid."[361]

[360] Moore and Lloyd, p. 170.
[361] Moore and Lloyd, p. 171.

Evey can hardly walk and she is afraid of being blindfolded again, but in V's words, "all blindfolds are gone."[362]

Evey reaches a roof overlooking London. It is raining. She is naked, but she cannot feel the cold. Already the previous panels have increased their blue shades together with Evey's increasing awareness. Now, in this fundamental scene which completes Evey's transformation and rebirth, the only colour is light blue with black ink which is predominant and adds intensity to the dramatic transformation of the heroine. Again, the central panel shows the heroine from a bird's-eye view, small, thin and naked on top of the roof. Evey feels different and V remembers his own experience from five years before. He knows what it feels like. "Five years ago, I too came through a night like this, naked under a roaring sky.  Seize it. Encircle it within your arms. Bury it in your heart up to the hilt...  Become transfixed... become transfigured...  Forever."[363] The chapter ends with a panel depicting Evey's white silhouette on the roof against the dark stair-rods raining sky. Her violent transformation is complete. The girl has become a woman.

[362] Moore and Lloyd, p. 171.
[363] Moore and Lloyd, p. 172.


OH, IT'S RAINING. IT MUST BE COLD.
DO YOU FEEL IT?
NO.
V...
EVERYTHING'S SO... DIFFERENT...
I...I FEEL SO...
I KNOW.
FIVE YEARS AGO, I TOO CAME THROUGH A NIGHT LIKE THIS, NAKED UNDER A ROARING SKY.
THIS NIGHT IS YOURS.
SEIZE IT.
ENCIRCLE IT WITHIN YOUR ARMS. BURY IT IN YOUR HEART UP TO THE HILT...
BECOME TRANSFIXED...
BECOME TRANSFIGURED...
FOREVER.

Picture 6

*The prison scene: adaptation*

Visually and content-wise, the prison scene in the film bears strong resemblance with the same episode in the graphic novel. Whereas a too literal translation of comics' panels through the medium of cinema may result in a different viewing experience, inasmuch as the viewer is no longer in control of the speed in which he experiences the scene, the director's choice of being as faithful as possible to the source works perfectly well in this dramatic, but not sensationalist scene.

Evey's imprisonment is framed by two interrogation scenes. The prison scene as such develops in between these two, alternating torture scenes, bird's eye views of Evey on the prison floor and flashbacks of Valerie's life, often repeating the same or only slightly changed imagery as well as camera positions and movements, in order to portray Evey's rite of passage that transforms a fearful young woman into a strong revolutionary.

The prison scene starts with reverse shots of Evey's terrified face and the face of a man kept in the dark. Only his threatening voice can be heard. The emphasis on shadows, which is reminiscent of the graphic novel, and the soundtrack increase the impression of threat. However, the power of the whole scene strongly relies on the acting of Natalie Portman. Subsequently, a tracking shot shows Evey in an orange prison garb, which recalls those used in Guantanamo Bay, having her hair shaved off by a faceless figure in a white frock. The threatening soundtrack continues.

After that, the audience gets a first glimpse of the dark prison cell through point of view shots through Evey's eyes. On a visual level, Evey's orange prison garb is in striking contrast with the grey prison walls. A shot of the linear, grey corridor outside Evey's cell, which will be repeated later, gives the audience an idea about the facility the girl has been taken to.

In the film, all the torture scenes involve water, probably because the director wants to put emphasis on the element that eventually will make Evey's rebirth complete and underline the difference with V whose rebirth is linked to fire. The first torture segment shows Evey's thin, naked body in a cold shower with the sound of the girl's piercing shrieks of pain, before being thrown back into her cell by one of the guards.

The next segment focuses on Evey lying on the prison floor, establishing the parallel with the rat that appears as food is thrown into the cell. In a similar way to the graphic novel, the close-up of Evey's face on the floor puts her on eye-to-eye level with

the animal. One of the most striking and most significant images is the bird's eye view of Evey on the cell floor, emphasising the contrast between the heavy grey prison walls and the insignificant, worm-like, orange bundle of flesh on the floor, either cowering in the corners or lying in a foetal position on the ground. The important moment of the discovery of Valerie's autobiography on toilet paper which initiates Evey's resistance, on the other hand, is prepared by a number of close-ups of Evey's face, the hole in the wall and Evey's eyes seen through the hole in the prison
wall.

Picture 7

Picture 8

The next sequence provides a close-up of Evey reading the text. Similarly to the graphic novel, there is a close-up of the piece of paper, but the film resorts to the narrating voice of Valerie in order to introduce the reasons for her writing, before continuing her account through flashbacks with voiceover narration, as in the graphic novel. The content of the flashbacks as well as the use of brighter colours parallel the technique used in the source text. The audience learns about Valerie's youth, the discovery of her homosexuality and her outing to her parents. A first visual hint at the parallel between Evey and Valerie is the lap dissolve that is used to link the end of the flashback – Valerie's father throwing a photograph of his daughter in the bin – and the beginning of the next scene in which Evey is being water boarded. Evey's face is shown from below the water and her gasping heightens the impression of suffocation.

Picture 9

Evey is eventually pulled back into her cell. Another bird's eye view shows the darkness of the cell and a shaft of light from the open door on the floor which serves as spotlight for the weak, motionless body on the floor. The camera angle and the lighting both stress the vulnerability and forlornness of the heroine lying again in a foetal position in the middle of the cell, which comes to symbolise the womb of her rebirth. This visually almost identical scene to the previous one with its succession of close-ups of Evey's face and the hole in the wall introduces another series of flashbacks of Valerie's life concerning her acting career, her encounter with Ruth, their love life and the roses in their flat. These scenes are visually very colourful and respect the conventions of romantic movie scenes, with their focus on flowers and kisses at sunset,

in clear contrast with the grim TV footage giving information about war and political changes.

The flashback is interrupted again by Evey being thrown into her cell. This time, however, there is no repetition of the previous shots showing her in a worm-like state on the prison floor. Instead, she reacts and immediately looks for the piece of paper with Valerie's story on it. This is a first significant sign of change in Evey's attitude: she seems to have become stronger. It is as if the words and the pictures that Valerie's story evokes give her the strength to survive. In other words, the power of the the story-teller keeps her going.

The subsequent flashbacks in the form of TV footage provide information about how the Norsefire party came to power and how the persecution of homosexuals started. Both, Valerie and her girlfriend Ruth end up in prison because of their sexual orientation. Valerie's prison experience shows clear parallels with Evey's experience. The head-shaving scene is visually identical with Evey's at the beginning of her imprisonment as well as the shot of a bundle of orange-clad flesh lying on the floor of the cell. The voiceover continues throughout the whole scene. The cutting between Evey reading and Valerie writing makes the similarity between the two figures even clearer and culminates in an evident visual parallel when Valerie's face fades into Evey's, thus entirely merging the two characters. The scene ends with a long close-up shot of Evey's emotional face reading Valerie's declaration of love and her plea for the importance of integrity.

Now Evey is ready for the second interrogation scene which is visually almost identical to the first, with the only difference that Evey's head is shaved and her countenance is composed, stoically accepting her death sentence. The final scene in the cell shows Evey waiting for her execution in darkness. She is sitting and her body is almost one with the prison walls. The prison warden tries to convince her to confess. A number of reverse shots show the man's face in darkness and Evey's face in light. A close-up focuses on Evey clenching Valerie's autobiography in her hand while the guard tells her she is completely free because she is free from fear. Evey's face expresses bewilderment and disbelief when she hesitatingly leaves her cell. The camera provides another view of the cell block, which is similar to the one at the beginning, but now focuses also on the fake elements of the *mise en scène*. Similarly to the sequence in

the graphic novel, there is neither dialogue nor voiceover narration. Only low background music accompanies the otherwise silent sequence of point of view shots which make Evey as well as the audience become aware of the enactment of the imprisonment. The music slightly changes when Evey opens a door and a first glimpse of the Shadow Gallery can be seen. The books and paintings, the piano and the juke box in the richly furnished gallery are in striking contrast to the linearity and bleakness of the prison complex.

The first confrontation with V relies on the acting abilities of the two actors. Evey's anger is all conveyed through her facial expression and body language. An asthma attack takes hold of her body and she sobs, "I can't feel anything anymore!" A close-up of her sobbing face and V's explanation of the reasons behind his cruel deed complete Evey's initiation into adulthood which will be ritually sealed by the final cleansing on the roof.

The roof scene completes Evey's catharsis. The two characters appear on top of a roof overlooking London at night. V's black figure and Evey's orange figure stand against a dark background. The classical music becomes increasingly solemn as the camera focuses on Evey's transfixed face in the rain, as she recalls Valerie's grandmother's words: "God is in the rain." A bird's eye view of raindrops falling on Evey and zooming into Evey's head underline the role of water and become a clear sign of the ritual the heroine is undergoing. Evey's moving forward, towards the city in the foreground is intercut with familiar scenes of V rising from the Larkhill fires. The parallel between Evey and V becomes evident as they both hold out their arms, V in a flashback of the Larkhill fire, shouting, and Evey in the rain, crying. V's baptism of fire is paralleled with Evey's baptism of water. Now, Evey is ready to take on V's legacy.

Picture10

Picture11

Picture12

Picture 13

### 3.2.2.3 From Film to Graphic Novel

Although, strictly speaking, prequels and sequels are not adaptations, in that they are not retellings of a story, but the continuation of a particular story, when it comes to analysing the adaptation of violence from film to graphic novel, however, some interesting considerations can be made. Since both the graphic novel *28 Days Later: The Aftermath*[364] and the comic series *28 Days Later*[365] bridge the time between the two films *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*, the writers and the artists have to bear in mind several aspects of the films which do not only concern genre, plot and character, but mainly visual elements such as settings and looks.

The graphic novel *28 Days Later: The Aftermath* explores themes around the outbreak of the epidemic. The main focus lies on the reason for the creation of the virus, its first victims and the first attempts to fight it. The comic series, on the other hand, follows the adventures of Selena, the heroine of Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, back to the British Isles in company of a group of Americans, among others two journalists. Their adventures lead them first to the Shetland and Orkney islands where most of the other members of the group are killed and where Derrick, the photographer is badly injured. Throughout their journey from northern Scotland to Inverness, Edinburgh and eventually Manchester, they have to fight not only groups of Infected, but also other survivors, unscrupulous scientists, American soldiers and Captain Stiles who wants to avenge the death of Major West.

What makes the analysis of the graphic novel and the comic series worthwhile for my study is the rendering of the violent elements of the film in the comic medium. My analysis will focus on the portrayal of the Infected and infection in general, the way the abuse of power in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic times is portrayed, the 'final girl' cliché in comic form and how the genre-related elements of the movies such as gore, speed and action are adapted into the comic medium, which can best be seen in the violent scenes. The high number of violent scenes in the altogether four episodes of *28 Days Later: The Aftermath* and the twenty-four episodes of the comic series require a

[364] Steve Niles (w) and Dennis Calero (a) et. al., *28 Days Later: The Aftermath* (Fox Atomic Comics, 2007) [print.]
[365] Michael Alan Nelson, *28 Days Later* (Boom!Studios, 2009-2011) [print.]

selection of scenes. Therefore, only a limited number of emblematic scenes will be analysed in depth.

3.2.2.3.1 Infection and the Infected

*The representation of the Infected*

As far as the portrayal of the Infected is concerned, the comic's artists draw inspiration from the film. However, there is a fundamental difference in the two media's expressive means. Unlike movies, comics are static and silent. The film *28 Days Later* relies on several conventions of the horror and slasher genre. First of all, the gory look of *the Infected* meets the requirements of the genre's inherent need to transgress visual taboos in order to create suspense and fear in the viewer, and to heighten the spectator's feeling of their own body at threat. The ghastliness and gore of the humans turned monsters is not only achieved by a team of skilled make-up artists, but also by the use of a different filming techniques, giving the Infected a slightly erratic, frenetic movement. According to the director, the special technique he used to film the Infected does not slow the film down, but captures the images in a more static way, conveying the jerky impression when run at normal pace.[366] Moreover, throughout the film, there is a continuous manipulation of the point of view, with its distortions of perspective creating a specific uncertainty of vision which increases the feeling of suspense. Also the fast editing pace of a number of gruesome scenes is typical to the horror genre. In addition to the movement of the Infected, the noise they make, which is similar to a human growl, as well as the use of background music increase the horrific experience.

The comic medium needs to resort to different expressive means in order to create a similar experience. Despite the stylistic differences due to the individual drawing styles of the artists, all the Infected are depicted with some elements which all versions have in common. What is most striking is the focus on the red eyes of the Infected and their bloody saliva. The artists play with strong contrasts: most of the time a bright, almost glowing red is used for eyes and blood, whereas the rest of the Infected is coloured in rather subdued, bleak shades. There is also a strong focus on their hands,

[366] Boyle, 'Audio Commentary' [on DVD]

which are contorted and look as if in pain, and perfectly complement the contorted gait of the figures.

In order to convey the power and impact of bunches of Infected, establishing shots are used which often cover a whole page or sometimes even spread over two pages. According to Daniel Cooney, "The size of a panel, along with the size and focus of its content, contributes to the emotional impact on the reader."[367] Thus, the eye used to smaller and more regular panels, suddenly is stopped by the visual load of information on one single page. It is up to the reader to decide whether to linger longer on the details, the facial expressions and body movements of the Infected or whether to pick up only the more striking features and gory aspects and quickly turn the page in horror. In action scenes which involve groups of Infected, often larger panels representing them are inserted in order to remind the reader of the danger of these creatures and thus heighten the tension of the whole sequence.

*The workings of infection*

In *28 Days Later: The Aftermath*, the transformation from human being into infected is shown by three inset panels placed across the full page depiction of an infected chimpanzee. Inset panels are traditionally used to draw attention to a significant detail which is important in the context of the main panel. The first inset panel shows a close-up of the professor's face the moment he is bitten and his still human sound of pain and shock represented by an "aaaaagh!"[368] The second inset panel is silent and shows the professor crouching down on the floor, blood running from his face. In the third panel, the professor's transformation is complete. The close-up of his face shows glowing red eyes behind his glasses and blood dripping from his nose, moustache and mouth. But the most distinctive sign of his infection is the speech bubble containing the first representation of the growl of the Infected ("ghaaaagh!!"[369]). Compared to the film's possibility to introduce sound, this technique is more limited, but nevertheless manages to convey the idea of the transformation which is taking place. The comic medium relies on the imaginative abilities of the addressee to transform the

[367] Daniel Cooney, *Writing and Illustrating the Graphic Novel* (London: A&C Black Publishers, 2011), p. 94.
[368] *28 Days Later: The Aftermath*, p. 22.
[369] *28 Days Later: The Aftermath*, p. 22.

representation of sound on the page into an auditive element in the reader's mind. In McCloud's terms, this is one form of closure.[370] Sometimes, in order to represent the sound of the Infected, balloon shapes which differ from those used for human beings are used or different lettering styles, similar to those used for sound effects (which are traditionally used for non-verbal sounds and stylistically rendered in such a way as to visually convey the quality of the sound), are introduced in order to underline the non-human quality of the infected creatures.

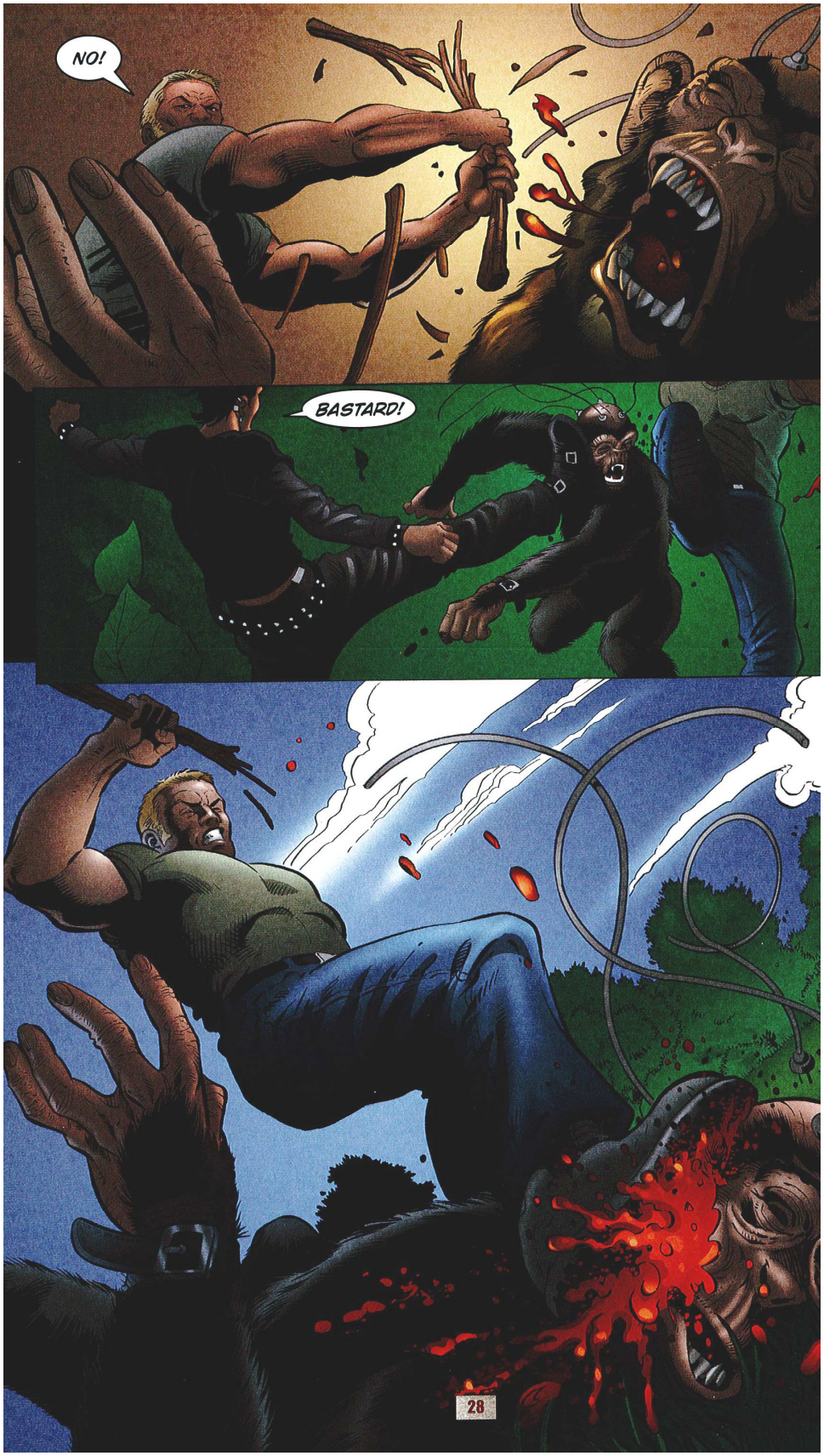
Sometimes, the appearance of a bunch of infected is preceded by a scene of relative peace and harmony, as it is the case in *28 Days Later: The Aftermath*, "Stage Two: The Outbreak", with a family celebrating a birthday in one of Cambridge's parks, or by dream sequences, as for example in Issue Four, *Gang War*, Chapter 16[371] of the comic series, where Selena dreams about all the people she lost because of the epidemic. However, the bright colour scheme, the fairly regular panelling and rather neat perspectives are in clear contrast with the subsequent scenes which depict the encounter with infection. This technique recalls Shakespeare's introduction of funny moments before the real tragic events of his tragedies in order to decrease the tension, thus making the tragic moment even more powerful. The writers and artists of *28 Days Later: The Aftermath* and the homonymous comic series seem to apply similar strategies.

*The power and dynamics of infection*

The way comics depict the destructive power and dynamic of infection can best be shown in the scene following the above mentioned family outing in the park. The sequence starts with reverse shots of Liam, the youngest of the family, and an infected chimpanzee – the electrodes and wires on his head indicate that it is the chimpanzee from the laboratory – on top of a tree. The moment the chimpanzee appears on the scene the colour scheme changes and becomes darker, almost surreal compared to the previous panels, as if a veil of darkness were covering the brightness of life on earth. The whole page is almost silent, except for an inset panel with Liam's mother shouting out her son's name while observing what is happening from a distance together with her

[370] McCloud, pp. 66-67.
[371] Michael Alan Nelson (w.) and Alejandro Aragon (a.), 'Gang War', *28 Days Later*, v.4 #16 (May 2011), Boom!Studios [print]

husband. Most of the perspectives on the page are distorted. We see the chimpanzee from a worm's eye perspective, a point of view shot through Liam's eyes. The drops of blood falling down from the tree recall a crucial scene in Boyle's film, in which Frank is infected by blood dripping from the beak of a crow which is feeding on an infected corpse. The power of the chimpanzee's aggression is emphasised by another low angle which shows the boy succumbing under the weight of the animal. The wires on the ape's head and the falling leaves serve as motion lines in order to increase the impression of power and movement. Bright red colour is used in the next panel which shows the moment of infection, a close-up of the boy's and the chimpanzee's face and the latter vomiting blood over Liam's face. The final panel of the page introduces a yellowish colour scheme, which heightens the doom and gloom feeling of the scene, and another low angle depicting Liam's family in the background, their faces in pain and terror while the boy is lying on the floor, his head covered in blood. The following page shows the two men of the family, Liam's brother and father, fighting the animal. The panels keep the distorted, low angle perspectives and thus manage to convey the violent impact of the fight. Again, the wires on the chimpanzee's head function as motion lines. The colours are kept bleak, only the blood squirting from the ape's head under Liam's father's lethal kick is bright red. These three fighting panels are created along diagonal lines and the opposing directions of the lines (the first two from bottom left to top right and the final, bigger and more impressive panel from top left to bottom right) increase the dynamics of the fight.




Picture 14

An interesting way of conveying the erratic movement and the animal-like qualities of the Infected can be seen in the opening page of "Stage 3: Decimation" in *28 Days Later: The Aftermath*. The page is subdivided into four horizontal panels, which gradually increase in size, depicting an advancing Infected. It is as if the figure was approaching an imaginary camera. In the first two panels only the silhouette of a distorted figure is shown. The way the arms and the legs are drawn and change from panel to panel is significant. The third panel provides a medium shot of the creature. Now some more detail of its hands, face and blood-stained clothes can be seen. The last panel depicts the face and upper body of the infected with a focus on its red eyes, bloody saliva and contorted hands. Its growl is clearly that of an Infected, and the introduction of a sound effect, namely "Sniff! Sniff!"[372] emphasises the animal-like character of the creature. However, eventually, it is only through the readers' way of linking the different panels in their minds that the erratic movement typical of the Infected is completed.

[372] *28 Days Later: The Aftermath*, p. 47.

Picture 15

*The representation of infection*

The film *28 Weeks Later* gives the audience insight into how infection works. Don, the male protagonist of the film, is responsible for the second outbreak of the epidemic. He kisses his wife, who is a carrier of the virus, but does not present any of the symptoms of the disease. Ironically, the disaster is triggered by an act of love. Within seconds, Don passes from sadness and love to violence. His sudden transformation into a monster is filmed in slow motion, a cinematic convention that can be traced back to Sam Peckinpah's 1969 movie *The Wild Bunch*. According to James Kendrick in *Film Violence: History, Ideology, Genre*,[373] the stylisation of violence through slow motion can increase the realistic feel of a film. Rage takes hold of both Don's body and mind. It is visualised in every detail: the erratic movement, the look and the violence in his deeds, culminating in Don putting his fingers into his wife's eyes.

Also the comic series *28 Days Later* visually presents the way the virus works. The scene takes place within the narration of the mad scientist theme which is present in Danny Boyle's film, in *28 Days Later: The Aftermath*, "Stage 1: Development" as well as in *28 Days Later: Bend in the Road*, Chapter 5, and *28 Days Later: Hot Zone*, Chapters 11 and 12. Chapter 11 sets the premises for the representation of the workings of the rage virus in comic form in Chapter 12. Selena and her companions (the American journalist Clint, his blind photographer friend Derrick and Douglas, a boy who joined them during their journey through Scotland) are captured by a group of American soldiers working for Doctor Billingsworth, who carries out experiments on the virus. However, the doctor does not intent to find a cure or vaccine for the disease, as our heroes think, but carries tries to continue the Cambridge professor's work for questionable reasons. Billingsworth wants to create a super soldier and is "trying to alter the virus, eliminate the mindlessness and the haemorrhaging while leaving all the power and the focus of purpose."[374] The doctor knows that some people might be immune to the virus, which links this episode to *28 Weeks Later* with its two immune characters responsible for the second outbreak of the virus and its spreading to the continent. Selena is only spared because Doctor Billingsworth knows that Captain Stiles is looking for her. Instead, Douglas becomes the victim of the doctor's cruel experiments.

[373] Kendrick, pp. 15-16.
[374] Michael Alan Nelson (w.) and Declan Shalvey (a.), 'Hot Zone', *28 Days Later*, v.3 #12 (February 2011), Boom!Studios [print]

The central scene is introduced by a tier of three vertical panels and three horizontal panels, all except the first focussing on Selena and Douglas' emotions conveyed through their facial expressions. The colour scheme is bleak, with grey, brownish and dark red shades. Douglas is fastened to a stretcher. The last panel of the page shows a syringe approaching the boy's face covered in tears. The subsequent page shows in comics fashion how the virus works. Selena's shocked face covers the whole page, while eleven inset panels around her face depict the different stages of the virus: the focus is on vomiting, clenching hands, red eyes, painful features and blood. The main colour scheme is that of dry blood. Only the next page shows the complete picture of the virus at work. Douglas' whole body is shown on the stretcher with all the standard symptoms of the infection: red eyes, contorted hands, convulsive movements and the typical growl of the Infected. The irregularity of the panel border and the pale red background add to the drama of the scene.

Picture 16

3.2.2.3.2 Horror Movie Tropes

*The Final Girl*

The comic series and the graphic novel both present tropes which can be found in horror movies. One major genre-specific feature is the focus on what Carol J. Clover calls the 'Final Girl.'[375] Similar to the character in the movie, the comic version of the heroine presents most of the characteristics of the Final Girl: Selena's masculinity which can be seen in her hair and dress style and her attentive, investigating gaze, her quick-mindedness, her pragmatism as well as her ferocity in confronting the Infected and all the other dangers she encounters on her journey, mainly by using her machete, a pretechnological weapon which, according to Clover, is typical for the Final Girl.[376] However, both in the film and the comic series, Selena keeps some of her female characteristics as well. The film shows her slow warming to Hannah, Frank and Jim whereas the comic series depicts her femininity through flashbacks or dream sequences of her happy pre-epidemic life as a married woman. All these aspects are part of the Selena character and can be directly transferred to the other medium. However, the comic medium has its own conventions in representing heroes such as a Final Girl who bear strong similarities with the superhero trope the medium is famous for. There are several examples which could be used to illustrate this point, but in order to avoid redundancy I will focus on a limited number of scenes.

Chapters 11 and 12 of *28 Days Later: Hot Zone* show the Final Girl in several action sequences. The group of survivors (Clint, Derrick, Douglas and Selena) are running from a fire the soldiers have ignited in order to capture some Infected for Doctor Billingsworth's experiments. The first part of the sequence focuses on the fire with drawings glowing in bright colours and Selena's glasses and the metal of her machete as the most visible elements. The whole scene is very dynamic and relies on different panel shapes: background scenes which establish the setting present horizontal and vertical inset panels which mostly focus on Selena in action. She is the one who stays behind in order to fight the approaching group of Infected. Three vertical fighting panels introduce Selena as superhero figure. The perspectives within these panels

[375] Clover, 'Her Body, Himself', pp. 125-74.
[376] Clover, 'Her Body, Himself', pp. 125-74.

change from worm's eye view to bird's eye view. Selena's machete looks like a fire sword and her glowing glasses with the black mask covering her mouth and nose and the red head scarf on her head make her look like an insect with superpowers, a little like Spiderman, but more of a fly-version of a superhero. These action panels are succeeded by an impressive double page representing Selena, the super heroine. Her whole body is off the ground as if she were flying, her black coat which has caught fire looks similar to the cape of Superman and her shouting resembles more a superhuman sound effect than a human expression. The sequence continues with smaller panels showing Selena fighting with two weapons, a gun and her machete before being captured by Billingsworth's soldiers.


Picture 17

Chapter 12 shows Selena's outbreak of rage which can to some extent be compared to Jim's enragement in Boyle's film. Selena is shattered by the way Douglas has been used as a guinea pig. Her vulnerable side comes to the surface and her two remaining companions, Clint and Derrick, are worried by seeing the toughest person

they had ever known broken and in tears. Selena's desperation is depicted in predominantly grey tones; only her dark red scarf adds some colour to the altogether bleak scene. The scene develops on two pages. Selena appears small on the floor of the room where they are kept prisoners. The central image on the first page shows the heroine from a bird's eye view, kneeling on the floor, her face covered by her hands, forlorn among the two men. Thick black lines on the border of the image heighten the bleakness of the scene. Selena's vulnerability is underlined by two smaller panels focussing on her suffering and crying face. However, being a Final Girl, it does not take long for her to recover. The central image of the second page is in stark contrast with the one on the previous page. The colour scheme is still the same, but Selena is now standing, her fists clenching, thinking about revenge and ready to act.

Selena's outbreak of rage is prepared by several pages reminding the reader of the Doctor's cruelty, focussing on the tormented face and body of Douglas. This makes Selena's deeds more justifiable to the reader. After fighting the guard together with Clint and Derrick and thus managing to leave their prison, Selena runs off to take revenge. The subsequent sequence shows Selena in her super heroine attitude with an almost whole page close-up of her face, the sharp knife she has previously taken from the guard covering half of her face. A sequence of smaller panels shows Selena entering the laboratory and confronting the doctor and one of the soldiers. A vertical panel on the left provides a full body shot of the female protagonist. The linear perspective and the regularity of the door as frame add power and stability to the character and heighten the impression of her cold-bloodedness. Only later, after mercifully killing Douglas with her knife, rage takes hold of her. The central image of the second page introduces distortion and shows Selena's body from a low angle. The blood running off the knife acts as motion line while the moving coat and scarf add to the dynamic of the scene. Selena is not satisfied with simply killing her antagonists. She infects both of them by cruelly slashing their eyes with the infected knife and only afterwards kills the soldier. The doctor is aware of his transformation into an Infected and begs her to kill him, but there is no mercy for him. The central image depicts Selena in her what I would call 'fly-woman-super-heroine' gear (glasses, black mask over her mouth, red scarf, black coat). Her 'no' is definite and results in locking the doctor into his laboratory leaving him to the pain of the infection.

*The gore*

The representation of gore is fundamental to the horror genre, be it film, novel or comic. In the *28 Days Later* version of the apocalypse, gore is mainly found in relation to the Infected and the corpses of their victims. In Chapter 10 of *28 Days Later: Hot Zone*, Selena and her fellow travellers need to hide from a group of soldiers and there is no better way than camouflaging themselves among the heaps of dead corpses along the road. The army has already started clearing up the area from the corpses, preparing the repatriation of the British citizens who were abroad during the outbreak. The opening page of the chapter gives a high angle view of Selena and Derrick's bodies among corpses. The heap of dead bodies is reminiscent of Holocaust footage with some almost naked, thin and bony bodies. The gore of the scene is heightened by the conversation of the survivors after the soldiers have left. As Clint's reply "Yeah, we could use a shower or three" to Derrick's remark "What does it say about us if they couldn't tell us from the corpses?" makes clear, the olfactory aspect of the gore needs words in order to be conveyed.

Another example of horror movie style gore can be found in Chapter 19 of *28 Days Later: Ghost Town* in which Selena has to flee from Captain Stiles, a friend of Major Henry West who was killed in Danny Boyle's film. One of Selena's strategies to distract the revengeful captain from following her is to put her distinctive red scarf on the head of one of the corpses. The whole sequence is kept in dark shades which turn into dark red tones with increasing gore. Three vertical panels show Selena running into a building where she finds a heap of dead bodies on the floor. Stiles follows her into the building and sees Selena's red scarf on the ground among the bodies. Since it is not the first time Selena hides among corpses, it is not clear to the reader that there is only her scarf. Turning the page two smaller rectangular panels with a close-up of the scarf and Stiles' weapon pointing at it are followed by a larger, central panel which shows all the gore of the scene. It is the decaying skull of a female infected with black holes instead of the eyes and streaks of dried black blood running down her cavernous cheeks and exposed teeth. The gore continues on the next page with four silent horizontal panels focussing on the corpses and the destruction of Selena's hiding place.

# Chapter Four: Myth

## 4.1 Introduction

### 4.1.1 Definition of Myth

Despite many attempts to define 'myth', it is still difficult to provide a satisfactory understanding of the concept. According to Fritz Graf in *Greek Mythology: An Introduction*, "myths are traditional tales,"[377] a definition which is substantiated by the etymology of the word *mythos* signifying 'word' or 'story' and originally synonymous with *logos* and *epos*. Subsequently, Plato started to distinguish *logos* and *mythos*, implying that *logos* can be proved by dialectics whereas *mythos* is basically false, granting it only expressive power in the realm that could not be reached through reasoning.[378] In other words, *mythos* belongs to the realm of Dionysos whereas *logos* is Apollinian.[379]

There are, however, some characteristics that myths have in common. First of all, myth is a story that is not limited to a certain genre or text form. Thus, myths find their expression in poetry, drama, visual art, film and many other art forms. As Graf states, "A myth is not a specific poetic text. It transcends the text: it is the subject matter, a plot fixed in broad outline and with characters no less fixed, which the individual poet is free to alter only within limits."[380] Moreover, traditionally myths have no author as their origins lie way back in time and space. This emphasis on the plot and structure of the myth allows for easy translations without loss from one language to another, nor from one medium to another. Nevertheless, myths change throughout time because they adapt to the conditions of the time of their reception in order to achieve cultural relevance. Graf explains, "A myth makes a valid statement about the origins of the world, of society and its institutions, about the gods and their relationship with

[377] Fritz Graf, *Greek Mythology: An Introduction*, trans. by Thomas Marier (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 1.
[378] Graf, p. 2, p. 4.
[379] Christian Wessely, *Von Star Wars, Ultima und Doom: Mythologisch verschleierte Gewaltmechanismen im kommerziellen Film und in Computerrollenspielen*, Reihe XXIII, Theologie, Vol. 612 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1997), p. 51.
[380] Graf, p. 2.

mortals, in short, about everything on which human existence depends."[381] Even though myths are fictitious, they illustrate a deeper truth.

A myth is a traditional story that explains what is important to a certain culture and is thus fundamental in order to understand a given culture. There has always been a need to explain the inexplicable, and even in contemporary society, despite the many answers science is able to provide, certain primordial fears are best addressed through mythological elements. Often myths provide metaphorical explanations of cosmological origins. Although presently there are rational explanations as to the origins of the world, the numerous narratives addressing issues related to the end of civilisation and its possible renewal indicate that a mere rational explanation is not sufficient. There seems to be a need to bridge the physical and metaphysical world, which art in general, but film in particular can achieve. According to Bronislaw Malinowski, what is an indispensable function of myth can also be applied to film. As he states, "it [myth] expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man."[382]

It is not always easy to distinguish between myths, legends and folktales. According to William K. Ferrell, "For a story to reach mythical proportions, a myth must exist not as fact but as metaphor for truth."[383] For Bronislaw Malinowski a story achieves myth status "when rite, ceremony, or a social or moral rule demands justification, a warrant of antiquity, reality, and sanctity."[384] According to Mircea Eliade, "myths narrate not only the origin of the world and all things in it, but also the primordial events which shaped man into what he is today – mortal, differentiated by sex, organized into a society, forced to work in order to live, and obliged to work in accordance with certain rules."[385] Joseph Campbell provides a Jungian reading. He points out that myths come from an inner consciousness. The role of the artist is that of reconnecting the addressee to forgotten archetypes.[386]

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[381] Graf, p. 3.
[382] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1954), p.101.
[383] William K. Ferrell, *Literature and Film as Modern Mythology* (Westport Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2000), p. 10.
[384] Malinowski, p. 107.
[385] Alexander Eliot, *The Universal Myths: Heroes, Gods, Tricksters, and Others* (New York: Meridian, 1976), p. 25.
[386] Joseph Campbell, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 145.

### 4.1.2 Myth, Psychoanalysis, Structuralism and Formalism

There have been several theories on the origins of myth and their functions, but what is important for this study is the psychoanalytic, as well as the structuralist or formalist approach.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of modern psychoanalysis, links the functions of the psyche to myth. In his analysis of the 'Oedipus complex' in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1909) he claims that the myth of the Theban king Oedipus, at the basis of Sophocles' play, records the events of everybody's individual mental life (as far as the Oedipus is concerned, the repression of libidinal feelings for one's parent of the opposite sex in early childhood accompanied by the desire to suppress the other parent) which otherwise only find expression in dreams. However, not only myths, but also folktales, jokes and popular tales are related to dreams both in form and content. Later, in *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13), Freud considers myths as "distorted wish dreams of entire nations, the dreams of early mankind."[387] But the Oedipus myth also contains the memory of a primordial event, namely the murder of an oppressive father by his sons who wish to take his wives for themselves. However, because of a sort of collective bad conscience they eventually refrained from taking advantage of the women. This is considered the origin of the incest taboo. In the films selected for this study, several father figures are killed, be it a number of male characters in *28 Days Later*, the father in *The Road* or V in *V for Vendetta*, and their deaths result in the empowerment of the surviving characters. These deaths are embedded within the heroic journey and are a fundamental aspect in the hero's development.

Freud's dissident disciple Carl Gustav Jung has developed a different approach. According to Jung, there are similarities between dreams, folktales and myths, because they use similar images and symbols to represent common archaic patterns which he calls 'archetypes'. Even though there are variations in the representation, the basic form stays intact.[388] The ability to create myths is an innate human skill and the origins of the archetypes are instinctual. Jung's theory will be further discussed in relation to the divine child archetype.

[387] Graf, p. 36.
[388] Carl Gustav Jung and Marie-Luise von Franz, *Man and His Symbols* (London: Aldus, 1964)

Jung's concept of the mythopoeic mind, in other words, mankind's ability to create myths, can be compared to Claude Lévi-Strauss's *esprit humain*. According to the French anthropologist, human beings have an innate ability to express themselves in symbols, and myths are copies of these symbols. Graf in explaining Lévi-Strauss's concept claims that, "Myths are created from the immanent store of archetypes; it is in this way that they become expressions of the human spirit."[389] However, Lévi-Strauss was mainly interested in the structural analysis of myth. In his article "The Structural Analysis of Myth" published in 1955 (indebted to Ferdinand de Saussure's structural analysis of language), he compared myth to communication, suggesting that myth employed the same structures as language. His aim was to discover the fixed structures underlying myths, which prove that certain mythical patterns are universal emphasises the trans-cultural relations among the mythical symbols. Moreover, mythical structures find expression in different codes, which vary according to the physical and social reality of their time.[390]

Vladimir J. Propp's formalist approach is of particular interest, due to his analysis of traditional tales, that are based on a study of repeated motifs and themes, which lies to some extent at the basis of the analyses of the films in this study. In his *Morphology of the Folktale*, first published in 1928, Propp came up with a plot structure common to all folktales. According to *The Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale* (1946), a later book by the Russian formalist, this fixed sequence of functions follows the steps of a typical initiation ritual, consisting in the hero's journey to a distant land, his encounter with death, his fight with monsters, his erotic encounter and his succession of his father.[391] These characteristics also inform Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Similarly, in light of this approach, Walter Burkert has come up with a number of narrative patterns in Greek myths, among others 'the girl's tragedy.' The pattern consists of five morphemes which represent a girl's passage from child to adulthood. The girl leaves home and lives in idyllic seclusion for some time before being surprised and impregnated by a god. Subsequently, she is humiliated and punished before giving birth to a son, which relieves her from her suffering.[392]

[389] Graf, p. 38.
[390] Graf, pp. 43-48.
[391] Graf, p. 51.
[392] Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 5-14.

According to Burkert, these patterns correspond to fundamental biological and cultural realities, a fact that explains the universality of many narrative types. Traditionally, in many cultures, girls undergo puberty, defloration, pregnancy and delivery. This makes the 'girl's tragedy' the female equivalent to the male initiation rite. The films in this study draw upon certain patterns of narrative expectations which can be traced back to ancient times. Nevertheless, there are also variations to the underlying structure which bear the signature of the minds of the creators.

### 4.1.3 Myth and Film

The films in this study are good examples of, as William K. Ferrell states, "how a contemporary artist adapted an ancient and recurrent myth/ritual to the values and aspirations of our culture at this point in time."[393] The artist interweaves metaphors and symbols without lessening the reality of the story and thus appealing to "archetypal themes deeply embedded within us, even when outwardly we tend to reject the basic belief."[394] Farrell explains,

> In realism, just as in myth, there exists an aura of truth. The closer the novel or film represents a primeval reality, the closer the story relates to myth. The closer the story connects to myth, the more direct the connection between the story being told and the reader or viewer of that story.[395]

Mythical patterns speak to something deeply human and thus do not only reach Western audiences, but other societies as well. It is not necessary that the audience or the filmmakers consciously recognise these mythical patterns as such, inasmuch as their power lies in their ability to speak to the subconscious. According to Jung, the myth is a manifestation of the collective unconscious and its archetypes.[396] Consequently, what is mythic is at the same time collective and universal. In Andrew Samuels' reading of Jung's idea of *primordial images* (what later become 'archetypes'), "The primordial images are like fountains, subsequent imagery is derived from them. And primordial

[393] Ferrell, p. 23.
[394] Ferrell, p. 25.
[395] Ferrell, p. 49.
[396] Carl Gustav Jung, *Archetypen,* 16th edn. (München: dtv, 2001), p. 9.

images have a certain independence, can pop up in the mind without warning in dream, daydream, fantasy or artistic creation."[397]

Certain film images can be considered projections of unconscious archetypal patterns. Relying on imagery, film, and other visual arts are able to reinterpret common mythic themes. According to Irving Singer in *Cinematic Mythmaking, Philosophy in Film*, while the fictive intent in art is evident, "the philosophical substrata remain hidden within some intricate texture, often mythological, that generally incorporates them without our being aware of their operative presence prior to an aesthetic analysis that brings them to the surface."[398] Usually, there is not a single dominant myth, but traces of different myths. Their adaptation to contemporary narratives can be detected, providing insight into the deeper meaning of a work of art.

Singer even goes further and grants certain cinematic techniques mythmaking qualities. Through montage and sound, film does not merely represent human experience, but expresses the truth behind it, in spite of abstracting or distorting the reality as we know it. According to Singer, these techniques "lull us into an acceptance of idealized eventualities, though seemingly realistic and often negated by the harsh circumstances that delimit our life in nature."[399] The result is a suspension of disbelief. Nevertheless, in spite of this semblance to reality, what the film images represent is not *real*. The real world is continuous and not cut up into significant moving images which are put together to create artificial meaning. This artificial, only apparent reality can, however, express a metaphysical truth which allows works of art to reach ultimate reality in spite of their fictionality. According to *James Monaco in American Film Now*, "People only respond to the mythic nature of a story when they recognize the inherent truth of it."[400] As Singer states, "The construction of this aesthetic truthfulness sustains the mythic impulse."[401] Films with mythical patterns carefully choose visual effects from the real world, thus creating mythological visions that hide deeper philosophical meanings or an archetypal content. Archetypes, in order to become manifest, need a vehicle through which they are conveyed. This can be symbols, behavioural patterns, or

[397] Andrew Samuels, *Jung and the Post-Jungians* (New York: Routledge, 1985), p. 24.
[398] Irving Singer, *Cinematic Mythmaking. Philosophy in Film* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), p. 3.
[399] Singer, pp. 65-66.
[400] James Monaco, *American Film Now* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 253.
[401] Singer, p. 66.

images. The image is only a projection of the archetype. According to Jung, "what we mean by 'archetype' is in itself unrepresentable, but has effects which make visualization of it possible, namely the archetypal images and ideas."[402] In *Mis/Takes. Archetype, Myth and Identity in Screen Fiction*, Terrie Waddel points out that despite the universality of the archetype, its imaginal representation is influenced by social and historical components.[403] In her interpretation of the way Jung saw the functioning of cultural texts, she emphasises that he considered them as symbolic of a culture's development, in the way they educated 'the spirit of the age' by showing the forms a certain period of time needs the most.[404] Susan Rowland provides a similar reading claiming that "art is a means by which the collective unconscious informs collective society."[405] Each culture will develop its own version of archetypal myths. Thus, the way contemporary films touch upon archetypal patterns and project them into moving images is indicative of which primordial fears and fundamental values are an issue at that moment of time in which a narrative is created. Terence Hawkes points out that "a myth is always [...] located in time" but "the specific *pattern* or structure of events described is bound to be timeless; embracing, and linking in an explanatory mode the present with both the past and future, while it is told."[406]

## 4.2 Mythical Elements in the Films

### 4.2.1 The Heroic Journey

In his article "The *Katabasis* Theme in Modern Cinema,"[407] Erling B. Holtsmark acknowledges "the astonishing extent to which mythic patterns of classical antiquity have worked themselves into the very marrow of the cinematic skeletons that support

[402] Carl Gustav Jung, *Collective Works of C. G. Jung (1953-91) (CW)*, ed. by Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler, trans. by R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953-91), *CW* 8, para. 417.
[403] Terrie Waddel, *Mis/Takes. Archetype, Myth and Identity in Screen Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 13.
[404] Waddel, p. 16.
[405] Susan Rowland, *Jung as a Writer* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 11.
[406] Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 42.
[407] Erling B. Holtsmark, 'The *Katabasis* Theme in Modern Cinema', in *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, ed. by Martin M. Winkler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23-50.

plot, action, and characterization."[408] As the Greek term *katabasis*, literally means 'a going down, a descent,' Holtsmark explores the narrative pattern "that portrays the hero's descent into, and ascent from, the underworld – the journey to hell."[409] According to the author, the entryway to the realm beyond our safe world is usually narrow and the lower world is generally grim and dark, inhabited by grotesque figures representing the spirits of the dead. The journey takes place at dusk or during the night, and the hero is often accompanied by a companion. Moreover, as Holtsmark argues, "from the time of Odysseus' descent in the *Odyssey*, *katabasis* seems inevitably to entail at some level a search for identity. The journey is in some central, irreducible way a journey of self-discovery, a quest for a lost self."[410] Moreover, by experiencing and overcoming the difficulties and dangers of the underworld, the hero acquires knowledge and consequently assumes increased responsibility or leadership once back in the upper world.

Of course, these paradigmatic elements may undergo transformations according to the requirements of the narrative and are not always easily recognisable. However, the *katabatic* pattern appears to be a fundamental element of the contemporary dystopian genre in that it can be found in all the films selected for this study. As Holtsmark points out, "the thematic displacement of katabasis themes shifts onto the narrative the power of a death tale, or part of a death tale, and hence lends to it a certain urgency and import beyond the surface structure of the story presented."[411] In the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genre this version of the death tale does not only regard the individual hero, but also the world as such. It is, generally speaking, the world that needs to die, to go on its own katabatic journey in order to ignite its own potential for renewal. This journey of the world will be discussed as part of the cosmogonic elements in the films.

#### 4.2.1.1 *Children of Men*

Theo is a tragic hero who embarks on a heroic journey which leads him from the relatively safe and known world of London towards the south. He has to overcome

[408] Holtsmark, p. 24.
[409] Holtsmark, p. 25.
[410] Holtsmark, p. 26.
[411] Holtsmark, p. 49.

several difficulties, and enter the underworld represented by Bexhill in order to fulfil his task. Like Odysseus, he uses different means of transport: predominantly cars and buses. In order to complete the most important part of his journey he travels on foot with poor footwear, and by rowing a boat: one of the most antiquated and metaphorically loaded means of transport. In order to enter the lower world he needs to disguise himself as an illegal immigrant and requires the help of the immigration cop Syd. Bexhill is hell. The images at the entrance to the camp recall men-made hells of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Inside the camp, Theo and Kee are greeted by a grotesque figure, who ironically welcomes them "to paradise," but what they really see rather recalls some medieval depictions of the inferno. There are starving figures in rags, fires on the streets, corpses being burnt. Inside this world, Theo and Kee find a new companion, Maruchka, who provides them with some sort of shelter, and thus enables them to give birth to the savour of humanity. What is equally important, this woman of unknown origins leads them to the place where they find the rowing boat that will help them to complete their journey.

This physical journey also has another dimension. Theo begins his journey as a flawed character, and reluctantly after Julian's sacrifice, in addition to a number of challenges, accepts his mission to sacrifice his life in order to give humanity hope of a future. He has to accompany Kee in her own heroic journey from childhood to adulthood, from teenage carelessness to her responsibility as the mother of a potential new humanity. The hero's journey becomes an inner journey, from apathy to activity, from despair and depression to hope. By the end of his journey, the initially alcoholic and suicidal anti-hero will recover his active self and die as the hero who has saved humanity from its destruction, thus providing the viewer with what, according to Mark Pizzato, tragedy should do, namely "a more complex catharsis through tragic insights."[412]

Most importantly, however, Theo and Kee's odyssey is both a journey back in time and towards a new beginning for humanity. The final scene of the film starts in a prehistoric-looking cave whose paintings depict the hunting scenes of a dying civilisation - modern weapons (airplanes dropping bombs) and modern prey animals (human beings) – and create a cross-reference to Picasso's *Guernica* in the first part of

[412] Mark Pizzato, *Theatres of Human Sacrifice. From Ancient Ritual to Screen Violence* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 2.

the film and the bombing of the refugee camp at the end of it. The travellers leave this primordial cave in a rowing boat, one of the most primitive means of transport, and embark on their final journey. Maruchka assists and pushes them through a narrow tunnel, with a partly barred opening, into the open sea and into the future. Maruchka becomes a primordial midwife who helps them leave the primordial womb in order to rebuild a new world order. Again, as in many metaphorical explanations of cosmological origins, the earth and humanity originate from war and chaos. According to Žižek, renewal means that the roots have to be cut,[413] or to stay within the birth imagery, the umbilical cord has to be cut. Thus, the rootless, floating boat is the cradle of a new humanity.

#### 4.2.1.2 *The Road*

Similar to the other films in this study, *The Road* also evolves around the *katabasis* narrative, portraying the journey through a world which has become hell on several levels. Descents into bunkers provide glimpses of the true hell, whilst some are rare glimpses of what once seemed to be paradise. Like most underworlds, this post-apocalyptic world is dank, dark and cold, the near complete absence of sunlight gives the journey a dusky feel. The protagonists meet monstrosities of all sorts and have to fight against monstrous impulses of their own. Therefore, the journey is not simply a journey of survival, but also a journey of moral self-preservation and a journey of self-discovery for the main characters.

The violent dystopian world described in the previous chapter is the backdrop of a post-apocalyptic road movie. It is the physical journey of a father and his son through a devastated country. As survival in the north has become an impossibility, their only hope is to reach the south coast with a chance for milder temperatures. Although the journey leads them across what was before the catastrophe the United States of America, their road could be anywhere. There are no specific landmarks and the map they use is generic.

However, more importantly, the journey is also an inner journey for both characters. It is the tragic journey of an adult man, a kind of Everyman, towards his own fatal end, and his eventual death. The burden of his responsibility, the threatening

[413] Žižek, 'The Possibility of Hope' [on DVD]

encounters throughout the journey, as well as the physical strains gradually impact the father's slow transformation from moral stronghold into a flawed character, as he becomes progressively aware of his approaching death. The frequent dream scenes of an idyllic past provide the first hints. Simultaneously, he appears to lose his moral balance. The way in which he treats the black man who robbed them exemplifies his increasing brutality. The man feels that his encounters with the savagery of the post-apocalyptic world trigger his own bleak inner self. This shows the protagonist's vulnerability to his own darker nature and how the terrible, savage, proto-man within every human being can be unleashed by fear. The various encounters with the cannibals, the strenuous search for food and shelter, and worrying about his beloved son all serve as catalysts for the emergence of his hidden, voracious, violent characteristics.

Another katabatic element is the encounter with the blind traveller. Throughout the film, the boy seems to be able to distinguish between friend and enemy, between "the good guys and the bad guys."[414] He intuitively senses that the old man they encounter is one of the 'good guys' and poses no threat. The ageing, limping and mostly blind man, wearing rags and cardboard shoes, recalls some aspects of the mythical figure of Tiresias. Although there are several versions that explain his blindness, one says that "Athene compensated Tiresias for his lost sight by giving him prophetic powers, and a cornel-wood stick which guided his steps as clearly as if he could see."[415] Thus, the old man bears clear resemblance to the blind seer, the wise man who can see beyond. As in primordial times, important conversations take place around the fire which, according to Campbell, not only provides heat but also has a sacred function.[416] The philosophical conversation about the apocalypse between the two men underlines the old man's quality of divination. He says: "I knew this was coming. This or something like this. There were warnings. Yeah, some people thought it was a con. I always believed in it."[417] Three generations of men are sitting around a primordial fire. It is the boy's task to carry on the knowledge the two older men deliver.

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[414] *The Road*
[415] Kenneth McLeash, *Myth. Myth and Legends of the World Explored* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 611.
[416] Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (London: Souvenir Press, 1973), p. 395.
[417] *The Road*

#### 4.2.1.3 *V for Vendetta*

Like most of the other dystopian characters in my study, Evey has to go on a journey – a journey which implies a descent into hell – in order to grow. The journey presents all the elements of death and rebirth: the innocent girl inside her has to die and is reborn as a different person, a strong young woman. Even though there are parallels with Burkert's 'girl's tragedy,' Evey's initiation rite lacks the final stage of giving birth which may be linked to the masculinisation the character undergoes.

Evey's descent into the underworld is gradual. She is first rescued by V, a man in a mask, from the Fingermen and taken to his vaults. This is her first experience of a different reality below the surface of the Norsefire society, and her first encounter with a father figure. It is Evey's encounter with a lost cultural heritage, her encounter with art, literature, music and film, works of art not stolen by V but as he puts it, "reclaimed from the Ministry of Objectionable Material."[418] This is almost an idyllic world in contrast with the cold outer world lacking the refinements of the Arts. This first descent into the vaults changes Evey's view of the world and she is apparently willing to help V in his second act of revenge, which, however, she eventually uses as a way to get away from the terrorist.

Evey seeks refuge at Gordon's place and once again is connected to a hidden world of culture, refinement and diversity. Gordon is another father figure wearing a mask, though not made of papier mâché. He wears an invisible mask of respectability in terms of Norsefire society, which serves to conceal his homosexuality. Despite his success as the presenter of a famous comedy show, his indirect critique of the regime costs him his life. Evey witnesses Gordon's capture, which on a visual level bears strong resemblance with her mother's abduction when she was a child. Thus, she re-experiences someone dear to her being "erased from the face of the earth"[419] at the hands of the regime.

Evey's descent into hell, or, in other words, her rite of passage, finds its climax in her fake imprisonment by V who puts her in the position of Valerie, V, Gordon, her parents and the other anonymous prisoners who experienced government torture in the past. As in the final scene of the film, V stands for Edmond Dantes, Valerie, Evey's parents, Gordon, the other characters of the film and the audience, Evey, in this scene

[418] *V for Vendetta*
[419] *V for Vendetta*

impersonates the wrongly incarcerated and tortured prisoner, providing a face and identity to the numerous victims of state terror. Being robbed of her own identity, her head shaved and her clothes substitued by an orange prison garb, she becomes the anonymous prisoners and the essence of tortured humanity.

The bird's-eye views of Evey lying on the grey cell floor in a foetal position symbolise the slow growth of the new Evey. According to Keller's analysis of the film, Evey's cell is "visually equivalent to the imprisonment scenes of the 1934 version of *The Count of Monte Cristo*."[420] The food dropped through a small opening in the door, as well as contact with another prisoner through a hole in the wall are specific references to the film. Abbe Faria, the man in the cell next to Edmond Dantes', is a highly educated man and teaches Dantes everything he knows. The prison walls are covered with diagrams and images which represent the sum of human knowledge. He becomes Dantes' moral and intellectual guide. Evey's imprisonment is similar to that of Dantes. Being stripped of her old identity and almost starved to death, her only nourishment is Valerie's letter teaching her courage and resolution. In other words, she survives because of a connection to another human being. She survives because of words telling a story and inciting her to fight for integrity which represents the last inch of personal freedom. The words are so powerful that they help Evey resist in spite of torture and humiliation.

When she is ready to face death, she is released and finds her way through the narrow dark, grey corridor into freedom. The corridor somehow represents the birth canal through which the new Evey enters the pre-chamber to the outer world, the familiar vaults of V's home where she learns that V, the dramatist, has put into practice one of Evey's father's convictions,[421] namely that of using "lies to tell the truth."[422] These lies and the resulting truth are painful and traumatic, and the suffering connected to Evey's new awareness can be compared to the trauma and pain of birth. The room Evey enters can be compared to Faria's prison wall inasmuch as V's vaults contain the sum of human knowledge and culture. Thus, V's home can be seen as a place of

[420] Keller, p. 81.
[421] "He used to say that artists used lies to tell the truth while politicians used them to cover the truth up."
[422] *V for Vendetta*

education and training in which items of a lost world are preserved and in which the guardian of the interdicted culture and the instigator of reform are forged.[423]

Evey still has to go through her baptism before she is ready to face the world outside. V leads her to the roof where, from a visual point of view, the heroine with her orange prison garb stands out next to V clad in black and the dark grey skyline of London. Raindrops fall on Evey's head. The scene is filmed from a bird's-eye view, thus heightening the almost sacred moment in which the birth of a heroine is completed through the Christening ceremony. Whereas V's element is fire, Evey's element is water: she has been tortured with and consequently cleansed through water, and her task is that of reconstructing. The male protagonist, on the other hand, has been forged through fire and his fire baptism is reiterated throughout the film in central moments. V's task is destruction in order to enable a new order to be built.

When Evey finally meets V on 5th November, her looks – short hair, no make-up, and boyish clothes – signify that her transformation is complete. She resembles a concentration camp detainee, and not the naive girl from the beginning of the film. Evey's friends from her previous life do not recognise her. The experience in the cell has masculinised her and she is ready for destruction and violence, thus completing V's work of destruction before instigating reforms. The heroine has gone through some stages of the girl's tragedy: leaving home, living in an idyllic place, being humiliated and punished. However, Evey completes the initiation rite according to male patterns, with an erotic encounter consisting of a kiss before V's death, and the heroine's succession of the father figure in completing the heroic deeds.

#### 4.2.1.4 *28 Days Later*

*28 Days Later* is a cinematic *katabasis* that presents most of the key elements of the narrative pattern. The narrative evolves around the journey of several characters from Britain's devastated capital city towards possible safety further north in the Lake District. During their journey they have to cross several katabatic places inhabited by humans turned into infected monsters. Jim, the katabatic protagonist, is accompanied by helpers and companions. Their main aim is to find a save haven. The physical journey

[423] Keller, pp. 81-85.

not only goes hand in hand with personal growth and development of the male protagonist, but also to a certain extent with that of the other characters.

Jim embarks on his journey towards safety, but also towards his own maturity having awoken from a 28 day coma and discovering that a great nightmare has come true: he appears to be the last human being on earth. He starts his journey through a deserted London and enters the first katabatic scene, a church, hoping to find help and an explanation. It is here that he gets his first glimpse of the disaster, and has to flee the living dead for the first time. This is when he meets his first companions, Selena and Marc. According to the director, "Through the film, he [Jim] has a whole series of different father figures that he relates to, as he searches for himself in some way."[424] Marc, despite being more or less the same age, is the first father figure to Jim. The young man provides him with the necessary information about the catastrophe and imparts to him basic skills that will allow him to survive in this hostile environment. However, he is also the first father figure who has to die, notably and symbolically in Jim's parents' house where his biological father has earlier decided to commit suicide in order to escape the threat of the virus.

A more explicit father figure and companion is Frank, father to Hannah, who gives Jim and Selena shelter from the Infected. Frank provides more knowledge. He knows about a group of soldiers based outside Manchester who promise food, shelter and most importantly the answer to infection. The man manages to convince Jim and Selena to join him and his daughter on their journey which initially takes them across another katabatic place, a tunnel populated by rats and infected people. Only Hannah's coolness in this moment of great distress saves them from the attack. On their way north they have to stop for petrol. Jim, armed with a club, enters a chip shop, another underworld. The numerous close-ups show food left on plates, and corpses, including a newborn baby, lying all over the place. Jim seems to be aware of the presence of someone and tries to attract him by shouting. This time, it is an infected young boy who attacks Jim from behind, who, after a fierce fight, he manages to kill. Despite this close encounter with the Infected, alongside Jim's first experience of killing someone, he nonetheless leaves the building calm and composed. His fellow travellers do not even notice that the protagonist has taken a first important step towards independence and

[424] Danny Boyle, 'Audio Commentary'

adulthood. Later Frank's role as surrogate father becomes more explicit. At night Jim wakes up from a dream in which he relives the trauma of utter loneliness. When Frank, who is awake, in order to protect his new, enlarged family, tries to calm him down, Jim replies "thank you, Dad."[425] However, this father figure is also destined to die. Before turning into an animal and eventually being sacrificed, Frank manages to use his last twenty seconds of humanity to tell his daughter how much he loves her. Thus, for a short moment, two of the strongest human emotions, those of love and rage, are united in one character. Eventually, Jim is prevented from killing his surrogate father by two soldiers who shoot Frank.

The next katabatic setting appears as a beautiful British country mansion, the architectural expression of a great civilisation. However, the perfect exterior soon reveals its hidden secrets. Despite some efforts to keep up the appearance of civilisation, such as hot showers and an improvised candlelight dinner, there are signs of barbarity. The major who runs the place is the third father figure Jim encounters. He appears rational, willing to protect the survivors in order to slowly start rebuilding society. In a man to man conversation with Jim, he explains his plans and even shows him his secret in the backyard of the kitchen: the infected Mailer in chains, a kind of human guinea pig used to find out more about the disease. Jim is shocked, but becomes aware of the danger of the major's pragmatism only when the latter tells him about his idea to use the girls for procreation. Thus, the mansion is meant to become the cradle of a new civilisation, but a civilisation based on rape. Jim tries to flee with the girls, but is overpowered by the soldiers despite the help of Seargent Farrell. Sergeant Farrell, also called 'New Age Sergeant', is a somehow prophetic figure. He is to some extent Major Henry's antagonist, an alternative authority figure with an alternative world view, mainly concerning the evaluation of the situation. According to Major Henry, the state of normality is "people killing people,"[426] implying that even before the infection people killed one another. Sergeant Farrell, on the other hand, referring to the short span of humanity's existence on earth, sees normality for the planet quite differently: "If the infection wipes us all out, that's a way back to normality."[427] Moreover, in the cellar where he and Jim are imprisoned before being taken to the woods to be executed,

[425] *28 Days Later*
[426] *28 Days Later*
[427] *28 Days Later*

Farrell reveals his own theory about the infection. He is convinced that the infection cannot have crossed the ocean and that Britain has been quarantined by the world until the virus has wiped out the whole population. Eventually in the woods, Jim will find this theory confirmed when seeing the jet stream of a plane in the sky.

At the film's climax, Jim's fear for the girls' safety gives him the strength to challenge Major Henry West, the ambiguous father figure. As Christopher Eccleston, the actor who plays the authoritarian major, aptly observes, "He [Major West] represents the head and Jim represents the heart."[428] According to Alex Garland, the writer of the screenplay, Major Henry and Selena – as she was at the beginning of the movie – would have been quite compatible, since both "don't give emotion and humanity much leeway in their pragmatism."[429] However, at that stage of the film, in the Jane Austen style mansion, the location where important gender issues are enacted, Selena has already re-discovered both her emotional side as well as her femininity. It becomes clear that for the continuity of humanity, women are needed. Even though sex is seen as mere procreation rather than recreation, style and appearance are still important. Therefore, the girls are dressed up in red dresses, according to Boyle a "kind of image of fecundity."[430] The importance of female fertility as a guarantee for the future of humanity is also underlined by the thick rain, symbolising the deluge and Noah's ark with its apocalyptic connotations. The reduction of the initially tough, boyish girls to their female procreative functions lays the basis for Jim's transformation into a self-sufficient man who does not need to rely on father figures any more. He is ready to let lose his animal instincts, to kill his enemies with his bare hands in order to free the helpless damsels from the claws of the brutish soldiers. Although he is almost heroically killed in this final fight, his two female companions are able to save his life and drive him to safety in the idyllic Lake District, where the three travellers wait, as if a small family, for their rescuers. Finally, Jim has become a surrogate father to Hannah, and as the last male survivor of the British Isles he may also become the father of a new nation.

[428] Christopher Eccleston, 'Pure Rage' [on DVD]
[429] Alexander Garland, 'Audio Commentary' [on DVD]
[430] Boyle, 'Audio Commentary'

#### 4.2.1.5 *28 Weeks Later*

Similar to the other dystopian films analysed in the study, also *28 Weeks Later* introduces characters who undertake challenging journeys, including travel to the underground. The first journey is Don's flight by boat from a group of Infected which finally takes him to a safe area in the city of London. His children are part of a group of people who are brought into Great Britain in order to repopulate the country. Both their first journey into the country and their last journey out of the country are by air.

Later, the two children undertake a dangerous journey into the past. After managing to escape through the secure area on the Isle of Dogs and coming into close contact with the remains of the viral catastrophe, they jump on a motorbike and provide the audience with a view of iconic London. They also enjoy a ride through a cemetery before reaching their home. What informs the children's actions is their desire to get hold of some items that belong to their past. Their new stylish but sterile home in District One lacks personality. Having learnt about their mother's death, the children want to at least gather some memories of their past life. However, not only do they find items belonging to their past, but hidden in a room in the attic is their presumed dead mother. This fatal encounter is foreshadowed by Andy's dream about his mother covered with bruises and blood. The room in the attic is the first *katabatic* location Andy enters and recalls the bloody chamber of Gothic tales and horror movies. The room is a complete disaster with a table full of tins with maggots. The natural lighting exacerbates the horror of the scene. The unkempt and visibly frightened disturbed figure recalls the trope of the mad woman in the attic and creates a parallel between the last image the audience has of the woman desperately standing at an attic window looking after her husband fleeing from the scene. The encounter between the boy and his mother is characterised both by tension and softness. The woman is both, a traumatised survivor and a mother. Her desperate hug is ambiguous and the camera heightens this ambiguity by focussing on a close-up of the woman's hand clawing into the boys back and opening her mouth as if intending to bite him. This close-up already hints at the close connection between biting and kissing, as well as the connection between love and danger in this film.

However, the longest and most crucial journey is that of the children through London after the outbreak of the Infection. They use different means of transport and

have to face several challenges, including the snipers on the roof who shoot at everyone on the streets. Then there are the Infected who run after the children, who are accompanied by the soldier Doyle, the medical officer Scarlet Ross and the other survivors in the park. The only way to reach the meeting point at Wembley stadium is by car, but Doyle has to sacrifice himself in order to allow the children and the doctor to flee from the soldiers and their chemical weapons and fire throwers. The last challenge is the journey through the underground: an underworld littered by corpses which can only be seen through Scarlet's night sight. This scene presents all the classical ingredients of the *katabatic* world: darkness, dead bodies, the dangerous monster (here in the person of Don, the children's father), and Scarlet as the guide, who sacrifices her life for the children. Scarlet's sacrifice is filmed in an interesting way and can only be seen indirectly through her night sensing equipment which is also used to kill her. At this crucial moment, the audience sees the action from the point of view of a monstrous father who kills his children's guide. After Scarlet's murder, Tammy has to take on the role of surrogate mother and guide at the same time. Her first task is that of killing their pursuer, her own father. Secondly, she has to protect her brother from the truth about his own monstrous identity as carrier and take him safely to the stadium where the helicopter will eventually take them, and consequently the virus across the Channel to France.

### 4.2.2 The Saviour Myth

#### 4.2.2.1 Messianism in *Children of Men*

The main and most evident myth behind *Children of Men* is a redeemer myth, a variation on the Christian Messiah myth, which, to put it differently, is a myth about the extraordinary feats of a chosen individual and his/her link to the divine. According to Sarah Schwartzman's article "*Children of Men* and a Plural Messianism,"[431] there are several Messiah figures in the film, although the film is a good example of what Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr. calls "the secularization of the apocalyptic tradition."[432] In other words,

[431] Schwartzman
[432] Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr., 'Hollywood and Armageddon: Apocalyptic themes in recent cinematic presentation', in *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film*, ed. by Joel W. Martin and Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), p. 62.

there is a tendency in contemporary works of art to "focus less on divine destruction and redemption, and instead focus on the human power to destroy and renew the world."[433] Even the title suggests that the film is not about a Son of God, but about Children of Men. Nevertheless, as the following analysis will demonstrate, the spiritual dimension is not completely absent.

The first and most obvious messiah figure is Theo who has all the characteristics of what, according to Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 1949) are required for a character to become a hero. He is a stranger, in that he does not belong to the terrorist group of the Fishes. He has to complete a quest, endure and overcome challenges, and obtain and guard an object, which in this case is a baby that will save the community from evil. But Theo is above all a flawed hero who only reluctantly accepts his messianic role, and has to be initiated by Julian, a more convincing saviour figure.

Julian is the leader of the Fishes and the guarantee for their peaceful agenda. The first appearance of Theo's ex-wife is significant inasmuch as it recalls a holy apparition. Theo has been kidnapped by the terrorist group and brought into a shed where he is blinded by a bright interrogation light that surrounds Julian's silhouette. According to Schwartzman, "Julian is presented in much the traditional way that the messiah figure is presented. She is obfuscated by the bright light emanating around her before we are able to see her clearly."[434] She introduces him to the project and lays the basis for his mission. There are other elements that emphasise Julian's heightened position. She is a 'mirror' who has the privilege to communicate with the Human Project, but a mirror's reflectiveness also suggests enlightenment and introspection. As Schwartzman states, it is "her ability to reflect or illuminate others' abilities to be part of the movement"[435] that is important. However, this first messianic figure is destined to be sacrificed for the sake of humanity, but it will take even more human sacrifice in order to transform Theo into a heroic figure. Nevertheless, the use of the soprano music, which throughout the film accompanies scenes of life and hope, to underscore Julian's burial, alludes to something transcendental occurring and initiates Theo's transformation.

[433] Schwartzman, para. 5 of 23.
[434] Schwartzman, para. 11 of 23
[435] Schwartzman, para. 11 of 23

There are nevertheless some elements that hint at Theo's messianic role from the beginning, starting with his name whose etymology is directly linked with the Greek word for God. Theo seems to be loved by animals, which can be read as a sign of his good-naturedness. Moreover, he is a peaceful man, who does not carry weapons or fight back (except during his escape from Syd). Even though his footwear is all but suitable for that, our hero tends to run. There are a consistent number of close-ups of the protagonist's feet and shoes throughout the film. For the most difficult part of his journey, his descent into the hell of Bexhill, Theo only wears a pair of flip-flop sandals. Rather than suitable shoes for an action hero, these are reminiscent of the footwear in Palestine during Christ's lifetime. However, as Schwartzman suggests, the insistence on feet and inept footwear also depict a character that is not well grounded.

In addition to the film's main mythologic narrative, the film strongly relies on more or less evident Christian symbology. When Theo and Kee leave the Russian apartment, a flock of sheep cross the street, somehow anticipating Theo's imminent sacrifice and maybe his role as shepherd. According to the director, the crying mother with her dead son on her lap, not only recalls a famous photograph taken during the Balkan war, but is a direct reference to Michelangelo's *Pietà* and all its significance.[436] The wound which eventually causes the protagonist's death is even more indicative: he bleeds from his side, just Jesus. This visual imagery is supported by the soundtrack. The scenes which represent life, intimacy and hope are underlined by "Fragments of a Prayer" sung by a soprano voice which recalls church music and stands in stark contrast with the high pitched ringing noise that accompanies scenes representing danger and death.

The Christian narrative finds its climax in the nativity scene, but is carefully prepared throughout the film. Kee is the mother of the redeemer of the world, the mother of hope. The barn, in which Theo finds out about her pregnancy, recalls the stable in which Christ was born, but also foreshadows the poor surroundings in which the saviour of the 21st century will be born. The girl is surrounded by cows, symbols of fertility and holy animals in some cultures. Kee is a sort of Black Virgin who recalls the Mexican Madonna of Guadalupe, but can also be seen as a reference to Africa as the cradle of humanity. Theo and Kee's conversation about her pregnancy might sound

[436] Voynar

blasphemous to a religious audience, but is another, albeit ironic, reference to the Christian nativity myth. She tells Theo that she does not know who the father of her baby is and jokingly says "I'm a virgin." Even though later in the film Miriam will invoke Saint Gabriel to help Kee complete her mission, it is clearly evident that the child is not an immaculate conception. We find out that the child representing hope and new life for humanity is the biological offspring of a "wanker."

Despite the baby's far from divine origin, its almost magical power is immediately felt by all those who come in touch with it. Kee's baby gives humanity hope for the future. When Theo, Kee and the baby flee from the building under fire – an image that recalls the flight of the holy family to Egypt – the people under attack realise that something magical is occurring. The bystanders are in awe as this Black Madonna with humanity's redeemer in her arms passes and walks down the stairs. The fighting stops as both rebels and soldiers realise the importance of the moment and provide a safe passageway for them.

#### 4.2.2.2 The Divine Child in *The Road*

In *Mis/Takes. Archetype, Myth and Identity in Screen Fiction*, Terrie Waddel discusses the relevance of the divine child archetype in contemporary films. She points out that

> The divine child archetype is a distinguishing feature of contemporary organized religious traditions: Christianity (Christ), Islam (Muhammad), Hinduism (Krishna) and Buddhism (Gautama Buddha), as well as polytheistic religions of ancient Egyptian, Mayan, Norse, Sumerian, Greek, Roman and Vedic cultures. Each bases their mythologies around the motif of special, gifted, enlightened or supernatural child figures, or figures destined to divinity from childhood, who act as vehicles for redemption. It's not surprising that numerous film and television versions of the saviour myth proliferate in popular culture through texts like *Astro Boy* (1963), *Superman* (1978), *Little Buddha* (1993), *The Terminator* trilogy, *Buffy*, *The Sixth Sense*, *The Matrix* trilogy. These wunderkinder of twentieth- and twenty-first century screen/comic culture are clear manifestations of past mythologies. But rather than diminishing the sacred or psychological properties of their earlier prototypes, these incarnations indicate a collective and ongoing need to project, incorporate, and reinforce the archetype as a signifier of future potential.[437]

Some of the characteristics of such a 'Wunderkind' can be detected in Kee's daughter in *Children of Men* and have been discussed previously. To some extent Andy, one of the

[437] Waddel, p. 103.

children in *28 Weeks Later*, depicts similar characteristics. The best example of the divine child archetype, however, can be found in the child protagonist of *The Road* and will now be discussed in further detail.

The inner journey of the father, which has already been discussed above, goes hand in hand with the concurrent development of the boy. Initially scared and shocked, he becomes aware of his role as a moral stronghold. It becomes his role to 'keep the fire burning.' In other words, it is the boy who has to remind his father of their moral duty as human beings. Whereas the father seems to have crossed a moral line during their encounter with the Black robber, the boy remains true to his destiny. He is a divine child, the bearer of light, and the hope for civilisation.

Throughout the film, the father hints several times at the divine qualities of his son: "All I know is the child is my warrant, and if he is not the word of God, then God never spoke."[438] He is the word of God made flesh. Furthermore, the old man they encounter on the road notices the boy's angelic nature: "When I saw that boy, I thought I'd died and he... he was an angel."[439] The father replies: "He's an angel. To me, he's a God."[440] Towards the end of the film the boy has indeed become, as Hillcoat describes him, a 'moral compass.'[441] He manages to convince his father to offer food and company for a night to the old stranger they meet on the road. But the emotional turning point occurs after his father's cruel and humiliating treatment of the Black man. The boy is really angry at his father for the first time, making the man aware of the fact that he has crossed an ethical line. Together with his father's failures, the boy grows as a human being and at the end of the film the boy is able to make decisions on his own. His father has died; he has left him with the necessary knowledge to survive in a hostile environment, and despite his moral failures, has managed to pass on human characteristics such as trust and kindness.

According to Waddel, who applies Jung's groundbreaking thoughts regarding archetypes states, "Divine children [...] are predisposed to shoulder the gifts of advanced human development, the nefarious threats and challenges that accompany such a mantle, and the victories of each battle."[442] She continues,

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[438] *The Road*
[439] *The Road*
[440] *The Road*
[441] *The Road*
[442] Waddel, p. 105 (referring to Jung, *CW* 9i, para 289).

> Jung refers to the divine child as a demi-god, half human and half supernatural/god-like, conceived and born under extraordinary circumstances to illustrate the struggle of psychological development: [...] To test the power of the child's endurance and divinity, a number of obstacles complicate its birth and infancy. Parental abandonment is a prime hurdle. Usually only the birth mother features as primary nurturer, the father is often of indeterminate origin.[443]

Child abandonment does occur in the film, yet parental roles are exchanged. The mother prefers death rather than a life in fear of savagery and abandons the child. As the father recalls, "She was gone. And the coldness of it was her final gift. But she died there somewhere in the dark. There is no other tale to tell."[444] The father, on the other hand, takes responsibility for his son's physical and moral growth, adopting the primordial role of passing on knowledge orally, around the open fire. In one of his voice-overs, the father points out: "Sometimes I tell the boy old stories of courage and justice, difficult as they are to remember."[445] Thus, in addition to practical skills, the wisdom and memories of another world contained in these heroic stories are also passed on to the next generation.

The child represents hope for the survival of civilisation. The *leitmotiv* of fire is visually emphasised by the fire around which father and son gather at the end of their exhausting days. In two instances the child holds a burning piece of wood. According to Jung, "Not a few child-figures are culture-heroes and thus identified with things that promote culture, e.g., fire, metal, corn, maize, etc. As bringers of light, that is, enlargers of consciousness, they overcome darkness, which is to say that they overcome the earlier unconscious state."[446] The fire is what Prometheus stole from Zeus who withheld it from mankind in order to force them to eat raw meat like animals. According to Joseph Campbell's reading of the Prometheus myth in *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*,

> Men, before he taught them, knew no arts but in the dark earth burrowed and housed, like ants in caves. They had no calendar until he taught them to know the rising and setting of the stars. He gave them numbers, the arts of writing, farming and the harnessing of the horse: metallurgy, medicine, divination; yes and the art, even, of making sacrifice to Zeus.[447]

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[443] Waddel, p. 107
[444] *The Road*
[445] *The Road*
[446] Carl Gustav Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Bollingen Series XX, vol. 9, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), part 1, para. 288 (p. 169).
[447] Campbell, *The Masks of God*, p. 279.

Thus, fire has always acted as an association with rationality and enlightenment, or in other words civilisation. Consequently, the boy's desire to 'keep the fire alive' not only represents an ethical decision, but also refers to the technological achievements of humanity, or even the ability to keep a calendar (which the man has not kept for years). Equally important is the the above mentioned desire to save the "old stories of courage and justice."[448]

#### 4.2.2.3 The Ambiguous Saviour in *V for Vendetta*

V is a tragic hero in that in addition to his heroic qualities he also presents some darker characteristics. His duality permeates his whole personality and can be explicitly seen in his political agenda, but also more subtly in the way his character is constructed.

V's identity is first of all constructed upon a theatrical paradigm already hinted at in the first scenes after the prologue which shows the character sitting in an actor's dressing room putting on his mask. The entrance to the room is draped in red, containing a bust of Shakespeare and a copy of John Everett Millais' *Ophelia*.[449] To Evey, V appears as a chivalrous gentleman with a rather affected pose and way of speaking. His sophisticated taste, his grace and eloquence as well as his fencing practice with a coat of arms are all reminiscent of Shakespeare's time.

According to Keller, there is a fairly obvious connection between the revenge tragedy and *V for Vendetta*,[450] not only implied by the title, but also because of V's frequent quotations of Shakespeare's tragedies which suggest analogies with some of the bard's villain heroes. Keller points out that V "models his post-Larkhill identity on Shakespeare's characters, filtering his experiences through a Shakespearean sieve."[451] The protagonist's first words in the film are from *Macbeth*. He rescues Evey from the Fingermen saying "The multiplying villainies of nature do swarm upon him (I.ii.13-14)"[452] as a reference to the behaviour of the Fingermen and their loyalty to a vicious dictator. However, the identification with the characters he quotes is not straightforward. Even though he seems invulnerable like Macbeth, his objectives are

[448] *The Road*
[449] Keller, p. 124.
[450] Keller, p. 138.
[451] Keller, p. 125.
[452] *V for Vendetta*

more like those of Macduff. Not only does he want to take revenge because of personal suffering and the loss of a dear person like Macbeth's antagonist, but similar to the protagonists of early modern revenge tragedies he intends to exact a retribution against a perpetrator who is rather insulated from the direct access of the revenger, which in the film is the dictator and the system he represents. V does not simply want to take revenge, he wants his antagonists to fully comprehend the implications of their deeds and be conscious of the retaliation. According to Keller, "V is Hamlet's ideal revenger, one who is not subject to the vicissitudes of 'blood and judgement' but is resolute, unswerving in his intent, capable of carrying out his project without rage, pity, or soul killing vexation."[453]

In spite of V's more than comprehensible personal and political *vendetta*, the protagonist presents the flaws of a tragic albeit villain hero which can be seen in the excessive violence of his acts of retaliation, his mercilessness in killing Delia despite her repentance, and last but not least the cruel torture of the heroine in order to free her from her fears. Before murdering Bishop Lilliman, V quotes from Shakespeare's Richard III: "And thus I clothe my naked villainy □With odd old ends stolen forth of holy writ, □And seem a saint, when most I play the devil (I.iii.335-337)."[454] The quote apparently refers to the bishop's hypocrisy and dissimulation and his way of exploiting religion for power and wealth. Yet, the statement could also be read as a self-mocking side blow to V himself who has assumed the mask of a just revenger and constructed it through Shakespearean references while simultaneously using fire, a devilish element, to bring along destruction.

V's choice of mask is significant. Guy Fawkes, sometimes referred to as "the only man ever to enter Parliament with honest intentions,"[455] is an ambiguous character in British history. He is the historic figure who wanted to blow up Parliament in order to either overthrow a regime that had increasingly become repressive after the renewal of Elizabeth's law against priests and recusants, or to introduce Catholicism and foreign influence. Guy Fawkes, whose effigies are traditionally burnt in bonfires throughout the country, has also become an anarchic hero. As Alan Moore explains, "Anarchy wears

[453] Keller, p. 138.
[454] *V for Vendetta*
[455] James A. Sharpe, *Remember, Remember: A Cultural History of Guy Fawkes Day* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 6.

two faces, both CREATOR and DESTROYER. Thus destroyers topple empires, make a canvas of clean rubble where creators can build a better world."[456] V was reborn in the fires of the Larkhill camp and since then his role has been that of unleashing fire and destruction in order to prepare the ground for a profound renewal. According to Keller, "he begins to resemble an allegorical embodiment of fate and justice."[457] Surviving the Larkhill imprisonment he has returned from the grave and become an instrument of fate, destruction and revenge. His role is juxtaposed, not only visually, with that of the female protagonist who represents fertility and renewal. Only Evey, who will succeed him in his mission after being reborn in the downpour after her incarceration, will assist in the creation and reconstruction of a new society. Thus, V represents the end of an era, whereas Evey represents the beginning. The idea of the end, of death, is symbolised by V's costume with his black cape and white mask which resembles the personification of Death in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*.

Not only V's costume, but also the fact that to some extent he embodies the idea of a virus escaped from a laboratory in order to torment its creators is linked to death. However, V has also come to save his people from totalitarianism, persecution and intolerance. His aim is that of re-establishing social and political principles. Like a messiah figure, not only does he sacrifice himself in order to defend the persecuted, but similar to Christ's blood, V's blood is used as a serum to cure humanity. On a practical level, V's blood is used to save the population after the biomedical attack by the government. Symbolically, he sheds his blood for the salvation of the British population. However, except for the curative qualities of his blood, V does not have much in common with the placid and peaceful Christ figure of the Gospels. He more accurately resembles the Christ figure of the Apocalypse described in 'The Revelation of John'[458] who on the day of wrath will use his sword to fight the unjust.

According to Keller, the paintings introduced in the film narrative are not selected randomly, but they actively comment upon the character and give further insight into his interiority.[459] William Blake's *Elohim Creating Adam* (1795) refers to the revenger's origins and fortunes and is inspired by the satanic school of Milton

[456] Alan Moore and David Lloyd, p. 222 (emphasis in the original).
[457] Keller, p. 207.
[458] Revelation 14-18.
[459] Keller, p. 172.

criticism that sees in Satan the spirit of rebellion countering tyranny, the epic hero with an indomitable will, the romantic hero who prefers death over domination.[460] V was reborn as a flawed character from the Larkhill flames. Larkhill had created a monster. Even Evey calls V a monster after finding out about the cruelty he was able to inflict upon her. V's physical monstrosity is invisible to both the audience and the female protagonist. V's lack of a face and eyes, and his scorched body force him behind a mask and imply, according to Keller, "an alienation from his own image, one that necessitates the creation of an identity that is forever shifting."[461] His identity is shifting between the messianic saviour and the satanic destroyer. His element is fire which links him to hell, but also has cleansing connotations.

V's duality can also be seen in minor aspects of his character. During his imprisonment in Larkhill he learned how to grow roses. When Evey decides to leave after her fake incarceration V shows her the shrine he made in order to commemorate Valerie, thus revealing that not everything in her dreadful experience was a lie. The red roses in front of Valerie's last film poster are a tribute to her, and her girlfriend who grew Scarlet Carsons for her lover. From a symbol of pure love the roses have become a symbol of death. In the graphic novel,[462] V grew the same roses in the Larkhill facility, and he later uses them to ornate the dead bodies of his torturers. Delia Surridge recognises V because of the roses. When V finally dies, the train carrying explosives and his dead body is covered with red roses. V represents both characteristics of the roses, death and love. At the end of his life, V is able to embrace both these aspects of his personality.

### 4.2.3 Elements of Cosmogony

According to the definition of myth in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Cosmogonic myths are concerned with origins in the sense of the foundation or validity of the world as it is."[463] Often, the world is created through sacrifice or a

[460] Keller, p. 174.
[461] Keller, p. 178.
[462] Alan Moore and David Lloyd, p. 81.
[463] 'myth', *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400920/myth/23579/Myth-in-culture> [accessed 8 January 2012]

primordial battle. The world is made up of irreconcilable opposites which in the act of creation are reconciled. In general, the main focus is on the origin of man and the origin of institutions. Cosmogonic myths are opposed to eschatological myths which are concerned with death and a cataclysmic end of the world.[464]

Two films in this study address the issue of the origin of a new world order, combining both cosmogonic and eschatological myths. Similar to the dying and rising hero – a myth which is linked to the vegetative cycle – also the world follows the cycle of death and renewal. In *Children of Men*, a male dominated world order is overcome and a possible new world order based on the reconciliation of opposites is suggested by the finale of the film. *The Road*, on the other hand, portrays the cyclical journey of humanity from civilisation to utter barbarianism and possibly, with the help of the few surviving 'good guys,' back to a new form of civilisation.

#### 4.2.3.1 The Reconciliation of Opposites in *Children of Men*

The key to understanding the deeper meaning of *Children of Men* can be perceived in the dialogue of two apparently minor characters and their function within the film. Miriam and Jaspers are faithful companions to the messianic figures, but they do not seem to belong to a Christian imagery. They come from a different realm and represent a different philosophy.

Miriam is a midwife, but she is above all a healer who believes that everything happens for a reason. Although her healing hands cannot prevent Julian from dying, she uses them like a shaman to perform a burial ritual that may help her spirit transmigrate. Miriam and Kee's prayers above Julian's dead body in the middle of the wood recall primordial matriarchal rituals and worship, but also contain Eastern elements.

Jasper has turned his back on society and lives far from what has become modern civilisation. In the middle of the woods he looks after his catatonic wife Janice. Like a primitive medicine man, he grows hallucinogenic drugs, thus providing relief to the suffering immigrants in the refugee camps. He also takes responsiblity for the life and death of his wife and dog. Moreover, he sees things not everyone can see, and he knows about the Human Project.

[464] Ibid.

The revelatory dialogue takes place in Jasper's house after Theo, Kee and Miriam have taken refuge there. There seems to be a deep understanding between Miriam and Jasper. Not only do both use the Hindu expression "shanthi, shanthi, shanthi," Miriam is also able to taste the strawberry flavour in Jasper's self-grown marijuana, and they express a similar worldview. As Jasper says, "Everything is a mythical cosmic battle between faith and chance," Miriam replies, "like Yin and Yang, like Shiva and Shakti." Kee, although not taking part in the conversation and reviewing some photographs adds, "Theo and Julian." Yin and Yang as well as Shiva and Shakti are Eastern philosophical concepts used to describe how seemingly contrary forces are interconnected in the natural world, and how they give rise to each other in turn. Many natural dualities, such as dark and light, female and male, low and high, are thought to be polar elements of a unity.

The whole film is based on contrary forces that are interconnected. Theo and Julian are an excellent example. Julian is a strong female character with leadership qualities usually associated with men, whereas Theo is a rather weak male character who has to perform some stereotypical female tasks. The film also explores the duality of infertility and fertility, best visualised in a scene that takes place in Jasper's house. Kee and Janice sit next to each other: the young, black, energetic, talkative woman on the sofa and the disabled, grey-haired, catatonic, mute woman in her wheelchair. The two female figures both provide a visual and symbolic contrast between life and death, past and future.

These opposites can also be seen in the two philosophies that inform the movie: the apparently dominant Christian one and the more subtle Eastern one. They are united in the film as work of art, both integral elements of a unity. The final words of the film, appearing after the credits, are "shanthi, shanthi, shanthi." They are also the final words in T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land providing further proof of the syncretic nature of the film. This idea may have inspired John Tavener to compose the musical poem "Fragments of a Prayer," which he describes as a 'musical and spiritual reaction to Alfonso's film.' According to Johnathan Broxton, "the piece is a slow, meditative, sacred-sounding work for a string orchestra, Tibetan temple bowls, and the crystal clear voice of mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly, who continually intones disjointed words in Latin, German and Sanskrit: 'mata', meaning 'mother', 'pahi mam', meaning 'protect

me', 'avatara', meaning 'saviour', and the ubiquitous "alleluia"."[465] Thus, Western and Eastern instruments and languages are combined to give voice to crucial scenes in the film.

All these opposites are finally united in the newborn baby whose name is Dylan, which is both a boy's and girl's name. Perhaps the interconnection of contrary forces is the only way humanity is able to overcome the eternal cycle of destruction and rebirth. Renewal requires not only the cutting of roots, but the combination of Western cyclical cosmogony with the Eastern idea of Brahma, a spirit which exists eternally and is in harmony with the universe.

#### 4.2.3.2 The End as New Beginning in *The Road*

The world in which *The Road* is set recalls, to a certain extent, the state of nature as depicted in Hobbes' *Leviathan* and other works of seventeenth and eighteenth century scholars. The violence of the environment apparently determines the behaviour of its inhabitants. In *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, the Romanian scholar Cătălin Avramescu, interpreting and directly quoting Hobbes, sees the state of nature as a situation without a sovereign authority that imposes order:

> This natural condition of mankind is one of primitivism and universal strife: 'In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death;[466] and the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.' [...] Thus in the state of nature reigns natural anarchy, savage and bloody, where natural law is perfectly compatible with brutality.[467]

Such a world is populated by people who have lost their humanity. Only the fittest and those willing to resort to any kinds of means survive. This description perfectly fits the world depicted in *The Road*, where there is a complete absence of political or social

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[465] Jonathan Boxton, 'Children of Men', *Movie Music UK*, 17 January 2007 <http://www.moviemusicuk.us/childrenofmencd.htm.> [accessed 2 September 2010]

[466] *Hobbes: Leviathan*, ed. by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), part 1, cap. 13. Cf. also *De cive* (10,1): "Extra civitatem, imperium affectuum, bellum, metus, paupertas, foeditas, solitudo, barbaries, ignorantia, feritas: in civitate imperium rationis, pax, securitas, divitiae, ornatus, societas, elegantia, scientiae, benevolentia."

[467] Cătălin Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, trans. by Alistair Ian Blyth (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 243.

institutions, and economic or cultural achievements. Furthermore, inhumanity becomes rampant as cannibalism emerges, reminiscent of the scenario imagined in a seventeenth century sermon, quoted by Avramescu, which states:

> Take Sovereignity from the face of the earth and you turne it into a Cockpit. Men would become cut-throats and Canibals one unto another. We should have a very hell upon earth, and the face of it covered with blood, as it was once with water.[468]

The world depicted in *The Road* is indeed a kind of hell in which the most extreme form of inhumanity is represented by survivors of the catastrophe gathering in groups and hunting down fellow survivors as prey. Violence is the order of the day and fear is what informs the actions of the individual. The film portrays a world that has moved back into primordial times when people were still savages, governed solely by their survival instincts, in which man really seems *to be a wolf to man*.

Very early in the film, the animalistic nature of some survivors is underlined by a scene in which father and son have to hide from a road gang. One gang member, who leaves the group to urinate, senses that someone else is close. What appear to be heightened animal instincts point him towards his victims, his sense of smell or hearing leading to the discovery of the father and son. Eventually, the man is shot by the frightened father who desperately protects his son. When the protagonists come back to the place where they had left their supply trolley, the man discovers the remains of his victim, his entrails. This is the first hint of cannibalism, in this case endophagy, which shows that the cannibals of *The Road* are so hungry as to eat even the flesh of their associate.

Thus, *The Road* is not only the journey of two individuals, but also a journey into the past, a journey both to the end and perhaps the beginning of human civilisation: a cyclic journey. The world portrayed represents the end of an era of civilisation, as everything humanity has attained lies collapsed. Similar to the picture conjured up in Hobbes' *Leviathan,* roads have been destroyed and no industry, agriculture or art survive. Human beings are reduced to their primary functions; as the protagonist states in a voiceover at the beginning of the film: "The clocks have stopped at 1.17. I think it's

[468] A sermon preached by Robert Bolton in 1621. Quoted in *Cambridge History of Political Thought: 1450-1700*, ed. by James Henderson Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 350-1

October. I haven't kept a calendar for years."[469] The characters' only aim is survival, and finding food and shelter. As if part of some kind of inverse historical process, settlers have become nomads again.

Cannibalism is a large part of this relapse into savagery. According to Brian Marriner, "Freudians, who coined the term 'oral fixation', postulate that cannibalism is simply a reversion to a primitive infant state where all the infant's needs are satisfied via the mouth, so that aggression is expressed by biting, and pleasure from sucking."[470] He also points out that some experts "feel that the act of cannibalism might be a reversion to primitive impulses, a return or slipping back to our ancestral primeval state when cannibalism was a common activity."[471] There are references to cannibalism throughout the film. The father remarks that "Cannibalism is the great fear"[472] to the extent that he would prefer killing his son by his own hand, rather than leaving him to the savages. Although cannibalism is generally seen as a taboo in most civilisations, according to Reay Tannhill in *Flesh & Blood. A History of the Cannibal Complex*,

> It is fundamentally only Jews and Christians who are dedicated to the proposition that eating the dead is worse than murder. On those occasions when instances of cannibalism are reported in the modern world, there is always talk of breaking 'humanity's oldest tabu'. Yet the tabu on eating human flesh is by no means the oldest tabu in the world – just one of those most deeply ingrained in the religions which have shaped the societies and beliefs of the most influential nations in the world today.[473]

In Judaeo-Christian culture, human sacrifice and cannibalism have been sublimated by religion. Referring to the doctrine of transubstantiation,[474] Tannhill points out that "Christianity adopted into its most sacred ritual an act of pure cannibalism, of unequivocal god-eating on the most primitive level. To the faithful, the communion wafer became not a symbol of the body of Christ but a part of his actual flesh."[475] Furthermore, she claims that "There have always been men and women who, from hunger or sheer perversity, have been ready and willing to eat their fellows."[476] Although there is proof of cannibalism in times of great famine and war throughout

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[469] *The Road*
[470] Brian Marriner, *Cannibalism. The Last Taboo!* (London: Arrow Books, 1992), p. 251.
[471] Ibid., p. 251.
[472] *The Road*
[473] Reay Tannhill, *Flesh and Blood. A History of the Cannibal Complex* (London: Abacus, 1976, 1996), p.48.
[474] Pope Innocent III, 4th Lateran Council, 1215.
[475] Tannhill, p. 82.
[476] Tannhill, p. 144.

Europe, even in recent history (e.g. cannibalism in concentration camps, during the siege of Stalingrad, or during the war in Bosnia), the issue remains a difficult one and is generally associated with barbarism. According to Avramescu,

> The eccentric taste for human flesh marks the difference between civilization and primitivism. This is why the civilization of the savages is sometimes presented as an education of culinary practices. Defoe, in Robinson Crusoe, also puts forward the theory of addiction to human flesh. Robinson's first reaction when faced with the remains of a cannibal feast, is one of horror and repulsion [...]. On discovering that Friday still craves human flesh and 'was still a Cannibal in his Nature,' he hatches a plan to 'bring [him] off from his horrid Way of feeding, and from the Relish of a Canibal's Stomach.' Surprisingly, Friday is so delighted with English cooking that he gladly gives up human flesh.[477]

*The Road* provides several instances of cannibalism which have been stylistically analysed in detail in the chapter on the adaptation of violence (see 3.2), but deserve a further analysis in terms of their metaphoric significance as return to savagery. The descent into the cellar in which human beings are kept like cattle is a descent into hell, into the underworld, a descent into a world of utter barbarianism, and in this context a descent into a primordial past. The cellar, a sort of death chamber, is crammed with human beings kept like cattle. As well as a common horror movie trope, this scene may be a reference to the mass murderer Leonard Lake, who was arrested in California in 1985. Lake had plans to stock food and weapons in a concrete bunker to survive a nuclear war, including captives in isolated chambers intended for food and sexual gratification.[478] However, whilst such images of the emaciated human figure, amputated limbs covered in blood, and scattered human flesh, vividly recall medieval depictions of hell by artists such as Hieronimus Bosch or Breughel, the trauma of twentieth century concentration camps is equally present. As Avramescu observes in his *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, "In Christian iconography, the Devil was long the principal devourer of humans. Paintings of the Last Judgment depict sinners devoured by Hell, which is represented as an insatiable maw spewing flames."[479] The prisoners are screaming for help, trying to grab the father and the son hoping to escape their inferno.

[477] Avramescu, p. 173.
[478] Marriner, pp. 254-5.
[479] Avramescu, p. 87.

The threat of cannibalism continues to loom constantly over the *The Road*, as later in the film the father and son are witnesses to a mother and child hunted down by a group of savages. Again, the scene is set by the preceding chain of images: bloody footprints in the snow, a cauldron, skulls on wooden sticks and a pile of skulls next to a tree, images that recall the primordial cult of the skull and the idea of the soul residing in the head.[480] In addition to this, the skulls on stakes are both a visual and thematic reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Francis Ford Coppola's film adaptation. As in Conrad's novel, the skulls can be read both as symbolic of a journey back into a primordial era, and as the symbol of dormant savage energies released by the complete absence of social control and restraint. Moreover, the horror expressed by Marlow after seeing Kurtz's degradation into savagery is the same horror the father in *The Road* experiences by seeing his familiar world turned aberrantly alien.

Any hope for humanity lies in the divine qualities of the boy, in his ability to sublimate the gruesome experiences of his journey and preserve what remains of the past civilisation represented by his father. Thus, the final encounter with a set of parents who refrain from eating their children and even their dog, and who are willing to adopt the boy, may be read as a sign that despite the bleakness of the film, humanity is not yet at an end and civilisation may rise again from its ashes.

### 4.2.4 Evil

Evil is a pervasive feature in all the films reviewed in this study. The films indicate that human beings are capable of cannibalism, as depicted in *The Road*, or political atrocities as demonstrated in *Children of Men* or *V for Vendetta*. In describing individual characters, the duality of V in *V for Vendetta* with both divine and monstrous characteristics has already been discussed. The most obvious instance of evil and monstrosity can be found in *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later* in form of the rage virus.

[480] Tannhill, p. 23.

#### 4.2.4.1 Rage – the Human Expression of Violence

Violence in its human expression – in the form of rage – is the major topic of *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*. Despite the purpose of maintaining a realistic edge to the films, the idea of the psychological manifestation of a virus, as opposed to a biological or chemical one, infecting the population of a whole country is slightly inconceivable, but allows for interesting philosophical questions about the disease. Is this a scientifically created virus or has it always been with humanity? To what extent are the infected still human and what makes them animal-like? Where does the difference between those infected by the rage virus and those taken by a desire for revenge lie?

Already, the opening scene of *28 Days Later* with a chimpanzee forced to watch news footage of civil unrest, violence and death on TV screens sets the premise. Human beings are capable of all kinds of atrocities towards their own kind and towards animals, even without the existence of a rage virus. The scientist explains that the animals are contagious with rage, their blood and saliva is highly infective. Very quickly, it becomes clear that the infected humans behave like wild animals. They ferociously attack other human beings, thus quickly transmitting the disease. Major Henry, who keeps an infected soldier in chains in order to find out more about the virus, has already learned that "he [the Infected] will never bake bread, farm crops, raise livestock. He's telling me he's futureless. And eventually he'll tell me how long the Infected take to starve to death."[481] These beings have lost all their human qualities and instincts. They have relapsed into a state of utter savagery. Only their features seem to somehow distinguish them from animals. Otherwise, they are primitive beings whose only drive is that of attacking and biting other human beings. Having lost their skills, their morals, the control over their dark inner self and even their ability to recognise their own image in a mirror, they seem to have regressed into a primitive, pre-cognitive state. However, even Major Henry, with his pragmatic view about finding out more about the infection, seems to have lost parts of his human traits. The way he treats Mailer who, only a few days ago, was one of his men shows how the pursuit of knowledge by all means can dehumanise mankind. Thus, both the science laboratory and the backyard in which

[481] *28 Days Later*

Mailer is kept prisoner become emblematic locations for the unethical attitude of institutions such as Cambridge University or the British army.

In his *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1898), Charles Darwin, who theorised human decendency from primates, analyses the characteristic symptoms of rage in human beings. His description perfectly fits the movements and expressions of the Infected in the film.

> Under this powerful emotion [rage] the action of the heart is much accelerated, or it may be much disturbed. The face reddens, or it becomes purple from the impeded return of the blood, or may turn deadly pale. The respiration is laboured, the chest heaves, and the dilated nostrils quiver. The whole body often trembles. The voice is affected. The teeth are clenched or ground together, and the muscular system is commonly stimulated to violent, almost frantic action. But the gestures of a man in this state usually differ from the purposeless writhings and struggles of one suffering from an agony of pain; for they represent more or less plainly the act of striking or fighting with an enemy.[482]

He also observes a "retraction of the lips and uncovering of the teeth during paroxysms of rage, as if to bite the offender" and considers it "so remarkable, considering how seldom the teeth are used by men in fighting."[483] According to Darwin, the physical manifestations of rage prove the animal-like nature of human beings and the reappearance of primitive instincts. Similarly, Major Henry's observation of the Infected's futurlessness goes in this direction.

Before Darwin, the Roman philosopher Seneca wrote a philosophical treaty on anger and described its physical and psychological manifestations. Again, the descriptions perfectly fit the portrayal of the Infected in *28 Days Later*. According to the philosopher, wrath is a characteristic of people with an innate vigour, who, "being hot and fiery [...] have no room for anything weak and feeble, but their energy is defective, as is the case with everything that springs up without cultivation through the bounty merely of nature herself,"[484] the result being recklessness and temerity. He considers anger, along with madness, ferocity, cruelty, and other passions linked to it as "the greatest of all ills,"[485] a clumsy, unwieldy, mental outburst beyond control. He explains:

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[482] Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, in *Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library*, cr. by Kathryn Schwarzschild and others (1998-99), p. 74 < http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DarExpr.html> [accessed 13 January 2012]
[483] Darwin, p. 242.
[484] Seneca, 'On Anger', *Moral Essays*, in *www.stoics.com*, ed. by Ben R. Schneider, Jr. (1999), II. xiv. 3-xv.3 <http://www.stoics.com/seneca_essays_book_1.html#ANGER1> [accessed 13 January 2012]
[485] Seneca, II. xii. 4-xiii. 1.

> No other emotion has an outward aspect so disordered: it makes ugly the most beautiful faces; through it the most peaceful countenance becomes transformed and fierce; from the angry all grace departs; [...] the veins swell, the breast will be racked by incessant panting, the neck will be distended by the frantic outrush of the voice; then the limbs tremble, the hands are restless, the whole body is agitated. What state of mind, think you, lies within when its outward manifestation is so horrible? Within the man's breast how much more terrible must be the expression, how much fiercer the breathing, how much more violent the strain of his fury, that would itself burst unless it found an outburst! [...] as such let us picture anger - its eyes aflame with fire, blustering with hiss and roar and moan and shriek and every other noise more hateful still if such there be, brandishing weapons in both hands (for it cares naught for self-protection!), fierce and bloody, scarred, and black and blue from its own blows, wild in gait, enveloped in deep darkness, madly charging, ravaging and routing, in travail with hatred of all men, especially of itself, and ready to overturn earth and sea and sky if it can find no other way to harm, equally hating and hated.[486]

And its major characteristic is that "unlike the other vices, it does not seduce but abducts the mind."[487] However, according to Katja Maria Vogt's article on "Anger, Present Injustice and Future Revenge in Seneca's De Ira", the generally agreed Stoic definition of anger is that of "a desire to *punish* or *take revenge*. To be angry means to desire an action which will bring about retaliation – the emotion of anger is partly defined through the action that the agent desires."[488] Consequently, the anger Seneca talks about can only refer to human beings, since it is a characteristic of humankind to seek revenge. Therefore, the question arises to what extent the Infected in the film can still be considered as humans, or whether they have entered a pre-human state.

Jim, unlike the Infected, experiences the human form of anger which, on a superficial level, apparently does not differ from that of the human monsters in the movie. Throughout the film, from an initially rather passive character who has just woken up from a coma, he develops into an increasingly active character, who slowly discovers the darker sides of his personality. The cold-blooded, although self-defensive murder of the infected child in the deserted chip shop is only a first step towards the awakening of his willingness to use violence. Later in the film, when his own life and the girls' safety are in danger, his instincts drive him towards irrational actions. He frees the imprisoned infected, thus becoming responsible for the spread of the disease inside

[486] Seneca, II. xxxv. 3-xxxvi. 4.
[487] Seneca, III. i.3-ii.1.
[488] Katja Maria Vogt, 'Anger, Present Injustice and Future Revenge in Seneca's *De Ira*' in *New Developments in Seneca Studies: Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition*, ed. by Gareth Williams and Katharina Volk (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 57-74 (p. 58).

the secure area, and meanwhile putting the two girls at risk. Mailer attacks the soldiers, initiating a domino effect. Jim not only witnesses the devastation that Mailer causes, but plays an active part in the killing of some soldiers. The protagonist's terrible look and frantic search for the girls makes it almost impossible for the audience, but also for Selena later, to see whether he has been infected or not. When Jim kills Mitchell, the soldier who has abducted Selena in order to rape her, there seems to be no difference between him and the Infected. He violently attacks the soldier and kills him with his bare hands, putting his fingers into the sockets of Mitchell's eyes. Jim's face is covered in blood, he even seems to spit blood like the Infected. In the director's audio commentary, Boyle explains that the similarity with the Infected was deliberate. The same filming technique that was used for the Infected throughout the film is also employed for Jim's state of wrath, in order to create the visual suggestion "that he was infected. And indeed he is infected with rage, with a kind of vengeance."[489] Nevertheless, despite Selena's initial shock and her willingness to defend herself with a knife, she hesitates longer than the famous heartbeat (which she mentioned at the beginning of the film) and realises that Jim is not infected.

However, this raises the question as to where the difference between those infected with the rage virus and those being possessed by the human form of rage lies. Rage has always been part of mankind. The clips of news footage showing street violence in Sierra Leone at the opening of the film emphasises that humanity has always been capable of all sorts of atrocities. The visual references to man-made tragedies, such as those in Rwanda, Bosnia or northern Iraq throughout the film suggest that there is no need for a scientifically created virus to unleash the darker forces of humanity. The only difference seems to be as indicated by Seneca, whose treatise *De Ira* aims at understanding the phenomenon of anger, thus showing up ways to alleviate this very human emotion. As already mentioned above, wrath is linked to the desire to take revenge, but can be escaped through a stoic attitude, or in other words through self control. The Infected in the film, on the other hand, have lost their desires, they are driven by mere instincts, which links them to the animals from which the virus has come.

[489] Boyle, 'Audio Commentary.'

#### 4.2.4.1 The Werewolf Myth in *28 Weeks Later*

One of the major differences between the two films *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later* is the portrayal of the Infected. As previously mentioned in analysing Danny Boyle's film, the Infected are presented almost as animals. The rather secondary mirror scene in which one of the infected soldiers is puzzled by his own reflection, and the general's analysis of the futurelessness of the Infected both support my argument. In Fresnadillo's *28 Weeks Later*, one of the Infected, the father of the two child protagonists, becomes a major character, but more importantly, Don retains some of his human characteristics. There is logic in his action and his instincts are controlled by his desire to track down his two children. As I already pointed out in my previous analysis, according to Seneca, desire is an important ingredient of human wrath and consequently distinguishes human beings in rage from animals in rage.

The origins of the virus in the film, and the decision to keep some human characteristics in portraying the infected father allow for some interesting considerations about a myth that may lie behind the rage virus. The virus in the film resembles the rabies virus. According to *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, rabies is a virus disease transmitted by the bite of a rabid animal and is borrowed from the Latin word rabiēs meaning madness, rage, fury, which refers to the Sanskrit *rábhas* meaning violence, impetuosity.[490] The symptoms of the illness, such as, agitation, violent movements, uncontrolled excitement, hypersalivation, as well as the inability to speak and swallow, can be detected in the infected people of the film. In his *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, Avramescu points out that the animal mostly associated with rabies is the wolf and he emphasises that rabies was considered a cause of antropophagy before Pasteur found a vaccine against it.[491] He recalls an incident taken from the *Histoires prodigieuses extraicts de plusieurs auteurs*[492] in which guests were served pork from a pig that had been bitten by a rabid dog and as a consequence became rabid themselves starting to bite and rent each other. According to Avramescu, "the lycanthrope, that hybrid of man and wolf, is well known for its appetite for human

[490] *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, p. 879, p. 882.
[491] Avramescu, p. 93.
[492] *Histoires prodigieuses extraicts de plusiers auteurs* (Paris, 1598), pp. 190-91.

flesh."[493] Thus, the infected in *28 Weeks Later* bear some resemblance to the werewolf myth, which is also heightened by the twilight atmosphere throughout the film.

### 4.2.5 Archetypal Motives

#### 4.2.5.1 The Feminine in *Children of Men*

According to Sarah Schwartzman's reading discussed above, the film gives a rather straightforward representation of the Christian saviour myth, but there are some interesting variations.

The child who represents the future of humanity is human born, and as the title of the film suggests, we talk about children of men and not about children of god. Apparently the title also alludes to a rather patriarchal world order. Where are the women? In the apocalyptic world of *Children of Men*, men are in power. They provide transit papers (like Theo's cousin Nigel), they imprison people (like Syd), they carry guns (like most of the male members of the Fishes, the soldiers and the police men) and 'daddy government,' as Jasper states, provides comfort through Quietus. Even the protagonist, designated to protect Kee, is a man, and so are the characters that provide means of transport. However, the characters who promote change are either female or do not really belong to the chauvinist world order. Jasper, and to a certain extent the old Russian who provides the boat, both live in seclusion from the outside world and are immersed in their past memories, represented by their photographs and newspaper clippings. Similarly, Theo is all but a typical chauvinist hero. He may appear as a man, but some of his rather unmanly characteristics mentioned above in connection with the messianic elements, make him an a-typical hero and hence, rather inept to protect someone as precious as Kee. Moreover, throughout his journey he has to take on different female roles. Theo has to step into Miriam's shoes and act as a midwife – a role traditionally associated with women – in order to help Kee deliver the baby. Later, on the boat, Theo has to give Kee some advice on how to deal with the crying infant. Again, the secrets of childrearing are traditionally passed on from mother to daughter.

[493] Avramescu, p. 93.

The people who really attempt to change the world do not belong to the male world order. Julian, the initiator of the whole mission, is in charge of communicating with the Human Project. She is the catalyst who pulls Theo into the journey. Miriam and Maruchka, whose names are etymologically linked to that of Mary, are two faithful companions, who pass on their knowledge to help Theo and Kee complete their tasks, using their instincts to save them in life-threatening situations. What is most important, however, is that the child the world has been waiting for so long is a girl. The hope for humanity is female. Does this imply a movement back to a matriarchal world order?

#### 4.2.5.2 The Family in *28 Weeks Later*

The whole tragedy of *28 Weeks Later* is based on the curse that seems to lie on a single family. In the commentary to the film, the director points out that one of the aims of the film is to emphasise how something microscopic such as a virus can lead to cataclysmic events, in other words the destruction of a whole world.[494] This idea is paralleled by the apparently insignificant feeling of guilt Don has after abandoning his wife in the cottage which eventually triggers a catastrophe of such dimensions. Similarly, the loss the children feel because of the supposed death of their mother lies at the basis of the destruction of the whole world.

The tragedy of children being chased and attacked by their own parents is already hinted at in the opening scene when Alice accepts a little boy into the house and thus attracts the Infected who run after him. Her mother's instinct is stronger than her survival instinct. Later, the strong bond between children and mother leads Andy and Tammy to their home where they find their mother. Similarly, the bond between the father turned monster and his children is so strong as to motivate Don to pursue his children.

The family is cursed and to a certain extent blessed from the very beginning. The special gene Andy and his mother have, which is linked to the colour of their iris, prevents them from getting the symptoms of the infection. Thus, they become dangerous, unrecognisable carriers of the disease with the ability to transmit it, but at the same time become valuable for vaccine research. The two different irides emphasise the duality of the characters, their dark side and their bright side. It is first visualised in

[494] Fresnadillo, 'Director and Producer Commentary' [on DVD]

the woman's loving hug which could easily change into an attack when she meets her son. But it is best exemplified in the loving and forgiving kiss she gives her husband, which transforms him into a monster. She is the carrier of rage, and she passes rage on through love. The boy, on the other hand, has almost divine characteristics. He looks like an angel, is brave and loves his father even when he has turned into a monster, but he cannot escape his destiny. Instead of providing science with the possibility of a cure for the infection, he becomes the carrier who will export the disease to the rest of the world. Instead of being a saviour, he involunatrily becomes a diabolic figure.

The importance of the eyes recalls the fear of the evil eye in many Mediterranean cultures. Here the eyes become the sign of evil. On the other hand, the film also seems to play with the idea of the function of the eye. Often, the audience sees the action indirectly through different means such as gun spotters, video recordings or night sensing equipment. While the military force wants to control everything through these means, the microscope gives insight into the workings of the virus. However, all these technical achievements are unable to prevent the catastrophe. Tammy, on the other hand, does not need any special equipment to see that her brother is infected. She perfectly sees the infection in his eyes, but what she mostly sees is what is beyond the infection. Andy is still her little brother. Thus, her heart perceives better than her eyes, and the decision she takes is a decision from her heart. When she finally assumes the role of mother by shooting her father and addressing him by his first name as only a wife and not a daughter would, her protective instinct similar to that of a mother towards her child makes her responsible for the worldwide spread of the infection. Thus, she can be seen as an angel of death who allows rage to spread all over the world. Ironically, in *28 Weeks Later*, acts of love cause rage to proliferate.

# Chapter Five: Catharsis

## 5.1 Introduction

### 5.1.1 The Catharsis Concept and its Development

The term '*katharsis*' has been translated in various ways throughout its development as an aesthetic concept – as purification, cleansing, clarification or purgation – according to the emphasis the scholar wanted to give this rather elusive concept. Girard refers the term *katharsis* back "to the mysterious benefits that accrue to the community upon the death of a human *katharma* or *pharmakos*."[495] According to Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, the Greek term *katharma* has a double significance: "In its first meaning it indicates a malevolent object that is expelled in the course of a ritual act; its second meaning is that of a human victim in a ritual sacrifice, a variant of the pharmakos."[496] This reference to ancient ritual is strongly emphasized in Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*. As Girard points out, "In describing the tragic effect in terms of katharsis, [Aristotle] asserts that tragedy can and should assume at least some of the functions assigned to ritual in a world where ritual has almost disappeared."[497]

Catharsis, originally a medical term, entered the realm of aesthetics through Aristotle's *Poetics*, but it can be traced back to the origins of humanity and is considered as innate to all human experience. Traces of it can be observed in primates, the species closest to humans as well as in ancient rituals and sacrifices, which bear testimony to the inherent human need of the purifying aspects of catharsis. Aristotle's *Poetics*, mentioning the cathartic effects of art, is the result of his intellectual engagement with Plato's claims about the dangers of the mimetic qualities of poetry and has influenced all subsequent aesthetic thought in the Western world. During the Renaissance period, with its emphasis on the ethical obligations of literature, the idea of the utility of poetry becomes prominent, but also leads towards a reevaluation of the

[495] Girard, *Violence,* p. 287.
[496] Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture – Art – Society*, trans. by Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 260.
[497] Girard, *Violence,* p. 290.

Aristotelian claim of the purifying effect of poetry, its role in furthering the moral education and improvement of the individual.[498] In eighteenth century bourgeois tragedy, according to Gebauer and Wulf, "The theory of catharsis becomes the conceptual mechanism by which the stage is made the preeminent site of the unfolding of the bourgeois cult of emotion."[499] During Enlightenment, the German dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing translates the term 'catharsis' as '*Läuterung*' (best conveyed by the term 'purification'), implying the conversion of excessive emotions such as pity and fear into a balanced, virtuous disposition of the human psyche. The term's original pre-Aristotelian use as medical term meaning purgation is taken up in the mid 1850s by Jacob Bernay[500] who sees catharsis as an elimination of a pathological state and thus somehow anticipates Freud's use of the term in psychoanalysis. However, for this study the aesthetic connotation of the term is fundamental.

### 5.1.2 Catharsis as Fundamental Human Experience

The question whether violent performances, either in film or theatre, excite or discharge violent feelings, has been widely discussed. According to Richard Schechner in *Performance Theory*, performances do both:

> They uncover hidden feelings, arousing them in the extreme. But this arousal does not lead to action, rather to a cathartic discharge and ultimate calm. Even when extremely worked up – as by the Living Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s – spectators did not seriously agitate in the streets. Rather they went outside to play.[501]

This cathartic discharge seems to be innate to all human beings and may well go back to primordial times. In order to underline his point, Schechner quotes George Beals Schaller[502], a mammologist who, while studying mountain gorillas in central Africa, observed that their chest-beating serves as discharge of excitement and showing-off, repelling intruders and maintaining group hierarchies. According to Schechner, "The function of discharging excitement among gorillas is parallel to the cathartic function of

[498] Gebauer and Wulf, p. 80.
[499] Ibid., p. 152.
[500] Jacob Bernay, *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie*, introd. by Karlfried Gründer (1857; reprint Hildesheim, New York: Olms, 1970)
[501] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 249, (Note 1).
[502] George Beals Schaller, *The Mountain Gorilla: Ecology and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963)

theatre proposed by Aristotle and Artaud, an ancient, persistent, and robust therapeutic tradition of performance."[503] Apparently, the build-up of tension among the gorillas does not lead to fighting but to display. In other words, the tension is transformed into entertainment making it thus similar to human dramatic performances in which violence is present in both themes and gestures, but appeased by the process of theatricalisation which most of the time results in an entertaining performance.[504] Drama, be it filmic or theatrical, evolves around the conflict between longing and constraint: social and moral taboos such as adultery, incest, or cannibalism (all based on forbidden relationships), in spite of being blocked by law and custom, are still desired. Schechner explains,

> If the forbidden relationships are consummated in fact (as they sometimes are) the social order may be threatened. When the social order is threatened, even by fantasies and desires, a special kind of performance is called for [...]; often enough the desires manifest themselves in wholly fictionalized transformations of the forbidden events (drama). But [...] what must be performed are the forbidden acts which are thereby both released and contained. The formal nature of these ur-dramas [...] guarantees some measure of control over the impulses being encated."[505]

In other words, instead of creating more anxiety, the performance of these taboos relaxes and appeases tensions.

Works of art of all kinds often portray the most horrible deeds, including bloody conflicts, torture and many other imaginable atrocities carried out by people, gods, monsters, beasts and demons. However, all these are portrayed or acted out as ritual and/or play. When action is involved, be it imaginary or real, we can talk about redirected behaviour. According to Schechner,

> Redirected behavior and displacement activities in people create complicated sequences of transformations, different in each culture, maybe in each individual, but interculturally recognizable as make-believe. Audiences can enjoy watching/participating and performers can enjoy playing out what otherwise would be dangerous, forbidden, or inhibited. Acting out the troubles of Oedipus, the murders of Macbeth [...] all yield great pleasure. In serious drama or tragedy as well as farce, the pleasures derive from excess of energy released when obstacles to seeing/participating in taboo actions are suddenly removed.[506]

This release of excessive energy does not only concern tragic but also comic performances. Schechner points out that all human theatre, and consequently also film,

[503] Schechner, p. 208.
[504] Schechner, p. 208.
[505] Schechner, pp. 242-3.
[506] Schechner, p. 247.

"is created by processes analogous to dream-work/joke-work," which are versions of redirected activities and displacement. Performances serve to "*mediate or explore for pleasure interactions that are potentially risky and disruptive.*"[507] Consequently, where there is risk for trouble, enactments of ur-conflicts may ease the way.

### 5.1.3 Ritual, Sacrifice and Catharsis

Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) links catharsis with ancient rituals and sacrifice. He sees the tragedy *Oedipus the King* as a sublimation of primordial strategies developed in order to cope with violence in society. The tragedy represents all the necessary ingredients of the sacrificial crisis and its solution through the sacrifice of a scapegoat. Catharsis in the play reflects the purifying effect of sacrifice on society and the consequent interruption of the cycle of violence. Girard presumes that prior to the foundation of a legal system and consequently the establishment of order, there must have been a situation of lawlessness. Institutions such as religion or the legal system are the result of violent acts, a sort of founding violence, necessary for them to be established as such. The chain of violent acts with violence leading towards vengeance and thus to other violent acts which need to be avenged requires one single act of violence capable of preventing further violent acts. According to Girard, in conditions of extreme social crisis, a scapegoat, usually an outsider or a marginalised figure, becomes responsible for the crisis and all the violence inherent in society is turned against this individual. This sacrifice of an individual leads to communal vengeance and consequently unites the previously rivalling members of society. However, violence does not disappear from society, but the cathartic discharge leads to unity and the establishing of regulations in order to prevent new outbreaks of violence. In *Oedipus the King*, through parricide and incest, the protagonist has become responsible for the sufferings his people has to endure, but by expiating his guilt he also becomes the saviour and founder of a new culture. So, as a real *pharmakos*, Oedipus encompasses both aspects of violence, the poisonous and the curative one.[508]

[507] Schechner, p. 247 (emphasis in italics in the original).
[508] Girard, *Violence*, pp. 72-93

Religious rituals can prevent violence. Choosing a human or animal scapegoat to be sacrificed channels the violence inherent in a community onto one victim. Thus, violence is tricked into, as Girard puts it, "spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals."[509] However, according to him, in order to defend ourselves against violence we need to fully understand its nature and accept that religion as such is not necessarily a way out, in that channelling violence contributes to perpetuating it. In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World,* Girard sees a new development and possible solution in Christianity which seems to interrupt the cycle of violence. The murder of Christ does not call for revenge, but for forgiveness, thus breaking the cycle of revenge and counter-revenge. Therefore, Christ lacks the poisonous aspect of violence: he is simply a victim, the divine without its violent element. This unconditional renunciation to violence brings an end to mimetic rivalry which is the origin of the cycle of violence.[510]

### 5.1.4 Catharsis in Relation to the 'Real' and the 'Chora'

Real catharsis can be experienced when the work of art leads you towards the edge of the Real or provides you with a sense of the chora. The concepts of the 'Real' and the 'semiotic chora' have been respectively theorised by Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva. Lacan's model of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary, according to Lionel Bailly, represents "a system of interacting realms, orders or registers in which the psyche functions."[511] In very simplified terms, the concepts of the 'chora' and the 'Real' refer to all human experience which goes way back before entering the symbolic order, in other words, experiences that cannot be expressed or rationalised through conscious means of expression. Both, the Real and the chora seem to be without reach, but can be sensed through a real artistic experience.

According to Lacan, the Real refers to a state of nature which is lost when we enter the Symbolic order (language, the law of the father). According to Bailly's reading of Lacan's concept, "The Real is best thought of as ineffable and unimaginable – a state

[509] Girard, *Violence,* p. 36.
[510] René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1987) pp. 141-223.
[511] Linoel Bailly, *Lacan: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), p. 88.

perhaps only experienced pre-birth."[512] Newborn babies, still unaware of a separation between the self and the outer world and whose only urge is that of satisfying fundamental needs, may experience something similar to this original state. This fullness, this completeness is, however, definitely lost when the child gets access to the Imaginary order the moment it enters the Mirror Phase and starts conceptualising. Thus, the Real becomes impossible in that it cannot be grasped through concepts and language, since both the Imaginary and the Symbolic are responsible for the separation from the Real. However, the influence of the Real can be felt throughout the whole life, in moments when all linguistic or expressive structures fail. This can be traumatic insofar as it makes us aware of our materiality, but on the other hand, it is also at the basis of what Lacan calls jouissance, the enjoyment produced by the function connected with a drive, inasmuch as the drives belong into the realm of the Real.[513] In this way, the encounter with the Real in cathartic experiences is both traumatic and pleasurable.

Žižek explores Lacan's concept of the Real through the discussion of a science fiction novel, *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag* (1989) by Robert A. Heinlein. In the novel, the human universe is just one of many existing universes which are works of art created by mysterious beings. The main character, Jonathan Hoag, hires a detective in order to find out what happens to him every day when he goes to work to an office which is located on the thirteenth floor of a building. The detective follows Hoag, but the latter disappears somewhere between the twelfth and the fourteenth floor. In fact, the thirteenth floor is only a fantasy space. Hoag eventually finds out that he has been sent by the creator of this universe to control the perfection of the artistic creation. He relates this to his detective friend and his wife, telling them that the world they inhabit has a minor defect which will, however, not affect them as long as they do not open the window of their car. They want to follow Hoag's advice, but on their way through the city, the detective and his wife come across an accident and are asked to open the window by a patrolman. However, when they open the window, outside, there is "nothing but a grey and formless mist, pulsing slowly as if with inchoate life. They could see nothing of the city through it, not because it was too dense but because it was

[512] Bailly, p. 98.
[513] Bailly, p. 102.

– empty. No sound came out of it; no movement showed in it."[514] When they close the window, the previous scene is restored.

Žižek compares this 'grey and formless mist, pulsating slowly as if with inchoate life,' with "the Lacanian Real, the pulsing of the presymbolic substance in its abhorrent vitality."[515] However, what is fundamental for Žižek is the place from which this Real erupts, namely "the very borderline separating the outside from the inside, materialized in this case by the windowpane."[516] Seen from inside a car, outside reality seems slightly distant. The glass of the window is some sort of filter that makes the outside world appear, as Žižek's puts it, like "another mode of reality, not immediately continuous with the reality inside the car."[517] This discontinuity can be felt when the window is rolled down and external reality hits us with its material presence. The moment the barrier of the glass is removed, we are overwhelmed by the proximity of reality. Behind the protective screen, the external objects are "transposed into another mode. They appear to be fundamentally 'unreal,' as if their reality has been suspended, put in parenthesis – in short, they appear as a kind of cinematic reality projected onto the screen of the windowpane."[518] It results in the feeling that the outside is fictional. With the screen removed, Žižek explains, "It is as if, for a moment, the 'projection' of the outside reality had stopped working, as if, for a moment, we had been confronted with the formless grey, with the emptiness of the screen."[519] The barrier between Real and reality guarantees normalcy. However, when the Real overwhelms reality, psychosis is the result.[520]

According to Mark Pizzato, Lacan "redefines catharsis in a more complex, tragic sense as purifying desires and clarifying drives at that edge of the Real."[521] He interprets Lacan's Real order of abject loss and lacking being as "an abyss of indiscernibility beyond the stage or screen edge"[522], "the void within the spectator."[523] He points out that "an ethics of the Real would realize this tragic void within oneself, rather than

[514] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 14.
[515] Ibid.
[516] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 15.
[517] Ibid.
[518] Ibid.
[519] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 15.
[520] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 20.
[521] Pizzato, p. 15.
[522] Ibid.
[523] Ibid.

projecting it upon the evil villain, melodramatically."[524] This idea is in line with Alenka Zupančič's interpretation of the Real. She argues,

> The Real happens to us [...] as 'the impossible thing' that turns our symbolic universe upside down and leads to the reconfiguration of this universe. Hence, the impossibility of the Real does not prevent it from having effect in the realm of the possible. This is when ethics comes into play, in the question forced upon us by an encounter with the Real: will I [...] reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence?[525]

Thus, the encounter with the Real in the form of a 'grey and formless mist' makes us aware of the illusion of what we conventionally consider to be reality. We realise that our impression of reality is only a projection, a creation which consequently does not have the status of absolute truth and can thus be put into question.

Pizzato also quotes a conversation with Žižek in which the latter advised him that

> An ethics of the Real [...] does not involve the heroic approach to the edge of an abyss, to get a glimpse of the Real, and then withdraw. Rather, it is a discovery of the Real within oneself, of a blind spot in the viewer, not some external place beyond symbolic and imaginary screens.[526]

This point mirrors Pizzato's theory of melodramatic catharsis as opposed to tragic catharsis, in other words, a distinction between

> the viewer's simplistic, 'moral' identification with a purely good hero, who fights at the cliff's edge and beats the evil villain, [and] the more complex, ethical challenge of the hero also discovering the tragic flaw within himself, of evil in the good – evoking in the spectator not just a purgation of fear and pity, but also a purification of desire, clarifying the drive that encircles the void of the Real.[527]

The order of the Real is to some extent related to Julia Kristeva's reading of Plato's concept of the *chora*, a rhythmic space responsible for the creation of meaning.[528] Plato tells us that the chora is akin to a mother's womb, with the maternal body comprising the semiotic chora and keeping horror and ecstasy at the periphery. Primal memories from the maternal body continue to influence a subject's mind and are also linked to cleansing rites of catharsis in some cultures.[529] So, the shared experience

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[524] Ibid.
[525] Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 235.
[526] Pizzato, p. 190 (Note 38).
[527] Ibid.
[528] Pizzato, pp. 190-91 (Note 45), p. 16.
[529] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 25-28, 46-59.

of ritual theatre within the community redefines the destruction of fear and sympathy as the purification of desire and drive. According to Pizzato, "This provides a new theory of the potential cathartic purpose of violence in performance, drawing also on the diametrically opposed ideologies of Artaudian cruelty and Brechtian alienation in modern theatre's challenges to its audiences."[530] Kristeva underlines the link between purification of the abject, religion and art. According to her,

> The various means of *purifying* the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion. Seen from that standpoint, the artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies, appears as the essential component of religiosity. That is perhaps why it is destined to survive the collapse of the historical forms of religions.[531]

Thus, there seems to be a strong link between sacrifice and catharsis. For Kristeva, Aristotle's catharsis is close to "sacred incantation."[532] She explains,

> Through the mimesis of passions – ranging from enthusiasm to suffering – in 'language with pleasurable accessories,' the most important of which being *rhythm* and song (see the *Poetics*), the soul reaches *orgy* and *purtiy* at the same time. What is involved is a purification of body and soul.[533]

It is through rhythm and song (elements associated with the chora) that the impure is stirred up, but in order to be harmonised by appeasing heated outbursts and filling the gap between body and soul. She continues,

> To Platonic *death*, which owned, so to speak, the state of purity, Aristotle opposed the act of *poetic purification* – in itself an impure process that protects from the abject only by dint of being immersed in it. The abject, mimed through sound and meaning, is *repeated*. Getting rid of it is out of the question [...]; one can, however, bring it into being a second time, and differently from the original impurity. It is a repetition through rhythm and song, therefore through what is not yet, or no longer is 'meaning,' but arranges, defers, differentiates and organizes, harmonizes pathos, bile, warmth, and enthusiasm.[534]

However, despite this link between catharsis and the chora, or the Real, Kristeva points out that "Purification is something only the Logos is capable of,"[535] thus associating it with the Symbolic order. Therefore, catharsis apparently works on different levels. Tragic catharsis seems to require connection with something that is out

[530] Pizzato, p. 16.
[531] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on the Abject.*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 17.
[532] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 28.
[533] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 28-29.
[534] Ibid.
[535] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 27.

of reach (like the Real or the chora) and at the same time the rationalisation of this experience through the Symbolic.

### 5.1.5 Catharsis, the Death Drive and Pleasure

One of the functions of tragedy and catharsis is that of offering the audience pleasure by enabling them to reexperience tragic events and thus broadening the range of their experience in safe circumstances which do not require direct involvement. This kind of pleasure is linked to the desire to survive. In *Mimesis – Culture – Art – Society*, Gebauer and Wulf point to the fundamental difference in Plato and Aristotle's views of the respective dangers or benefits of an encounter with the aesthetisation of horror through works of art. As they put it,

> In contrast to Plato, mimetic identification with the horror expressed in tragedy suggests to Aristotle precisely the promise of fortifying oneself against the 'horrifying' and 'pitiful.' Mimetic reception of tragedy is not, as in Plato, a threat to the individual but the means by which he or she cultivates internal strength. Aristotle interprets the strengthening as the result of a 'purification process' set in motion by tragedy, which offers a further explanation for the pleasure it releases.[536]

In *The Shattering of the Self. Violence, Subjectivity, & Early Modern Texts*, Cynthia Marshall explains why the contemplation of described or enacted violence has a certain impact on readers or viewers. She uses Freud and Lacan's concept of the death drive to explain the need of human beings to experience a dissolution of identity through interaction with art. Even though we generally try to avoid thinking about our own deaths, the performance of violence representing life-threatening fears or providing glimpses of death is hugely attractive to human beings. The involvement with works of art hinting at extreme experiences "displac[es] the ordinary structuring bonds of selfhood to effect a radical emotional response."[537] This is necessary "not because people are innately cruel or aggressive but because the ego imposes an alienating unity that fails to contain all aspects or levels of the subject's experience and knowledge."[538] Thus, this drive is necessary to integrate the self with what it is lacking, or helps to

[536] Gebauer and Wulf, p. 56.
[537] Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, & Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 159-60.
[538] Marshall, p. 160.

grasp something of the Real. Marshall further develops Richard Boothby's reading of Lacan's death drive as operating on both, the Imaginary and the Symbolic,[539] but emphasises its different functions according to the two different orders:

> Within the Imaginary (in Lacan's terms the level of ordinary existence), the death drive or primary masochism produces actual violence, either in active form or mimetically through images of literal violence, while the Symbolic allows a mediation or sublimation of literal violence. [...] Complex manipulations of the death drive that encourage symbolic mediation have an obvious advantage over the simple reiteration of images of literal violence.[540]

Thus, even though catharsis may provide a glimpse of the Real, the Symbolic order is necessary to make sense of the ungraspable. Brecht's critique of Aristotle's tragedy may go in a similar direction: the immediacy of the experience, the emotional involvement of the audience and the physicality of the cathartic experience position Aristotle's tragedy closer to the realm of the Imaginary, whereas Brecht's distancing devices position his epic theatre closer to the Symbolic allowing a more rational engagement with the happenings onstage.

Marshall argues that the relationship between violence (with its focus on shattered selves and fragmented bodies), fantasy and pleasure proves that subjectivity remains to some extent in doubt or under question.[541] The engagement with art allows for a temporary reversion to a psychically disunified self. In other words, "extreme experience grants a temporary release from the ordering structures of identity."[542] Marshall quotes Leo Bersani, who, in *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art*, states that there is no real distinction between glorified violence in entertainment and its opposite. People are automatically drawn to violence in the arts. However, he distinguishes narrative violence from anecdotal violence. Narrative violence elaborates violence in a complex way, problematises simple repetition and puts stable identities into question, whereas anecdotal violence repeats violence for its own sake.[543]

Aristotle's idea of theatrical mimesis involves pleasure when painful acts, obscene beasts or corpses are being watched on stage. According to Marshall, "Aristotle

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[539] Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 177.
[540] Marshall, pp. 160-61.
[541] Marshall, p. 34.
[542] Marshall, p. 36.
[543] Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 70-78.

has generally been understood to have believed that an audience's experience of strong emotion purges them in a way that is either socially beneficial or pleasant for the individual, or perhaps both."[544] There is no need for positive role models. The cathartic experience may lead to happy results, but the path towards these results is not necessarily pleasurable. However, the purgative encounter with art results in a state of balance. Thus, the initial unbalancing of emotions in good works of art can have a therapeutic effect.

In *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?*, Anthony David Nuttall claims that tragedy provides "a kind of psychic exercise," "a game in which the muscles of psychic response, fear and pity, are exercised and made ready," a means "to practice for crises."[545] He puts strong emphasis on the viewer's emotional involvement and sees pleasure mainly as a cognitive and moral gain. Marshall argues that "In the pursuit of pleasure, the subject, in other respects so eager to build up and maintain conscious control, seeks a dissolution of boundaries."[546] Even though according to Freud, humans find their greatest pleasure in sex, which explains their wish for self-shattering, Marshall sees similarities in the pleasures of textual interaction and its self-distancing effects. She points out that

> Losing oneself through imaginative involvement with literature or drama is typically experienced as highly pleasurable. Identification with a character, for instance, temporarily realigns one's ego boundaries, and for a time the familiar self dispappears. Since ordinary experiences of literary pleasure are related in this sense to masochistic pleasure, it follows that violent or extreme images and situations carry heightened possibilities for enjoyment.[547]

Literary pleasure thus results in a combination of pleasure and pain, a concept which is in line with Richard Müller-Freienfels' idea that contrast of feelings is essential to aesthetic impression and that duality is at the basis of tragic feeling, "since the spiritual conquest of deep pain and sorrow generates a feeling of triumph which has no equal."[548] According to Marshall,

> Standard literary devices, such as formal repetition, replacement through tropes, and redefinition of people and experiences, come into new focus in the light of this analysis as the convention necessary to deliver pleasure. So, too, with the

[544] Marshall, p. 48.
[545] Anthony David Nuttall, *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* (Oxford: Clarendon,1986), pp. 78,77,76,78,77.
[546] Marshall, p. 50.
[547] Ibid.
[548] Richard Müller-Freienfels, *Psychologie der Kunst*, vol. 1, (Leipzig: Teuber, 1922-1923), p. 229.

> enjoyment afforded by the description of violent acts or their enactment in the theatre: through imaginary immersion in these events, the subject is pleasurably shattered, lost to him- or herself.[549]

### 5.1.6 Melodramatic Catharsis and Tragic Catharsis

In his study *Theatres of Human Sacrifice. From Ancient Ritual to Screen Violence*, Mark Pizzato theorises the distinction between melodramatic and tragic catharsis, starting from Aristotle's Poetics and applying Artaud and Brecht's theatrical theories on films, bearing in mind also Kristeva's and Lacan's thoughts on the chora or the Real. Pizzato convincingly combines Artaud's theories of ritual cruelty and Brecht's theories of theatrical alienation with psychoanalytic notions of 'self' and 'other' in order to attempt an explanation of the appeal of depictions of violence in contemporary entertainment.

According to Pizzato, melodramatic catharsis is based on clear-cut good and evil characters, violent conflict and revenge plots in which a triumphant, purely good hero succeeds in avenging innocent victims, destroying a purely evil villain. In this respect, it bears strong similarities with ancient sacrifice based on warring gods, human or animal scapegoats and cosmic cycles of destruction. Tragic catharsis, on the other hand, provides complex characters who, in addition to fighting the outer world, have to struggle with the darker sides of their inner selves. There is potential for tragic insight when all the characters, heroes, villains and victims alike, are presented as flawed characters, thus depicting good and evil on both sides of the conflict.[550] However, according to Pizzato, "Pleasurable entertainment – making money through the melodramatic thrill ride – has become the dominant aim of screen violence today, rather than a more complex catharsis through tragic insights."[551] Thus, whether surrogate violence experienced through film, theatre or other art forms leads to a mimetic repetition of violence or, rather, results in a curative awareness of the consequences of violence largely depends on the melodramatic or tragic mode of presenting other people's sufferings. Pizzato quotes Jeffrey D. Mason who points out that "Fear is [...]

[549] Marshall, p. 53.
[550] Pizzato, pp. 1-17.
[551] Pizzato, p. 2.

the emotion from which melodrama springs, inspiring first a conception of evil to rationalize the fear, and then a villain to mythologize that evil, giving it a form and a voice,"[552] and notices worrying similarities with contemporary's society's fear of clear evils, which makes our society somehow imprisoned in a melodramatic state of being, recurring to melodramatic ways of solving conflicts. Pizzato also underlines the role of the dramatic arts in the sublimation of ritual bloodshed towards fictional violence and consequently the role of the arts in coming to terms with violence and evil. As he puts it, "For thousands of years, theatre has experimented with replaying traumatic dramas as collective dreams, fictional and real, to entertain and instruct, so as not to repeat actual sacrifices of blood and pain offstage."[553] This reference to actual bloodshed in prior cultures and its affinity with film and theatre may help to explain the underlying reasons for the appeal of displays of acts of violence to a watching audience.

Aristotle's catharsis provides both, simple, melodramatic purging, but also complex, tragic purification or clarification. However, his ideal tragedy is capable of transforming melodramatic myths into complex plots with complex characters. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle criticises dramas with simple plots and little or no discovery in the Peripety. Pizzato states that Aristotle prefers complicated tragic dramas, where narrative action coincides with moments of insight on the part of the hero and the audience. This has the effect of manipulating the audience's sympathies towards the protagonist and his/her imminent tragedy, thus fully bringing home the causes and effects of violence through the act of sacrifice depicted on stage and consequently blurring conventional audience expectations.[554]

## 5.2 Applied Analysis

### 5.2.1 Premises

The above mentioned theories and approaches serve, first of all to justify the use of a concept that originally comes from the theatre in film studies. The Greek tragedy

[552] Jeffrey D. Mason, 'The Face of Fear', in *Melodrama*, ed. by James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 213-223 (p. 213).
[553] Pizzato, pp. 2-3.
[554] Mark Pizzato, pp. 5.

developed out of the Dionysian cult and its performances were intended to cause pity and fear, in order to free the audience from these affects. In *Schönheit und Schrecken: Entsetzen, Gewalt und Tod in alten und neuen Medien*, Peter Gondola and Carsten Zelle point out the importance of the fact that these events are collective experiences in order to achieve the desired results and thus claim that catharsis can only be achieved in public places such as the theatre or nowadays the cinema, but not through the private reading of a novel or the private viewing of a video.[555] Schechner's *Performance Theory* goes in a similar direction. He points out that the function of any form of performance is that of stirring up suppressed fears and taboos in order to discharge and appease them. By transforming forbidden acts or taboos into art, in this case into film, hidden impulses can be controlled. All the films in my study tell the stories of certain ur-dramas and bring the audience close to phantasies about possible human atrocities, such as cannibalism, torture, or the loss of one's humanity, thus redirecting their primordial fears.

Moreover, the theories discussed under 5.1 help to back up my thesis that the combination of violence, both in terms of content and style, linked with mythologic elements results in a cathartic experience, that can be either tragic or melodramatic according to the qualities of the hero.

First of all, Girard's idea of a lawless society that needs to sacrifice a scapegoat in order to be able to establish institutions and laws can be linked to the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic settings of the films. The main characters need to die in order to enable society to recover from the experience of utter barbarity, thus transforming their deaths into ritual deaths. This is similar to the savagery depicted in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) in which Simon, the visionary of the group of boys stranded on an island and the only one aware of the true nature of the beast threatening them, is killed during a frenzied ritual dance. The innate evil of humanity that comes to the surface when civilised reasoning is overcome by animal savagery in its urge to inflict pain and exert power is the real beast that haunts civilisation, be it ancient or contemporary.

Kristeva sees catharsis as a way of purifying the abject, which can either occur through art or the rituals of religion. Due to the mimesis of passions through language, the abject is repeated but also mediated through artistic means, which results in its

[555] Peter Gondola and Carsten Celle, *Schönheit und Schrecken: Entsetzen, Gewalt und Tod in alten und neuen Medien* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1990), p. 9.

purification. Kristeva also stresses the need for Logos in order to make the cathartic experience graspable. The films as literary texts work within the realm of the logos and thus repeat the abject (in the form of cannibalism, disease, torture, and other forms of violence) through artistic means.

Pizzato's use of Lacan and Kristeva's theories to explain the difference between melodramatic and tragic catharsis are useful in explaining why the films in my study, despite all presenting violence and myth to some degree, impact the audience in different ways. According to Pizzato, real catharsis (which is tragic catharsis) occurs when there is no simplistic projection of the void on the evil villain in the film, but when the flaws in the characters lead the viewers to ask questions about themselves and their own existence. Thus, melodramatic catharsis with its simplistic identification does not result in any awareness of the dangers and implications of violence and the cathartic experience is short lived. Tragic art, on the other hand, allows the viewer to perceive intuitively a glimpse of the Real, but only through the questions which arise through this encounter with something imperceptible.

Marshall underlines the possibility for the self to leave its boundaries by the interaction with art. Extreme experiences such as the representation of violence result in a radical emotional response which allows the self to leave its control zone and to get a glimpse of what is lost (maybe the Real). Through the identification with a character, at least for the time of the interaction with the work of art, the self experiences a new form of self. The acts of violence the addressee experiences are always mediated through the Symbolic order as opposed to literal acts of violence which belong to the Imaginary order. The identification with the character is more intense and the cathartic experience longer lasting and more effective when there is a higher chance to get a glimpse of the Real, which according to Pizzato, occurs in the presence of tragic heroes.

To sum up, it can be said that in order to achieve a cathartic experience, violence in combination with myth is required in order to guarantee that deeply felt archetypal issues are addressed. However, only through a flawed character that forces questions upon the audience about their own identity and existence can a deep cathartic experience be reached.

### 5.2.2 Catharsis in *Children of Men* and *The Road*

The catharses in *Children of Men* and *The Road* can quite easily be considered as tragic in that both films present if not all at least most of the required ingredients for a tragic catharsis.

*Children of Men* presents a flawed main character whose all but heroic qualities have already been analysed as part of the discussion of the mythological elements which inform the the narrative (see 4.2). The initially reluctant hero has to fight forces which are evil, but whose malignance is not so clear cut. The British government has its flaws, but it is still a democracy and guarantees some sort of safety and wellbeing at least for its own citizens. Theo's other antagonists, the terrorist group 'The Fishes', inspite of using violent means, have good reasons to fight for Kee's baby in order to force change upon the government. Consequently, evil is not entirely black, although, of course the film makes it clear whose side should be taken.

In telling a messianic tale by subtly merging different cultural substrata, the film touches upon issues deeply rooted in humanity which have been told in various ways by different cultures. Two central cathartic scenes address the issues of death and birth. Julian's death has already been discussed in Chapter 3 as part of the discourse on the adaptation of violence. The birth scene is central both from a thematic point of view and in terms of character development. Even though already Julian's death has moved Theo towards a heightened awareness of the importance of his mission, the birth of Kee's baby consolidates Theo's determination in completing his mission. The birth scene is very tense and dark. It is an elaborated computer generated sequence which shows the actual moment the baby is pushed into the world. There is no background music and the light of a dim lamp serves as the only lightsource. The whole attention is placed on the pain and the miracle of the delivery. Only when the baby cries for the first time, a melancholic tune sets in. The audience is confronted with the miracle of life in the broadest sense by witnessing the possible beginning of a new cycle of being. In a subsequent scene, the holiness of the event is underlined by the awe and reverence of the people who see Kee and the baby, the impression of slow motion when mother and child walk past and the soft tune that accompanies the crying of the baby. The miracle is

completed by Theo's final sacrifice after having led the mother of humanity and her child to safety.

*The Road* presents a tragic hero who has to come to terms with his growing brutalisation due to the prolonged contact with a hostile environment. He feels the burden of the responsibility not only of protecting his child, but also of passing on the achievements of a long past civilisation to his son. The focus of the film lies to some extent on the father's journey of self-discovery, the discovery of his own darker self and the difficult balancing act between what is right and what is wrong. Eventually, his final death at the end of the film can be interpreted as a necessary sacrifice that may enable the boy ti keep his fire burning for a humanity that may not be completely extinguished after all.

The environment depicted in the film is completely hostile and the portrayal of the cannibals and their victims is reminiscent of the most gruesome fantasies about hell. The film is a complex tragic drama that addresses some deeply felt human taboos such as the fear of cannibalism. The audience is forced to deal with questions that arise when all the pillars of civilisation have collapsed. To what extent does an evil environment impact on the hero's decision making and morality? Would the spectator in similar circumstances be able to keep the fire burning? The most dreadful scenes almost physically affect without though desensitising the spectator, because they are well chosen and introduced only sparingly. This physical discomfort may be an instinctive reaction to the primordial fear of cannibalism.

### 5.2.3 Catharsis in *V for Vendetta*

*V for Vendetta* presents an explicit cathartic act in V's staging of Evey's imprisonment and exemplifies how fiction, by presenting a destorted view of reality, provides a glimpse of the true Lacanian Real.[556] This sort of play within the play is one of his most cruel acts of the whole film, also because it does not rely on traditional action film tropes, and serves as a cathartic experience for both Evey and the audience. Like Evey, the audience is unaware throughout the whole sequence that the events are

[556] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 18.

not real but only staged in order to educate the female protagonist and enable her to get rid of her fear. However, Evey's suffering is real. The imprisonment sequence in itself is the staging of a real historical event and offers the audience a glimpse of how the conditions in the state prisons are. V puts Evey in his own position, thus forcing her to experience what he himself had to endure many years before. However, through Valerie's account of her own prison experience as narrated in her letter written on toilet paper, the heroine also experiences both the suffering and personal growth of another V character. What the spectator experiences is similar to Evey's reading the letter. The audience becomes the addressee of a tale that recounts a terrible experience which eventually becomes cathartic. Evey, on the other hand, is in the double position of actress and addressee. Like a real actress she is forced to re-live the hero's suffering and consequently changes as a person, but her catharsis is supported by reading and visualising the powerful words of Valerie's story.

However, even V as the dramturge, experiences Evey's imprisonment in double manner. Not only is he the creator of a play and an actor who has to play several roles, he also becomes a spectator. What he discovers while putting on stage Evey's torture is a glimpse of his own abyss. As he says after Evey's release, "Every day, I saw in myself everything you see in me now. Every day I wanted to end it. But each time you refused to give in, I knew I couldn't."[557] What Evey sees in him is best expressed in her immediate reaction to V's confession: "You're sick! You're evil!" By voluntarily taking on the role of the torturer, V discovers his own monstrosity. Whereas before he was only aware of his external monstrosity, which he decided to conceal behind the Guy Fawkes mask, the role-playing has brought to the surface his darker inner self. The vaudeville character from the beginning of the film has been transformed into a tragic hero. He goes from being persecuted to being a persecutor. Putting on the mask of the torturer has eventually changed his identity and made him discover that part of him is a torturer. As Gordon states in an earlier scene of the film, "You wear a mask for so long, you forget who you were beneath it."[558] V has worn the torturer mask only for a limited time and has not been changed completely, but the role-playing has added a layer to his personality, transforming him in a more fully aware human being. Not only Evey has

[557] *V for Vendetta*
[558] *V for Vendetta*

grown as a person through this experience, also V has gained insight into his personality.

This whole discussion exemplifies the workings of catharsis in the film. Whereas Evey experiences cleansing and purification from her deepest fears through the rite of passage represented by the imprisonment sequence, she does not, though, represent the tragic hero that is required for a tragic catharsis. Even though she grows as a person, her personality does not present any major flaws or weaknesses. She is, all in all, a good girl, a young woman who has to learn how to face the outer world. Her fear in the prison is more than comprehensible and due to the circumstances, not some inner inadequacy. The character who forces the audience to ask questions about what is right and what is wrong is V. The hero's ambiguity, with his more than justifiable agenda but questionable means has been discussed at length under 'The Ambiguous Saviour' (see 4.2.2.3). What transforms V into the tragic hero is the discovery of his evil, sick side by forcing a cathartic experience upon Evey, who is also the woman he loves. The fact that at the end he sacrifices himself in order to allow his country to rise from its ashes is only secondary, but helps consolidate his tragic nature. He becomes the sacrificial victim the nation needs so that law and order can be restored.

### 5.2.4 Catharsis in *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*

The two horror movies are more difficult to classify in terms of melodramatic or tragic catharsis. The fact that both films deal with a source of evil that does not leave much doubt about its malignity, according to Pizzato's theory, places them rather in the realm of melodramatic catharsis.

*28 Days Later* contains several mythical elements, ranging from the the danger of a viral epidemic that threatens humanity's ontological status by transforming civilised beings into savage animals, to the heroic journey the main characters undergo. In addition to overcoming the difficulties related to the outbreak of the rage virus which are depicted in gory detail, the male hero has to overcome several father figures throughout his journey before reaching maturity the moment he fully embraces his darker self in one of the climactic scenes of the film. After having unleashed the virus within the secure area controlled by Major Henry West and his men, Jim endeavours to

rescue Selena and Hannah. As soon as he sees Selena being held hostage by one of the soldiers, Jim loses control. The film depicts a character governed by his instincts in an outbreak of pure rage that likens him to the Infected. In that moment, all the brutality human beings are capable of comes to the surface. However, the violence is justified by the fact that he is fighting for his own survival and that of his friend Selena. The soldiers he is fighting against are either already infected or have been represented as evil figures beforehand. Therefore, despite portraying the hero's short encounter with his savage impulses, the film does not relinquish from offering a clear division of what is right and wrong. Similarly, also Selena's ability to kill her friend 'in a heartbeat' on the one hand together with all her caring character traits on the other present a quite rounded character. However, the film does not give the two characters much space to delve in reflections upon their darker selves. Maybe, also the fact that both protagonists survive the cataclysm and are eventually rescued is another indicator of melodramatic catharsis. The audience leaves the cinema shuttered by the depiction of primordial fears, such as that of being overpowered by animal instincts, but without questions that may lead to further insights.

Similarly, *28 Weeks Later* presents some shortcomings with regard to a possible tragic catharsis. Don, the most tragic character in the narrative, has to come to terms with his feelings of guilt because of leaving his wife behind when fleeing from a group of Infected. The apparently happy rescue of his wife and their subsequent reunion celebrated by a fatal kiss transforms the guilt ridden man into a brutal monster. The incident as such is tragic, mainly because an act of love triggers the second outbreak of the rage virus. The scene depicting Don's transformation into a monster is one of the most memorable of the whole film, but the violence and the gore detract from the underlying eros/thanatos theme. The idea of love linked to death permeates the entire narrative and is passed on from the parents to the children. Don's impulse to look out for his children even after being transformed into a monster implies that not all of his human traits have been lost: his running after his children may be governed by love and not by rage. However, the result is destructive, not only for the children as individuals, but for mankind in general. Similarly, Tammy's decision to conceal Andy's infection even to himself is an act of love that triggers a catastrophe of global dimensions. Love

brings about the end of humanity. This duality is best presented by Andy's eyes whose genetic peculiarity signifies both a possible cure for the disease and a threat to humanity. Thus, the boy is a potential divine child character whose saviour qualities are however transformed into infernal qualities by the tragic circumstances as presented in the narrative. These aspects are interesting ingredients for an apocalyptic scenario, but all in all, the film does not provide enough space for a thorough development of these points. The film's focus on gory details and special effects (with their emphasis on physicality at the expense of character development, or the examination of the dread which the loss of one's human traits implies) offers the audience shocking cinematic spectacle, without forcing further questions upon the addressee. The primordial fear of rage taking over humanity provides potential for tragic catharsis. However, in *28 Weeks Later* it is only explored superficially.

# Conclusion

In an age that is prone to violence, from wars over ethnic conflicts and criminality to domestic violence, the fictionalisation of violence and its representation in different media is relevant more than ever. From a moral point of view, the representation of violence has always been a source of controversy being considered as immoral or even as social threat. From an aesthetic point of view, the depiction of violence allows for interesting observations about textual strategies and expressive means. In the light of the considerations of the adaptation process as discussed in Chapter One, the passage from the written word to its visual rendering mainly in connection with violence, opens up interesting perspectives on the power of the moving image and its ability create intense audience response. However, a film narrative does not only rely on the visceral power of the image. The combination of image, narration and performance gives film its unique status of a complete work of art. The fact that on an academic level film studies can be found in arts departments, literature departments and theatre studies departments is only one indicator of the medium's polyvalent nature. As this thesis suggests, the combination of the graphic depiction of violence, the narration of complex plots and multifaceted characters through performance and mise en scène as well as the presence of deeply rooted myths results in a cathartic experience. Catharsis, which traditionally belongs to the realm of theatre, can be achieved in film as well, first of all because the cinematic viewing experience is collective, secondly, because the narratives presented on screen contain tragic elements and thirdly, because the story is conveyed visually through performance. Thus, the combination of theatrical elements, narrative and images allows for a complete aesthetic experience. However, can such a cinematic catharsis have a similar function to that provided by the Greek tragedy in ancient times, namely bring about purification and clarification? If so, is there an additional relevance of this catharsis that goes beyond the aesthetic experience? Does the audience leave the cinema simply gratified by an entertaining spectacle or are they shattered to the extent that they are able to take something with them into their real life? Can cinematic fiction really bring about change?

The works of art taken into consideration in this study all belong to the dystopian genre which traditionally has a political agenda. By offering a view on contemporary society and its problems, these films intend to stir up responses in the audience. A dystopian text does not aim at simplistic entertainment but rather at long lasting effects. The genre is placed between fiction and reality, being firmly rooted in the time of its creation while at the same time being projected into the future, though offering an oblique view of the present. This double stance is reflected in the genre's use of realistic techniques, such as documentary style or the introduction of historic images, together with distancing effects such as symbolic colour schemes or emblematic sound and music. The introduction of haunting images from the past which is a standard trope of the dystopian genre has been criticised by scholars such as J. David Slocum who thinks that the use of "intertextual references and pastiche" typical of contemporary films that "appropriate styles and references freely from throughout film and media history" results in the production of "historically depthless movies."[559] He continues, "Violence in postmodern cinema arguably loses depth and any meaning accrued through traditional relations to the real world. Even the most graphic instance of violence in these films potentially becomes like any other image, homogenised and emptied of meaning or seeming originality."[560] This view does not take into consideration the expressive power of certain visual references. Dystopian narratives need historic iconography in order to root the narrative in a specific reality. One of the powers of the image is its concreteness and immediate readability. Thus, the associations the film wants to trigger in the audience only require short visual references, thus leaving more room for narrative deployment. This is one of the major advantages of a filmic dystopia. Of course, sometimes, these references may seem too simplistic, mainly to a visually aware audience, but the strategy proves successful in delivering the message, which is one of the aims of dystopias.

The role of dystopian narratives in talking about contemporary social, political and cultural issues is important in an age in which the borders between real life and fiction are blurred. The way contemporary news channels provide information disguised as entertainment is only one example that illustrates this point. Similar to commercial film, the infotainment industry offers its audience news reports about war, terrorism and

[559] Slocum, p. 21.
[560] Slocum, p. 21.

crime which present clear cut villains and idealised heroes. The news is increasingly presented like breathtaking thrillers in which anger and disinformation are fused with the needs of popular culture for light entertainment. The way contemporary politics and media function is reminiscent of the workings of melodramatic catharsis as theorised by Pizzato. A large number of contemporary commercial films provide melodramatic plots with clear cut characters representing good and evil. As films reflect the dominant ideology of their time, this insistence on a clear distinction between right and wrong is paralleled by a similar perspective on the world. Contemporary politics seek to create projections of pure evil in order to justify righteous violence against clear enemies. The politics of the Noughties with their fierce reaction to the 9/11 attacks which resulted in the 'coalition of the willing' waging war against the 'axis of evil' reflect similar black-and-white attitudes in mainstream films.

However, art and culture, far from existing only for their sake, also have a social function. Mainly cinema, which reaches a large number of people, manages to shape millions of minds. By providing narratives dealing with violence, but presenting it within demanding plots and through complex characters, the sources and effects of violence can be explored more critically. Thus, media literacy can be increased and screen violence experienced in a more conscious way, which may, in a second moment, result in a more critical view on real violence and the melodramatic way of politics using violence.

The role of catharsis in art is that of freeing the addressee from evil, which can have a narrative or pragmatic effect. In other words, the question is whether the spectator leaves the cinema continuing the narration in his/her mind or feeling the urge to act as a reaction to the narrative. Both elements can be found to different extents in the films selected for this study, but generally speaking, the aim of dystopian catharses is rather pragmatic than narrative. However, all the selected films leave some room for imagination and a possible sequel in the viewers' minds. In *Children of Men*, Kee's destiny and the role of the 'Human Project' in saving humanity from its elimination are left open. Similarly, *The Road* with its final scene in which the boy joins a family opens up for a possible sequel and a possible albeit feeble optimistic outlook to the future of mankind. *V for Vendetta* ends with the hero's death and the beginning of an uprising against the regime. Consequently, the future of the British society is guaranteed and will

probably change in a positive direction. There is no question about a possible narrative continuity in *28 Days Later* insofar as the sequels both in comic form and film have indeed been produced. The open ending of *28 Weeks Later* makes it clear that a sequel, which may answer the questions about how contagion occurs on the continent or whether Andy's special genes eventually provide a cure, is possible. However, the main purpose of dystopian narratives is that of pushing the audience towards action. Of course, it is difficult to generalise to what extent these films accomplish their agenda. As with most works of art, their value lies largely in the eye of the beholder. Therefore, the way a film is experienced is highly individual and whether a film achieves a more narrative or a more pragmatic reception depends on the spectator's sensitivity to the issues presented onscreen.

As the in depth analysis of the films selected for this study has shown, by combining visual and thematic violence with mythological elements, they succeed in providing some sort of catharsis. However, only tragic catharsis has a long lasting effect on the viewer, in contrast to the ephemeral effect of melodramatic catharsis. Tragic catharsis at its best forces questions upon the audience including those about their own mortality, the dark sides of humanity and consequently their own possible darker selves, as well as the dangers of violence. The subsequent paragraphs attempt to give a final reading of the pragmatic potential of the selected films.

*Children of Men* presents a tragic hero who reluctantly learns to fight for a just cause. He has to overcome a number of external obstacles. However, the biggest challenges are presented by the obstacles within him. The awareness of the weaknesses of the hero provides the audience with role models that are far from the larger than life heroes conventional drama presents. A flawed hero exemplifies that there are no clear distinctions between good and evil and that even a hero wearing flip flops can bring about change to the world as long as he believes in the cause.

*The Road* presents a similarly flawed hero whose journey across a devastated landscape threatens his inner humanity. The film asks the audience to question their belief in the strength of their own humaneness. What does it take to unleash the savagery that is part of human nature? Not only does the film pose questions about what humans are capable of when the structures of society and communal living collapse, by depicting cannibalism as a symbol for utter barbarity. It also investigates the human

reaction to fear and the consequent loss of compassion. There is no need for a cataclysm of such dimensions as represented in the film to cause fear. Contemporary society is governed by anxieties about what is different and unknown. The current media landscape fuels artificial fears, and society reacts by losing compassion. The overwhelming savagery depicted in *The Road* touches upon deep fears about the loss of one's humanity. The audience may well leave the cinema asking questions about their own human attitude in times of fear and act accordingly.

*V for Vendetta* ends with the death of the tragic hero, but Evey lives on in order to complete V's task. The ending of the film makes it clear that the audience and the hidden anarchist in each audience member are addressed directly. When Finch asks Evey about V's identity, she tells him that he is Edmond Dantes, Valerie, her parents, Gordon and all of us. When the mass of people approaching the Houses of Parliament take off their masks, faces of people who died throughout the film appear. V stands for everyone who is ready to risk his/her life for a just cause. He stands for every single spectator who is willing to fight for human rights, justice and integrity. The fact that V's iconographic Guy Fawkes mask is being used as a symbol for protest against corporate power shows that the film has managed to bring part of its message across.

The two films that succeed the least in reaching the audience beyond the cinema experience are *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*. Both films offer interesting seeds that could have been developed into more thought provoking themes, but they are addressed only superficially and are overpowered by the films' main focus on horrific spectacle. *28 Days Later* with its almost happy ending does not really encourage action. The question about rage as inherent human trait is being addressed, but not given enough room for further development. Similarly, the climactic moment in which Jim is confronted with his darker self has potential, but is only superficially developed. Also, the reasons for the outbreak of the virus and the responsibility of science are only hastily hinted at. The focus of the film lies on mere survival, and 'that is as good as it gets,' as Selena puts it. Similarly, *28 Weeks Later* addresses deep human fears and connects both love drive and death drive, but again little character development and the focus on gory details make the film more spectacular than thought provoking. The questions the audience of the two horror films are confronted with are submerged by

excessive gore, mainly in *28 Weeks Later*. Evil in the form of a rage virus of these dimensions cannot be fought, it can only be survived.

Violence is an inevitable structural feature of life and thus finds artistic expression in various forms. Film, as a medium that reaches millions of minds, has the power to shape people's perceptions of violence and its dynamics. Therefore, film can also be used to provoke a critical response in the audience that may result in a more critical attitude in everyday life. Eventually, dystopias serve as a warning. They are fictions that show up the truth. As with anamorphosis, the deformed image appears in its true shape when viewed in some unconventional way.[561] The distortions of dystopia are necessary to get to know the truth about the risks and dangers our time encounters.

[561] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 11.

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