A is for Anarchy, V is for Vendetta: Images of Guy Fawkes and the Creation of Postmodern Anarchism

Lewis Call, California Polytechnic State University - San Luis Obispo

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Abstract
Although the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 failed at the level of conventional political action, it had a profound impact on Anglo-American political culture. The Plot added the face of Guy Fawkes to our political iconography, and introduced the word 'guy' into the English language. This paper argues that the face of Fawkes and the word 'guy' have become what poststructuralists call 'free floating signifiers.' Liberated from all permanent meaning, this image and this word have become potent instruments for the promotion of postmodern anarchism. The comic book V for Vendetta (Alan Moore and David Lloyd, 1981) makes very effective use of these instruments. This book uses the image of Guy Fawkes to initiate a powerful anarchist critique of fascism. The book experiments with postmodern symbolism, but its version of anarchism remains mainly modern. However, the film version of V for Vendetta (dir. James McTeigue, screenplay by the Wachowski Brothers, 2006) articulates a full-blown postmodern anarchism. This film has been widely criticised, but critics overlook the film's valuable contributions. In the film, the face of Fawkes provides the basis for sophisticated representations of sexuality, mass media systems and anarchist political action. Through its visual iconography, the film thus provides mainstream cinema audiences with an effective introduction to the symbolic vocabulary of post modern anarchism.

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