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Guy Fawkes, from villain to icon

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I will be explaining and analyzing the changes that the historical figure of Guy Fawkes underwent from being one of the most hated figures in England, with an annual celebration to commemorate his death, to a fictional character representing the fight against totalitarianism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. And finally, how, in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century he became the face of the international hacktivist group known as Anonymous. Furthermore, I will be analyzing the historical context in which the character of Guy Fawkes was conceived as well as explaining why he was the main figure who was accounted responsible for the Gunpowder Plot despite the fact that he was not its leader. Moreover, I will analyze why the group Anonymous chose the “Fawkesque” mask from the character from the graphic novel as well as the movie *V for Vendetta* which was at the same time inspired in the historical character, to become the face of the 21<sup>st</sup> century hacktivist movement.

Keyword: Guy Fawkes, England, Anonymous, Hacktivism, V for Vendetta, Gunpowder Plot.

En este trabajo, explicaré y analizaré los cambios que sufrió la figura histórica de Guy Fawkes, de ser una de las más odiadas en Inglaterra, con una celebración anual que para conmemorar su muerte, a un personaje de ficción que representa la lucha contra el totalitarismo en la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Y, finalmente, cómo en el inicio del siglo XXI, se convirtió en la imagen del grupo hacktivista conocido como Anonymous. Además, se hará un análisis del contexto histórico de la figura de Guy Fawkes al mismo tiempo que se explicará por qué fue la figura responsable del Gunpowder Plot pese a no ser su líder. Por otra parte, analizaré el porqué detrás de la elección por parte del grupo Anonimous de la máscara de Guy Fawkes del personaje de la novela gráfica y película *V de Vendetta* que al

mismo tiempo se inspiró en este personaje histórico que se convertiría en la marca de este grupo hacktivista.

Palabras clave: Guy Fawkes, Inglaterra, Anonymous, Hacktivismo, V de Vendetta, motín de la pólvora..

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## *Guy Fawkes, from villain to icon.*

### *Introduction.*

The 16th century is known as a period of change in Europe, the reason behind it is the Protestant reformation initiated by Martin Luther and continued by John Calvin and other protestant reformers. They demanded a change in the doctrine and to remain separate from the Roman Catholic Church as its teachings as well as the supreme authority of the pope in Rome had been questioned and criticized. Although the Catholic church tried with all means possible to suppress this newly born threat which spread around Europe planting hatred and grief which would finally flourish in the last 30 years of the 16th century with a series of religious wars in Europe between Catholics and Protestants. England firstly became Protestant under the reign of Henry VIII in the 1530s, he broke up with the Roman Catholic Church and decided to become the head of the Church in England, a kind of pope for the Protestant faith in England, holding both the supreme religious and political power in the country. Then, during the reign of Edward VI, his son and heir, Protestantism grew stronger and became strongly rooted within the English church. Although this would change after the death of Edward VI as his sister Mary I, wanted to restore the Catholic faith in the country, while prosecuting and executing Protestants which earned her the pseudonym of Bloody Mary. (Duffy, 2009)

But the attempts of Mary to restore the Catholic Church in England would die with her in 1558 as her sister Elisabeth would go back to the ways that his grandfather introduced back in the 1530s, while becoming eventually the greatest protestant power in Europe at the time and would eventually drift into a war with its Catholic counterpart, Spain.

The 16th century brought in November 1558 a brief end to some of the violence and oppression when Queen Elizabeth I was crowned. At the time, there was a belief that she would restore the Protestant faith in England. But she had other plans for the church. She

tried to minimize the oppression of religion in England while trying to introduce an atmosphere of tolerance between Catholics and Protestants. Although these measures were taken in order to achieve peace and stability in the realm so that the queen could focus her efforts in foreign affairs further increasing England's power at the time. The result was that despite the fact that tolerance had improved in comparison with the previous monarch, the reality was that tension was building up on the streets after many years of blood shedding and fighting could not be easily forgotten. Nevertheless, Elizabeth had been raised a Protestant and shared its religious views. Therefore, Protestantism quickly spread around the country gaining more adepts while depleting Catholic power.

The intermittent war between England and Spain which started in the 16th century shaped the world as two of the most powerful nations in the world clashed not only militarily but also economically and culturally. In the final years of the 16th century, a secret communication channel between Spain and England was established with the objective of uprising an insurrection in order to restore the Catholic faith in England. Spain had been suffering with all its open fronts in Europe. First of all, it was involved in the 80 year war, the war between the seventeen provinces of the Low Countries and the Spanish hegemony of Phillip III over Europe. Flanders would become Spain's main problem, as it was not to be conquered anytime soon and a lot of pressure was being applied to the Spanish government both in the colonies and in the old continent as money seemed to flow out of the Spanish's treasure like water. England was trying to impede the communication and trade routes between Spain and the colonies in order to choke the economical flow that the empire needed in order to maintain its status and fight the wars in Europe. Therefore, Spain needed a Catholic ally in Europe urgently in order to ease the pressure and maintain its hegemony as the main political and economic power not only in Europe but in the whole world as well.



## Antecedents

The years previous to the gunpowder plot were marked by the growing oppression on the Catholic population; their only hope was to look for help from England's primary enemy at the time and one of the few countries that could provide substantial help to their cause of restoring the Catholic faith in England. The events that precede the gunpowder plot were bred in Spanish soil as a few members of the later plot travelled to Spain with the objective of getting some help from none other than the king that ruled over half of the known world, King Phillip III.

Thomas Wintour, one of the original members of the plot together with his brother Robert were the ones in charge of opening and establishing the links between the English plotters and Spain; his mission was to seek help from Spain in order to unite against the Protestant power in England. In a statement written he recalled that he brought a message to King Phillip III with the assistance of Joseph Creswell, who was an English Jesuit who succeeded Robert Persons as vice prefect of the English Jesuit interests in Spain and as one of the most important links between the Catholic population in England and Spain.

To bestow some pensions here in England upon sundry persons, who making use of the general discontent that young gentlemen and soldiers were in by reason of my Lord of Essex's death, and the want of his purse to maintain them, might no doubt by relieving their necessities have them all at his devotion. Because in all attempts upon England the greatest difficulty was ever found to be transportation of horse, they assured him of 1000 or 1500 against any occasion or enterprise. (Loomie, 1971, 10)

The first accounts in history of the figure of Guy Fawkes first appear next to the one of Anthony Dutton. The name was merely an alias of Christopher Wrights, who was one of the original members of the plot and had been early related to the figure of Guy Fawkes as he was the link between Guy and the plotters as well as the one recruiting him. They were also

in charge of getting Spain's help as they travelled together to the Spanish court in order to discuss the details of the imminent Catholic insurrection in England. The report of those negotiations of 1602 in the court of Phillip III of English Catholic affairs was presented to Archduke Albert in Brussels in 1603 and the Spanish diplomacy would name as "The English Empresa". In the following report, we can appreciate the sense of urgency that the Catholic groups in England had at the time as they were under the yoke of the Protestants at the time.

This is the last embassy that the Catholics can send to Spain. They wish only for the response of his Majesty... whether he can assist with the air promised for this spring... Upon a reliable report about what they can expect from here hangs the decision to do or to leave undone many important things. (Loomie, 1971, 18-19)

The English Empresa would focus mainly on the Irish campaign because the English had little or no success when trying to convert the Irish population into Protestantism because they were using a series of brutal methods in order to pacify the Irish population as well as exploiting the country's resources. It all added up to the extent that a feeling of resentment and hate would flourish in the Irish leading to the unification of their people in fighting the invaders. The Irish knew that the British were too strong and that on their own they would never be able to defeat and expel them from the country. This is where they turn to Spain for help. Although for Spain it was an advantageous situation, the negotiations were delayed as there was not a clear and strong candidate for England's succession that would change the country's official religion into Catholicism and would revert all the prosecuting laws against Catholics. This was not well received by the Catholic population back in England as they needed a change desperately, their situation was very precarious. (Loomie, 1971)

Consequently, when the Spanish government decided to wait and see where the new king, James I, would side, an unannounced cease fire between the two nations was established. Anthony Dutton, as the main representative of the English Catholic community was trying

to push the Spanish invasion so it would happen as soon as possible. Given the fairly precarious situation that the English Catholic community was living in, they needed to find a quick solution and they agreed that Catholics were set if Spain's aid arrived on time. In the end, Dutton's plans did not convince the Spanish to entrust such a risky move on English territory as they would have to send forces from a conflict heavy area of Europe, which was Flanders, a position more than compromised at the time with the sudden rebellion of the United Provinces. This would add to the low impact that the Catholic community would end up having in the invasion led to the final negative to Dutton's plans. Therefore, King Phillip III decided to take a different approach, one that would not be as risky as the open invasion. This would mean that Spain would not offer its help, therefore forcing the English Catholic population who was keen on revolting against the established religion to change their approach as Spain would not offer them its help.

Therefore, the trip to Spain of the notorious members of the later Gunpowder Plot (Guy Fawkes and Anthony Dutton) was useless and they would start to plan their own way of reestablishing a new Catholic monarchy in England again. Both Dutton and Fawkes failed in Spain and Wintour wrote a letter to King Phillip stating that his friends were begging him for action and that they could not be contained much longer. He sent another letter through Creswell where he expressed his urgency.

This same individual told me that although they have 3000 Catholics ready as requested by your Majesty, what was promised to them has not arrived, and those interested, who he assures me are people of the highest rank, are being forced by their expenses and hardships to lose their properties. (Loomie, 1971, 31)

Therefore, the Catholic population in England could not wait any longer and decided that they would have to force the issue and act alone without the open support from the Spanish.



### *From Plot to celebration.*

In November 1605, the Gunpowder Plot took place. A group of Catholic conspirators, Guy Fawkes among them, plotted to blow up the parliament with the king, James I, together with all the attending lords and representatives. First of all, we have to go back to analyze the reasons of the attempt.

At the beginning of the 17th century, with the death of Elizabeth Tudor, a new house and a new king in James, Catholic's hopes were placed in this new king to decrease the prosecution levels on Catholics and increase the religious tolerance in the country. Despite the fact that James had been raised a protestant, the figure of his mother, Mary Stuart, which was a Catholic, shed some hope into the English Catholic population in England hoping for an improved religious situation. But in 1603 with James' crowning, their dreams shattered as his Protestant side shined. For the Catholics in England, he became a deterioration as he enforced harder penalties against English Catholics. Therefore, their only hopes to go back to Catholicism lied in Spain and the religious war with England. So, when the Treaty of London was signed in Somerset house, London, in 1604, ending 19 years of Anglo Spanish war in Europe in what was also known as the Somerset house conference, their hopes were once again crushed, as the main agreed term of the treaty was the renounce of Spain to restore Catholicism in England.

This, together with the disillusionment with the performance of the newly crowned king led to the creation of the rebel cell which in November 5th 1605 would attempt to blow up the parliament with the king together with everyone who would have been inside. Although Guy Fawkes is the most well-known plotter. According to Antonia Fraser, the man in charge of the plot was none other than Robert Catesby. These are the rest of the plotters involved: Robert and Thomas Wintour, Thomas Percy, Christopher and John Wright, Francis Tresham, Everard Digby, Ambrose Rookwood, Thomas Bates, Robert Keyes, Hugh Owen and John Grant. The Wintour brothers were also related with another member of the plot which would happen to be its leader, Robert Catesby. (Fraser, 1996)

They rented a house outside the Houses of Parliament and managed to store 36 barrels with gunpowder in a cellar under the House of Lords. This was possible due to the fact that one of the conspirators, Thomas Percy, had family ties with the earl of Northumberland for whom he worked as his steward. Although Percy had family among the nobility, it was not him that would finally set the rest of the plotters up. It was Francis Tresham, as he was worried that the explosion would end up killing his brother in law and dear friend, Lord Monteagle. Therefore, on October 26th, Tresham sent a letter to Monteagle warning him of the dangers of attending the parliament on November 5th. What follows is a transcript of Tresham's original letter to Lord Monteagle

My lord, out of the love I bear to some of your friends, I have a care of your preservation, therefore I would advise you as you tender your life to devise some excuse to shift your attendance at this parliament, for God and man have concurred to punish the wickedness of this time, and think not slightly of this advertisement, but retire yourself into your country, where you may expect the event in safety, for though there be no appearance of any stir, yet I say they shall receive a terrible blow this parliament and yet they shall not see who hurts them, this counsel is not to be condemned because it may do you good and can do you no harm, for the danger is past as soon as you have burnt the letter and I hope God will give you the grace to make good use of it, to whose holy protection I commend you. (Fraser, 1996, 215)

When Monteagle received the letter, he immediately passed it to Robert Cecil, earl of Salisbury, and one of the king's most important and trusted ministers. This finally led to the search in the surroundings of the Parliament and the capture of Guy Fawkes and the latter pursue and capture of the rest of the plotters.

But why was Guy Fawkes remembered over the rest of the conspirators of the Gunpowder plot? Although there could have been more well-known names such as the leader of the conspirators, Robert Catesby, or the original members of the plot: Thomas Wintour, John and Christopher Wright and Thomas Percy who happened to be close friends with Catesby.

Despite the fact that Guy was not as close to Catesby as the ones mentioned before, due to his experience in both the Netherlands and Spain, where he got his nickname "Guido" (as a matter of fact, he even signed with his pseudonym) he quickly became a trusted member of the group and was tasked with acquiring 36 gunpowder barrels which would be later stored in a rented cellar under the House of Lords. This would finally place Guy Fawkes alone in that same rented cellar when the guards caught him and was the only suspect held in custody for two straight days. Although shortly after nearly all the conspirators would be either tortured, imprisoned or executed while having confessed, or in most cases, complemented the given information with everything the authorities wanted the official version to be. In the end, all plotters were to be reunited in a public execution in March 1607, hanged, drawn and quartered in order to inspire terror in other potential traitors and to discourage of further plotting attempts. (Fraser, 1996)

In the 17th century, in order to commemorate the failure Guy's the plotting attempt against the king and to celebrate the capture of anyone who would dare oppose the crown, the festivity which was known as Guy Fawkes' night or simply bonfire night was created. It originally consisted in throwing effigies of Guy Fawkes into bonfires. Later fireworks would be added and it would turn into a pyrotechnic spectacle and bonfires. The preparations for Bonfire Night celebrations consist on making a dummy of Guy Fawkes, called "the Guy". Nowadays we can even see children keeping up with an old tradition of walking in the streets, carrying "the Guy" and beg for "a penny for the Guy." Then the kids would use the money to buy fireworks for the evening celebration. Then at night, "the Guy" is placed on top of the bonfire, which is then set on fire while fireworks fill the sky. Although it could be said that there is a standard celebration, the extent of the festivities and the size of the bonfire varies from every community. In Lewes, located in the South East of England, became famous for its Bonfire Night festivities and is one of its main touristic events attracting tourism from all over the world. Although this festivity has changed throughout the years, what has not changed is the famous rhyme which is sang in every Guy Fawkes Night. (Champion, 2005)

Remember, remember, the 5th of November  
The Gunpowder Treason and plot;  
I know of no reason why Gunpowder Treason  
Should ever be forgot.  
Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes,  
'Twas his intent.  
To blow up the King and the Parliament.  
Three score barrels of powder below.  
Poor old England to overthrow.

Although it is originally an English celebration, the Bonfire Night is not only celebrated in Britain. The tradition established itself in the British colonies during the centuries. It was celebrated in New England with the name of "Pope Day" in the late 18th century. Nowadays, November 5th bonfires still light up in places like New Zealand or Canada. This is due to the fact that immigration underwent a great change in the 20th century, when English people migrated all around the world carrying with them their culture and festivities. (Champion, 2005)

The celebration underwent many changes throughout the years, firstly it was the pyrotechnic component which was added into it to symbolize the use of the gunpowder to celebrate and not to blow up the parliament. Then, at the beginning of the twentieth century the tradition underwent a small variation and a detachment of ten Queen's Body Guards of the Yeomen of the Guard perform the search right before the Opening of Parliament. The Yeomen of the Guard, dressed in their scarlet uniforms and black hats, carry lanterns to maintain the essence of the celebration, search the Palace of Westminster. The cellar that Fawkes tried to blow up no longer exists because in 1834 it was destroyed in a fire which devastated the medieval Houses of Parliament. Nevertheless, the lantern that Guy Fawkes carried in 1605 is in the Ashmolean Museum, in Oxford. (Ashmolean.Org.)



The traditional search carried out by the Yeomen of the Guard derived from the constant Catholic menace which throughout the years haunted England ringing the alarm with the slightest suspicion. And later, in the second half of the 20th century, people started to make changes to “the Guy” and instead of burning effigies of Guy Fawkes, England’s traditional villain, they started to make effigies of mainly people related to politics varying from examples such as famous British political leaders as “the iron lady” Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair to the current US president Donald Trump, or British prime minister Theresa May which would then be thrown in the fire. “The Guy” symbolizes people seen as villains while burning them as a way of public criticism. Therefore, nowadays, the figure of Guy Fawkes is not considered as a villain as it was in the past, and people have created their own villains. (Champion, 2005) And, as a matter of fact, they would be more similar to the villains which are present in the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* as it will be discussed later in this dissertation.

Despite the fact that the plot was stopped, throughout the years there has been a debate of whether the 36 gunpowder barrels stored in the cellar below the parliament would have been enough to achieve the goal of killing the king together with all the people in it. An experiment was made with 1 metric ton of gunpowder (1000 kg, or 2204 pounds) stored in wooden 36 barrels) used to blow a building (a replica of the 1605 Westminster 'House of Parliament') to the ground. It was the biggest gunpowder explosion ever recorded at the time. A 2005 ITV documentary recreated the explosion to show the damage it would have caused, had the plot succeeded. It would have obliterated the parliament and cause serious damage in the nearby buildings. ("biggest gunpowder explosion ever!", 2017").



## *V for Vendetta.*

This graphic novel created written by Allan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd was published by DC comics in 1988. The story is set in a dystopian future in 1997, where a nuclear war has destroyed much of the world. Britain, however, survives under the cold, watchful eye of the Norsefire government, a fascist regime that took control amidst the chaos and confusion after the war. The story follows V, a mysterious man in a costume and a porcelain mask and his quest for revenge as well as to right the wrongs present in society.

V, the main character, rescues a woman, Evey, from danger, as she was about to be raped by an undercover member of the Norsefire organization and takes her under his wing. V is a man dressed in a 17th century style costume with a cloak, a hat, a wig and ultimately a mask. He is never seen without it which confers him a shadowy and mysterious aura. He frequently appears almost out of nowhere, he is skilled in martial arts, stealth and explosives. While he carries out his vendetta against the Norsefire organization, he is also trying to light a fire underneath people's feet, so that he might encourage them to take action after being inactive for so long by blowing up government buildings.

V's revenge is originated from when he was detained at the Larkhill Resettlement Camp. Although the reasons for his confinement are never revealed, everything that happens to him in the camp is told in great detail. V suffers at the hands the camp's keepers. By his own means, he manages to escape by blowing the prison up. From then on, the only meaning of his existence is to go after those who are responsible for what happened to him. Later on, we know that each one of them has moved on to higher roles in the government so V hunts every single one of them down until he settles the score.

Now, how exactly, does a Roman Catholic who failed a 17th century act of killing the king of England become an icon in the 21st century? ". First of all, we should take into account that the main character of *V for Vendetta*, "V", fights the totalitarian English Government through terrorism, and we could state that his means are not so different from Guy Fawkes'. Although terrorism did not exist in the 17th century as its origin as a concept dates of the late

18th century (in reference to the rule of the Jacobin faction during the period of the French Revolution known as the Terror) from French terrorism. And it is defined as: The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims. (Oxford Dictionary, 2017)

This can be applied to both the Gunpowder plot and the *V for Vendetta* graphic novel. First of all, despite the fact that terrorism was a concept which was introduced later on, the Gunpowder plot fits perfectly into the description as they were planning on assassinating the king and basically anyone who was in the parliament at the time (this would involve civilians) as well as being in pursuit of a political aim, which would be to restore Catholicism in England. Furthermore, in *V for Vendetta*, V uses violence and intimidation in numerous occasions, even to civilians; and as it was mentioned before, its mean is to take down the Norsefire organization as well as making people react and seize freedom by themselves; therefore, in both cases the definition of terrorism could be perfectly applied.

According to an interview from the newspaper Tech Times, where David Lloyd was asked how he came up with the mask worn by the protagonist V in *V for Vendetta*, and how it has now become the most recognized symbol of socio-political dissidence in the 21st century, he answered that the look of the mask came to him when the popularity of Guy Fawkes Day was declining because of popular celebrations like Halloween.

"By the late '70s and early '80s the holiday [Guy Fawkes Day] was lessening in importance, and the politics of the event was being seen in a much more cynical manner by myself and my fellow creatives in comics," Lloyd explained both the decline of the holiday and the conservative context of the times. "Celebrating the survival of a corrupt government and the death of those who tried to undermine it was not such a good thing, really. Maybe it would have been better if the Houses of Parliament had been blown up ... symbolically, that was still a good idea."

Now both David Lloyd and Allan Moore wanted the graphic novel not only to be entertaining

but to be a critical force to be reckoned with, while at the same time cover England's political climate in the 80s. When comparing the setting in *V for vendetta* and the portrait of England in the 1980s in "Bang a history of Britain in the 1980s" where Graham Stewart makes an accurate description of the country's situation at the time, describing it as a country broken by unemployment and violence we can appreciate quite a few similarities.

The 1980s began with the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. England was being shocked by a social, cultural and political counter-revolution. There was violence on the streets and on the football stadiums as well (the Bradford City fire in 1985 led to the death of 56 people as well as highlighted the neglect of English stadiums. Just two weeks later the Heysel tragedy which left 39 fans dead who were crushed by a collapsing wall and finally the Hillsborough disaster four years later, where 96 Liverpool fans died). Liverpool supporters were blamed and all English clubs were banned from Europe, these measures were fully supported by Thatcher. Furthermore, unemployment was at its peak as it reached a record high in September 1981. Thatcher, who was also known as the Iron lady, and regarded by many as an autocratic leader was taken as an inspiration by the graphic novel's creators. "Our attitude toward Margaret Thatcher's ultra-conservative government was one of the driving forces behind the fascist British police state we created in *Vendetta*,"

Therefore, both Englands (The one experienced by David Lloyd and Allan Moore. 1980s England, and the one depicted in the graphic novel/movie) had huge unemployment rates that led to the rise of a "fascist" government which introduced authoritarian measures such as censorship or repression. Furthermore in both settings, violence reigns on the streets feeding the feeling of rage and the necessity of having such government in order to keep the situation under control.

Moreover, when asked about the graphic novel's setting, David Lloyd answered that they wanted to add to the autocratic atmosphere using as inspiration the most well-known and criticized autocratic regime of all time:

The model for the society in *V* was Germany in the 30s, where a people emerging from mass unemployment and hyperinflation sought a saviour and found a monster in looking for one [...] When *V* was created by myself and Alan, we produced a basic character who had been persecuted, and tortured and had a mission to wreak vengeance ... but it was a skeleton not fully fleshed," said Lloyd. After brainstorming, Lloyd came up with Guy Fawkes "out of the blue," realizing that the animus of *V* would be to "succeed where Guy Fawkes failed. [...] Our character would adopt the persona and look of that character ... the costume [would be] accurate to the dress of 1605. (Lamont, 2017)

Although the model of society depicted in the novel is quite distant from the Guy Fawkes 'day Lloyd and Moore wanted to create an aura that surrounds the main character, *V*, was deliberately conceived to emanate a 17th century scent. In order to illustrate what is mentioned before, an inner and outer description of *V* will be made. First of all, he is an enigmatic figure with very eloquent and sophisticated speech, showing that he knows a wide variety of vocabulary as well as using archaic terms giving us the feeling that he belongs to another era. Moreover, it is quite interesting the fact that he is quite fond of quoting none other than Shakespeare himself and shows in various occasions a meticulous knowledge of English literature. Quoting Macbeth from Macbeth Act I Scene 7: "I dare do all that may become a man; who dares do more is none." As well as quoting Polonius from Shakespeare's Hamlet Act 3, Scene 1. "We are oft to blame in this, 'Tis too much proved that with devotion's visage, And pious action we do sugar o'er/ The devil himself". (Moore et al, 2005)

In order to illustrate the change of Guy Fawkes into a fictional character, I will proceed with the comparison between Guy and *V* carrying out both an outer description as well as an inner one.

Guy Fawkes is depicted wearing a capotain, (its importance will be further discussed later on), a 17th century shirt, trousers and a long cloak. Sticking to its 17th century style, *V* wears

a black, narrow-brimmed, tall-crowned and slightly conical hat which is known as a capotain or flat topped hat. In her book, *Patterns of Fashion: the cut and construction of clothes for men and women 1560–1620*, Janet Arnold states that the capotain hat had been associated to puritans as well as with the early pilgrims that settled in the Plymouth area in America. So, it is quite shocking to see Guy Fakes, who was totally the opposite to a Puritan, wearing this type of hat. Nevertheless, in both the graphic novel and in the movie a different type of hat was used as it has a longer brim if we compare it to the standard capotain, so it resembles more to the hats used by Catholics in Spain during the 17th century which would end up being more reasonable, because after all he was a Catholic. Although the usage of the capotain can have a possible explanation; being used as a disguise, it would be easier to remain unnoticed wearing a hat that everybody at the time was wearing in the Protestant England, instead of wearing a Catholic hat and showing your real religious preferences to everybody. (Arnold, 1986)





A contemporary engraving of eight of the thirteen conspirators, by Crispijn van de Passe.  
Creative commons international licence.

Furthermore he wears black boots as well as trousers and shirt which resemble to the ones worn by Guy Fawkes; although Guy did not wear black, the color was not one of the elements shared as V needs to wear a totally black outfit, as one of his many talents is his ability to be sneaky. Finally, he also wears a long black cloak which was a very typical element in the 17th century; as cloaks were mainly used not only as a fashion element but also as an easy means to hide weapons, in the case of V, he hides blades and explosives; which as a matter of fact is quite interesting how once again Lloyd and Moore stuck to 17th century weaponry avoiding the usage of modern firearms making an even more accurate resemblance. As we



know, blades were one the most common weapons during that time. Moreover, it should be highlighted that, on the one hand, Guy Fawkes was initially recruited by Catesby because he was an expert in explosives, which made him indispensable for the plot to succeed. While on the other, V is also very proficient with explosives himself which in the end could add up to the big list of common qualities that both characters share. Nevertheless, the most relevant element in V's outfit is undeniably the mask. Lloyd recalled, his childhood memories and the papier mâché masks they would wear on November 5th. In that same interview he would tell how he came with the idea of designing the mask that we know nowadays as the V for Vendetta's mask.

The original plan was to use the masks that you could still buy in stores around [Nov. 5], [...] but it was summertime and I couldn't get one anywhere, so I designed my own on what evidence we have of Guy Fawkes' features. (Lamont, 2017)

The mask represents the identity vs the ideal. We have seen that the main character of the graphic novel, V, never takes his mask off because he represents the embodiment of the ideal as he is not an individual. When he is asked by Creedy: "why won't you die?" and V answers: "Ideas are bulletproof" therefore, he represents more than a person, flesh and blood. He is a symbol, representing the ideas that he stands for. The fight for freedom and against oppression. Furthermore, the mask not only represents the ideal but also the masses. As seen in both the graphic novel and the movie, V's mask becomes the "face" of the rebellion against the authoritarian regime embodied by the Norsefire party. Consequently the mask ends up representing everybody. We can actually see this phenomenon at the end of the movie when we see thousands of people dressed up as V and Evey says that he is everyone simultaneously.

"You wear a mask for so long, you forget who you were underneath it" This quote from the 2006 movie describes the character of V, who was created deliberately as an antihero with a noble cause but questionable, unethical means (as seen when for instance he captures Lewis Prothero, the voice for Norsefire's computer FATE, and drives him to insanity, he murders, and he even broadcasts a message declaring that every citizen was responsible for permitting

the Norsefire organization step in and seize power). This was done, as previously mentioned, in a deliberate way as the objective was to create the doubt in the reader from Machiavelli's *The Prince*, introducing the everlasting dilemma of "the end justifies the means". Therefore, he shall not be regarded as a hero itself but more of an antihero or a vigilante with questionable morality and sense of justice as we have seen before. (Machiavelli, 1995)

So, if we go back to the previous quote we can see that V has been fighting the Norsefire organization for so long under his masks and his ideas that he does no longer stand as an individual but as an ideal. Ultimately it means that, it does not matter who you are but what you stand for, as individuals perish but ideas cannot be killed.



*A contemporary Guy Fawkes mask (Original mask of Guy Fawkes from the film V for Vendetta at the Musée des miniatures et décors de cinéma (fr) in Lyon, France.)*

*Creative commons international licence.*

Despite the relative success that the graphic novel initially had, its real breakout point was with the release in 2005 of the movie by the Wachowski sisters Lilly and Lana Wachowski and with James McTeigue as the director. The original title was kept, *V for Vendetta* as well as the original plot; the movie was a total success spreading the universe of V to a wider public than what was initially expected starring Hollywood stars such as Natalie Portman or Rupert Graves among others. (Moore et al, 2005)

Despite the fact that there has been a lot of criticism against the Wachowkis' movie, Lloyd declared to be "fond" of the *V for Vendetta* adaptation as it would in the end bring his mask out of the circles of comic fans. He considers the *V for Vendetta* adaptation an overall satisfactory work, as it "carried the core message of the original. Fans had been nervous due to the fact that movie could have been done by other Hollywood hands adding to the list to the endless string of strictly popular commercial movies with no background message whatsoever. Despite the fact that the movie's rights are owned by Time Warner Bros, Lloyd defends that the mythos of the image has not been diminished and that it is just a very small blemish.

That point about it being an object that raises money for a corporation that in some ways typifies the kind of structure that many mask-wearers oppose is a small irony—but but a very small one in the bigger picture. (Lamont, 2017)

A dying tradition as well as a dying historical character were brought back to life with Lloyd and Moore's work capturing the very essence of Guy Fawkes as well as creating a copycat which would then be adapted into a modern world which, in a way, reminds us somehow of the original's one, which is something scary to think about.

The spirit of Guy Fawkes was reborn onto a cloaked anarchist who wears a mustachioed mask to fight against a fascist authoritarian state becoming an anti-hero for the modern age. But the figure of Britain's most infamous criminal would not stop there. When the movie *V for Vendetta* was released in 2006 he passed from being a character to being alive again and

becoming famous worldwide; plastic masks were distributed to commemorate the release of the movie and could be bought online as well. V's masks were no longer recognized as the mask from the movie or even the comic but were recognized worldwide as "the Guy Fawkes mask". The historical character had finally seized the identity of the character that saved him from being forgotten. Nowadays, the mask symbolizes rebellion, freedom from any tyranny, it does not matter if it is political, cultural or social; and that regardless of ideologies, the mask always stands for good intentions. Thanks to the movie and the broader audience that it was directed to, a feeling of rebellion against what was established grew deep in the younger generations and the strength to defend in what they believe in; as in the last scene of the movie of *V for Vendetta* where everyone is wearing the Guy Fawkes mask That scene is very reminiscent of what the values of Guy Fawkes meant and how they have been planted into the people, who will ultimately revolt against oppression and injustice. What would happen next would shake the pillars of our society in a series of protests led by masks our most beloved criminal.



## *The face of “Anonymous”.*

We have seen how Britain’s most infamous criminal jumped from history to fiction embodying the fictional character V in Allan Moore and David Lloyd’s *V for Vendetta* and how it later was adopted by the Anonymous movement as its “face”. But before we dig deeper into that matter, what is Anonymous? And most importantly, how was it born? As it is a very fuzzy and opaque topic where the verisimilitude of the information ranges a lot from source to source, I will be sticking to a couple of reliable sources to explain what Anonymous is. First of all, the Anonymous documentary from 2012 “We are Legion” which gathered the information of the creation and development of Anonymous and how it quickly spread through the net and then into the real world featuring ex members of Anonymous. Besides the documentary, I will be using reliable articles from well-known newspapers such as [www.businessinsider.com](http://www.businessinsider.com) or [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)

To start with, although the organization’s origins are not definitive most sources agree that they are traced back to an online forum known as 4chan. This forum was chosen due to the fact that user’s identities are safe because of the page’s forced anonymity policy. What follows is the current official description of 4chan’s forum:

What is 4chan?

4chan is a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images. There are boards dedicated to a variety of topics, from Japanese animation and culture to videogames, music, and photography. Users do not need to register an account before participating in the community. Feel free to click on a board below that interests you and jump right in! ("4Chan" 2017)

The Anonymous group got his name from this forum itself as it is not possible to have a username in the forum due to its policies, every post’s author is regarded as Anonymous, so the forum was not regarded as a place where individuals would meet but as a place where anonymous people would share their ideas with the rest of an alike community with the same

profile, interests and culture. The site was launched on October the 8th 2003 and was initially conceived as a place where people would post anime and manga pictures as well as opening discussion about the topics mentioned above; but it ended up being an online platform to one of the biggest communities on the internet.

As a matter of fact, despite the popular conception of Anonymous as activists that used hacking as a way of achieving their means, the organization did not start with such practices. Instead, what first united Anonymous (which first started from a group of geeks posting about manga and anime in a forum) was the online practice known as trolling. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, trolling can be defined as: to antagonize (others) online by deliberately posting inflammatory, irrelevant, or offensive comments or other disruptive content. (Merriam Webster, 2017)

Therefore, a whole community grew up just linked by the idea of trolling. It became part of their daily life and it was used as a mean of having fun and laughing at people who would take the internet too seriously. Trolling started as an alternative way of having fun on the internet and has developed over the years into one of the most well-known practice on the internet and it was mostly due to the fact that everyone could do it anytime anywhere. The next step for this community came with the online game called “Habbo Hotel” which was an online community where people could create an avatar and talk with other people online, it was one of the first popular virtual worlds. What the members of Anonymous would do is troll people doing things that would disrupt other players in order to get cheap laughs. But they reached a landmark when they realized for the first time that they could use their numbers in order to achieve very interesting or disruptive practices. According to Mike Vitale, exmember of Anonymous and head of the Chanology project (which we will see later on) stated that for instance they would draw a swastika out of their own avatars, and the fact that they could offend people just by drawing something offensive on their screens made them realize that they could use the internet for more than just trolling.



But these off-color behavior is far from being called activism. Therefore, how does a group of trolls become all of a sudden a hacktivist organization?

Firstly we have to know what hacktivism is. According to “Free Software, free society, selected essays of Richard M.Stallman” hacktivism is a term coined by the Cult of the Dead Cow, an online organization; the term itself was coined by one of its members, T.Fish who stated that everybody should be able to communicate freely and to get their message out on the internet as well. Even in countries where there is an oppressive regime. So basically hacktivism revolves around using illegal methods in order to achieve something that would be ethical from the point of view of the hacker, as in the previous example hacking in defense of freedom of speech. For instance, the hacktivist group, the cult of the dead cow that was mentioned above, wrote software so people from other countries could use it to communicate securely while their own country was spying on them, hacktivists intervened mostly in countries with autocratic regimes or governments that have repression policies applied to anyone against them. Although this is an illegal practice, it has become more and more popular during recent years due to the fact that it has had some ethical meaning behind it. Hacktivism started to become popular around 2006; just one year later of the release of *V for Vendetta* and the worldwide popularization of the Guy Fawkes mask. Not only this, its popularity had risen far beyond the real world and had grown very popular among online forums like 4chan. The movie not only rescued the figure of Guy Fawkes from being forgotten, but also got its values of rebellion and fight against oppression planted in the hearts of the younger generations. And how these youngsters would put what they were best at, computers, into good use.

Although the first demonstration of power by Anonymous happened in 2007 when it evolved from a group of trolls to a more organized entity. The man that triggered this change was none other than Hal Turner, white nationalist a denier from the nazi holocaust, and blogger who had a podcast and was very active online sharing his white supremacy ideas all over the internet; he was according to some ex Anonymous members featured in the “We are legion” documentary a “neonazi”. It started just as a regular troll among many but they thought that

they held a moral ground over him so they took it personally, as a way of making a better world. Although Anonymous had already trolled people in the real world, this was the first case of major media coverage as they overflowed Turner's web page servers, sent industrial materials and pizzas to his house, and ultimately destroyed his radio show by saturating the line. In the end, it turned out that he was an FBI informant and was ultimately prosecuted for threatening judges. This was the first time that Anonymous was recognized as an activist organization, as a force for good and this led to a dramatic increase in the group's popularity.

These series of events led to the changing point that would set Anonymous where it currently stands. This event is referred to by ex-members of Anonymous as the Scientology breakdown. What triggered this event was an upload of a video that featured the famous actor Tom Cruise, who was a member of the church of Scientology at the time. But why would this be important? The church of Scientology defines itself in its website as: The study and handling of the spirit in relationship to itself, others and all of life. In Scientology no one is asked to accept anything as belief or on faith. That which is true for you is what you have observed to be true. An individual discovers for himself that Scientology works by personally applying its principles and observing or experiencing results.

The Tom Cruise video spread like wildfire and there was object of major laughs and mocking on the internet. As a response to the internet's reaction on Tom Cruise's video, the Church of Scientology decided to end the diffusion of the video by ordering lawsuits if the pages featuring the said video did not delete it immediately. This is when Anonymous decided that Scientology had gone too far and that internet's freedom had been compromised. The formation of the first internet army had already started, as this unleashed a chain of uploads where the video was being uploaded simultaneously to various pages on the internet. This phenomenon is known as the Barbra Streisand effect, which, according to Paul Armstrong, chief of the social department of Mindshare, the global media network, this effect consists in the act of suppressing information but only making it more widespread as a result of that suppression. The name was given in 2003 when Barbra Streisand tried to suppress some photographs that had been taken from her home. According to the documents which were

filed in the California court, Streisand's house images had only been downloaded a total of 6 times before the lawsuit (twice by her own lawyers). After legal action, a page where her pictures had been uploaded recorded 420.000 visits within a month.

The follow up by Scientology involved lawsuits and legal repercussions to anyone who dared upload, or share the video. This open internet war which was an unprecedented one, could not go forever, and the path that the Church of Scientology took, involving legal repercussions is what finally forced Anonymous to organize itself and start what would be later known as project Chanology. The main members of Anonymous showcased three videos in order to carry out the project, the first one, on January 21st 2008, a video called "Declaration of War" which was followed by a press release stating that all attacks by Anonymous will continue in order to defend freedom of speech on the internet and end the indiscriminate exploitation that the Church of Scientology had been doing. This was one of the first times that Anonymous started referring itself as a movement and stated that it was going to take down and destroy the Church of Scientology-This video is still regarded today as the moment when internet hacktivism, as we know it today, was born. The values of standing for what you believe in and defending it regardless if you have to do something illegal to do it, that is what hacktivism stands for- And what better image for that than a symbol of rebellion and fight against oppression than Guy Fawkes himself?. A second video followed on January 28th; it was referred to as "the Call to Arms" video and it basically encouraged people to show up at their closest scientology building around the world (in every major city in the USA there is a Scientology building). The Anonymous machinery had just started to move. Throughout all these 3 videos of the Chanology project, there was no one directing the message but a voice over instead, so when does the Guy Fawkes mask first appeared? And most importantly, what did it appear for? First of all, we should go back to the call to arms video that was aired on January 28th where they versioned the well-known traditional Guy Fawkes poem into: "Be very wary of the 10th of February" (Remember, remember the 5th of November). That is the first glimpse of the Guy Fawkes/*V for Vendetta* influence. We have seen before the influence that both the comic and the movie *V for Vendetta* had on the younger generations and Anonymous itself in the values they stand for,

but it had never been shown overtly as a symbol and this was the first time. With the first two videos, the members of Anonymous were already fired up, to take the banner of freedom and protest in front of every Scientology building worldwide. But what really matters here is what would be released in the 3rd video of project Chanology, “The Code of Conduct”. Which organized the protest and gave a set of rules and indications for the members who were going to take part in the protest to follow: don’t bring weapons, dress accordingly, and the most important for us, cover your faces to prevent identification from videos taken by hostiles. This was a way of hiding their identities and protecting them, as they had very legitimate fear of repercussions. So, therefore, they needed to wear a mask; and the mask that everybody knew about in online forums was the Guy Fawkes mask.

Mike Vitale, member of Anonymous and one of the organizers of project Chanology said the following about the Guy Fawkes mask being used by Anonymous as their symbol:

“We wanted to represent anonymity in some way when it moved into real life, I think that the Guy Fawkes mask was one of the most natural things to happen”



*Members of the group Anonymous wearing Guy Fawkes masks at a protest against the Church of Scientology in London, 2008.  
Creative commons international licence.*

But it is not only the fact that they wanted to represent anonymity, but also the fact that they did not want to protest in front of Scientology buildings as individuals but as a group, a

movement with a common identity. The Guy Fawkes mask made that possible, and what initially started as a way of protecting people's identity become their trademark, their symbol. During the actual protest, every major city in the world had hundreds of people swarming the streets and protesting against Scientology and to protect freedom of speech, to the cheers of "We are Anonymous". On February 12th 2008 on the online journal [www.dailytech.com](http://www.dailytech.com) we could read the following:

Remember, remember the 10th of...February?

It appears that "Anonymous" – a loose-knit group of Internet protesters united in their campaign against the Church of Scientology – kept its promise of worldwide demonstrations. This past Sunday, activists identifying themselves as members of Anonymous appeared in cities around the globe to peacefully demonstrate against the Church and its so-called crimes. (Dailytech, 2017)

Demonstrations were reported to have occurred in 93 cities worldwide, including Sydney, Los Angeles, New York, London, Dublin, and Stockholm. Donning signs with slogans such as "Knowledge is Free," "Question Scientology," and "Enlightenment should not cost £100,000," Anonymous took a vocal stand against the Church of Scientology's alleged human rights violations and relentless suppression of dissent. Demonstrations proceeded peacefully, with protesters concealing themselves behind Guy Fawkes masks – among other things – as popularized in the movie *V for Vendetta*.

Over the past couple of years Australia had introduced some of the most severe internet restrictions in the democratic world; one of the more controversial restrictions was the censorship law on pornography that featured women with small breasts. On February 10<sup>th</sup> 2010, Anonymous shut government sites down in a series of co-ordinated attacks as well as plastering the Prime Minister's home page with pornography. Kevin Rudd's site became the home, temporarily, of "Operation Titstorm", part of an assault targeting a range of government servers. For the first time, Anonymous went against a state in retaliation for its



copyright laws. (Marks, 2017)

That same year, there were two major events that triggered an Anonymous response into what would be known with the codename “Operation Payback”. Anonymous was seeking retaliation for the shutdown of The Pirate Bay, a file-sharing site, and against financial institutions that refused to process payments for the pro-transparency organization WikiLeaks. The attacks, which took place from September 2010 to January 2011 targeted the Recording Industry Association of America, the Motion Picture Association of America, Visa, MasterCard, Bank of America and several law firms. (“Feds Charge 13 Members Of Anonymous”, 2017)

Despite the fact that these previous operations have had great importance in the development of Anonymous of not only a movement but a whole culture as a hacktivist organization; their opportunity to show the people that over the past few years, Anonymous had transformed from an internet subculture into an international activist network capable of taking down the most sophisticated of networks. Its involvement in popular struggles, especially in the Middle East with both Operation Turkey and Operation Egypt helped its consolidation and improved its public image.

The beginning of the Arab Spring in Tunisia marked Anonymous’ shift into explicit hacktivism. This latest phase of Anonymous’ growth featured technological methods of nonviolent collective actions to fulfil political goals. For instance, Anonymous members provided translation services for in-country activists, created internet access points or held denial of service attacks. (Ryan, 2017)





## Conclusions.

Nowadays, it is not very frequent to find historical characters used as the face of any organization. Take for instance Christopher Columbus, he was one of the most important figures in history and nowadays, in places like the US Columbus Day, which supposedly is a national holiday and the commemoration of the discovery of America, generates controversy. Nevertheless, a growing organization like Anonymous, used a controversial historical character as Guy Fawkes to be the face of its movement. Nevertheless, we should take into account that the figure of Britain's most notorious criminal has changed a lot throughout the years. Firstly, it started as a villain, a figure which inspired fear and antagonism and was used as a sort of boogeyman in Britain to scare children and make them more obedient. People were taught since they were children that Guy Fawkes had been bad and that people should celebrate his death and failure as a commemoration of the triumph of good over evil. It is quite unique the way that someone with such profile could become something totally different, a figure that stands for positive values in our current society which shines for its lack of such things. The first step towards this significant change, was the fact that over the last couple of centuries, people have turned the celebration of Guy Fawkes Night into a night were he was no longer the protagonist. People found their villains in coetaneous politicians and they blamed them for their problems; Guy Fawkes was no longer a figure important to them, time had distanced their view on the fact that he tried to kill the king of England, regardless if people agreed or disagreed.

Once that Guy Fawkes was fading into oblivion, what we should take into account is that he was no longer "the" villain. With the release of Lloyd and Moore's graphic novel and the latter movie V for Vendetta, the figure of Guy Fawkes went from being hated, to almost forgotten, to starting to be related to positive elements. He was no longer a villain, although he was not a hero either, but at least the general conception about him had changed for the better.

Anonymous has always been controversial, it is an illegal organization and a lot of its members have been prosecuted and faced the consequences of their acts. They needed a figure that would represent what they are, and they are a movement that uses means that nowadays are considered illegal in order to achieve ethical political aims. As Mike Vitale said, the Guy Fawkes mask was the most natural thing to happen; they needed the mask, the icon, they are using a comic superhero as the face of their movement and people love that. On the other hand, Guy Fawkes also needed them not only to stop its extinction as so many historical figures before him but to become one of the most important icons of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he is neither a villain nor a hero, nor even an antihero; Guy Fawkes is now an icon.

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