

Personality Analysis in “A Question of Integrity” —We Are on the Journey to Integrity

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Abstract—Integrity is the foundation of one’s personality. Life is just a question of integrity, and we are on the journey to integrity. Family plays a very important role in the process of personality formation, and personality defects can be healed if you can recognize and accept them, understand the roots of family influence and believe something can be done to improve it until it is integrated. In the novel of “A Question of Integrity”, by analyzing personality defects, tracing family influence, and finding out how to be integrated of the main characters --Alice, Lewis and Nicholas, this paper highlights us to realize that the best way to integrity is to be true to yourself, facing the reality courageously and fighting the difficulties. So we need to guard our integrity as a sacred thing.

Index Terms—personality, personality defects, family influence, integrity

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Definition of Integrity

Integrity is the wholeness. It is a real-time genuine value, like persistence, courage and intensity. And it is this central, dominant value that guarantees all the other values. Integrity is one of the great aspect of personality which has drastic impact on mind and has a direct effect on personality traits.

To be integrated means to be true to yourself, and face the reality courageously and fighting the difficulties.

B. Family Influence upon Personality

“Psychological problems, which can be traced back to childhood, are probably the most serious and hardest to be cured, because the character qualities of adults have already been determined in his early life.”(Forward, 2011, p. 8-9) Children who grow up in healthy family environments, which help them feel worthy and valuable, are likely to form healthy personality and good relationships with others, and vice versa. And “What an adult suffered especially mental wound in his childhood would be branded deep down, and would be kept subconsciously. It seems that they have forgotten that, yet once the more frustration or stress he meets, the more symptoms will appear unconsciously. But he has no idea what triggers it.” (Forward, 2011, p. 27). So it's hard for the main characters --Alice, Lewis and Nicholas to realize that the truth can be traced back to children experiences, and even difficult for them to admit and accept the hurt caused just by their own family.

C. Introduction to the Main Characters in “A Question of Integrity”

“A Question of Integrity” is written by Susan Howatch, about the healing priests in the healing center based at the St. Benet's Church in modern London, and the people drawn in it.

The story opens with Alice, a shy, lonely, insecure woman, whose parents' abandonment and Aunt Beatrice' toxic rules make her be on the verge of emotional collapse and feel worthless in the world, stumbling into St. Benet's Church. There, she discovers a modern but mysterious healing center, where she witnesses a group of gifted healers led by a young charismatic minister Nicholas. Helped by Nicholas, Alice and her aunt finally clear up the misunderstanding between them. That receiving love and acceptance she desperately needs revolutionize her life.

As the story unravels, it shows us not only Alice but also the healers themselves have their own problems, and are in need of healing. Lewis is an irascible traditionalist who has problems dealing with women, which can be traced back to childhood experience. Mother's disgrace behavior and his uncle's toxic rules make him irascible, eccentric and have anti-women fever. With the help of Nicholas and proactively offering healing to an alcoholic woman just like his late wife who addicted to drinking but died on the street, he finds the right tool, i.e. to build a new attitude to women and life. He finally becomes integrated, genuinely forgiving his mother, and his uncle Cuthbert who brainwashes and manipulates him. Nicholas seems to be perfect, excellent, warm-hearted, hardworking, and ready to help, but his perfectionism, work holism and abusing his psychic power to save his collapsing marriage can be traced back to his parents' emotional abandonment and childhood insecurity. With the help of his spiritual directors and Alice, Nicholas finally realizes that he was self-centered and arrogant, and accepts his collapsed marriage.

II. ANALYSIS OF PERSONALITY DEFECTS AND FAMILY INFLUENCE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS

A. *Alice's Personality Defects*

Alice was a kind and well-behaved woman with a talent for cooking, but she was shy and humble. Being over-weight, she always thought she was in an unequal position and no real relationship was possible, which made her bath in the dark and retreat into isolation. But she couldn't stop binging to suppress her loneliness, emptiness and hopelessness about her future life.

Feeling like the ugliest person on the earth and completely isolated, worse more, failing to get a permanent job to pay for mass nursing fee for her dying aunt, who brought her up and was suffering from strokes, she was on the verge of desperation. Once she stumbled into the church, she was actually deeply moved by the touching healing service---laying-on of hands offered there, but she thought she did not belong to such a warm atmosphere. The hidden anger burst out: "I hate what was now going on in the church—I didn't know why I hated it so violently, but I did hate everyone and everything. I wanted to grab a machine-gun and mow down everyone in sight, then I'd shoot myself too because life was so vile, so awful, and even when Aunt died I'd still have no hope of happiness because there'd be no money and no one would want to employ me..."(Howatch, 1998, p.10) However, following the healing service, she had even been trying to touch Nicholas' cassock in the belief that she might be able to draw off some of his power to pass it on to her aunt, as if she would be cured. Struggling against the situation over which she had no control, Alice was so desperate that she collapsed in the church.

B. *Family Influence on Alice*

Abandoned by her parents, Alice was brought up by Aunt Beatrice who was a strict spinster devoted to rationalism. Aunt Beatrice talked a lot about moral duty and about a woman of integrity in her sense. Such as churchgoing was a waste of time, but Christian education was important, plain woman never married, etc. She always said that you're devoid of charm, when Alice let her down. Therefore, Alice always thought she wasn't the sort of child aunt wanted and as a failure woman who wasn't clever and pretty. And she believed that it was all her fault for being such a disappointment to her aunt.

"Any child, who is completely dependent on adults can't face the imperfections of adults. He will idealize the adults and owe all mistakes and defects to himself, thus he will feel psychological security, with which he survives."(Bradshaw, 2018, p.19) Gradually, Alice viewed herself was actually worthless.

C. *Lewis' Personality Defects*

Lewis was an old irascible traditionalist. He was capable of finding out the unvarnished truth for his clients to heal them, but for himself, he had trouble in perceiving and dealing with women accurately.

He thought, "All women priests are as good as lunatics."(Howatch, 1998, p.124) He was worried that Alice's entering the Rectory would represent danger, and he was irritated about the church's change, especially, women priests. Even worse, he never helped his ex-wife who addicted to alcohol and died on the street. Although, failing as a priest and a husband, the guilt often drove him nearly against the wall in despair.

Meanwhile, he faced his deep-seated desire for companionship, which he had denied for so long, hiding behind a dodgy hip rather than replaced it. "I could only face life with my arthritis as a chastity belt, so that I can rely on God's grace to keep me in order, happy and productive, I'm hiding behind my arthritis in a blue funk."(Howatch, 1998, p.130) Therefore, he dared not face up to his desires when he was in a physical state he was certain that would be an immediate turn-off to prospective companions. Not because he thought that as an Anglo-catholic, a divorced priest shouldn't remarry, but because he avoided a new commitment, and deep down he felt unworthy of love.

In order to get rid of upsetting thoughts, he often locked himself in his room, drinking or begging God to relieve his anxiety. However, he knew that it definitely wasn't his hip, and it's got nothing to do with women priests or Alice either. He still failed to identify what triggered his continuous anti-women fever.

D. *Family Influence on Lewis*

Lewis' mother was a disgrace, and abandoned him when he was in mid-teens. His Uncle Cuthbert who was an eccentric traditionalist brought him up. In his mind, Uncle Cuthbert was faultless Christian, and was an extremely perfect and holy man. Lewis often tore up his mother's letters in front of his uncle in order to impress him, and his mother was forfeited to visit him before she died. He thought, "Uncle Cuthbert was right, my mother was a disaster, no use to me at all, I was well rid of her!"(Howatch, 1998, p.217)

"Children always assumed adults are right, and they have no proofs that they shouldn't believe this. The more they accept the irrational assumption, the more deeply they will trust what adults say."(Bradshaw,1999, p.20) Gradually, he reduced all the women to a disposable facility, and took his revenge unconsciously on the women to avoid emotional involvement. And deluded himself that he didn't want a decent woman because he thought he was only capable of being sexually satisfied by tarts. And like many people with psychological blocks he was crucially blind about the basic problem: he yearned for love and security yet deep down he felt so unworthy of them.

E. *Nicholas' Personality Defects*

Nicholas was a handsome clergyman with a gift of psychic ability. He seemed to be perfect in everyone's eyes and was adored very much by his parishioners, especially women parishioners.

However, as a perfectionist, he was self-centered to keep busy working, leaving little space for his wife and none for the children. He cautiously wrapped himself in the cassock, concealing his loneliness, emptiness and defects. He thought that the only way to achieve approval and self-value was through solving others' problems and easing their pains. But he faced a moral dilemma involving pride and the misuse of his gifts. Success breeds pride, pride distorts one's vision of reality. Arrogance drove him to think there's no situation he couldn't handle. He's over-confident that within his influence, Stacy, a young assistant, would change his homosexual tendency, Francie, a befriender in the ministry of healing would not be deranged by her collapsed family and her over-worship to him, and he was deeply convinced that, his wife Rosalind, was still love and loyal to him.

Once destabilized by his collapsing marriage, he fell into a wonder worker, believing his power to be God-like rather than God-given, allowing his arrogance and self-centeredness to gain the upper hand. He raped his wife through hypnosis in order to prove that she still love him and induce her to believe that divorce was mad. Just as he proclaimed "I'd be able to prove that I know Rosalind still loves me, and her desire for divorce was madness. I figured hypnotherapy was a valid tool to strip away her self-centeredness." (Howatch, 1998, p.399)

F. Family Influence on Nicholas

"Emotional abandonment of his parents made him feel shame and unable to establish healthy relationship with others, because he learned not to trust others. This self-doubt urged him to avoid pain and console himself by means of illusion or compulsive behavior." (Bradshaw, 2018, p.432) When he was young, he didn't see much of his parents who were preoccupied with their own career. But he consoled himself for their absence by savoring the fact that he was unquestionably wonderful. "I was the only surviving child of my parents' marriage and all the adults I knew treated me as if I were immensely special." (Howatch, 1998, p.475)

"The mid-life crisis is characterized by the desire to cling to a lost youth, the refusal to move on to the next stage of life. The symptoms include not just the tendency to have a love affair with someone much younger, but the clinging to a symbol of youth--a sports car, perhaps some other much-loved significant object which should have been set aside long ago." (Howatch, 1998, p.420) He had no friends except a toy bear, which he was taking for company and keeping him feel secure all the time. He was lonely but pretended not to be. In the kindergarten, he was hostile to the other children, until he met Rosalind, who was shy, quite and non-threatening, with whom he felt normal, strong and safe.

He valued himself only on the basis of other people's approval. And only making him special that could draw others' attention. So he acted as a workaholic and abused his psychic power to save his collapsing marriage. His off-beat upbringing made him have little idea what a normal family life was like, which was doomed to the marriage crisis.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS HOW TO FIND THE WAY TO INTEGRITY

A. Alice's Personality Integrity

In the healing center, Alice found that she was accepted and welcomed. She fancied Nicholas, the only man she thought who treated her as a real person, listening to her and respecting her decision to stay with her aunt, despite financial and personal costs. Nicholas didn't rebuke her when her focus was backwards-recovery rather than forwards-towards-death. He just told her "Even if no cure is possible a healing can still take place. A cure is that the disabled person who gets up from his bed and walks. A healing is that same disabled person coming to terms with his lack of mobility, transcending his anger and grief and becoming an inspiration to all those who visit him." (Howatch, 1998, p.15)

In Alice's house, he took the time and cared to notice his surroundings, asked for some more information from Alice: her aunt's name, age, marital status, the whereabouts of Alice's parents. He figured out "I believe you love your aunt, but your relationship with her has unhappy aspects." (Howatch, 1998, p.31) Shortly after they moved to Aunt Beatrice's bedroom, although Aunt was unable to communicate with him, he gave respect and dignity to her aunt as well as to Alice. He assured her who he was, what he would do, and that Alice asked him to come because she loved her.

Nicholas didn't claim the healing power for himself, but shared it with Alice. And he encouraged her to realize her part in the venture to summon up her hidden love for her aunt. With the help of Nicholas, Alice had the courage to burst out with a stream of apologies for all the times she had let her aunt down. But Aunt Beatrice managed to ask 'forgive' from Alice as a burden and disappointment to Alice. At this Alice burst into tears, "Of course I forgive you, I forgive you because I love you. It's all right. Everything's all right, and you don't have to worry any more" (Howatch, 1998, p.41) This released her aunt to whisper clearly, "best of girls, such a blessing. How lucky I was."

Healing finally came when both Aunt Beatrice and Alice gave forgiveness to each other. Aunt Beatrice was able to die with peace, knowing that she was forgiven, knowing that what she had devoted he life to had not been a waste but had been appreciated, and knowing that she was loved by her niece. Alice was able to let go of her aunt knowing that she herself had done what her aunt had done for her, knowing that in the end she loved her aunt so much and had told her so. They completed the unfinished business, and both of them were healed, indeed, by each other.

Alice was surprised to find that she was remarkably calm, and wrapped in a deep peace. "My voice said 'Alice is healed.' I hadn't understood before, "I was the patient, wasn't I." (Howatch, 1998, p.42)

Later, she worked as a cook at the Rectory, she loved to be part of this new "family" where she felt concern, respect and love, she soon made progress, conquered her eating, and developed her personality. Meanwhile, she sensed the

priests themselves had their own problems and needed to be healed. She carefully looked after the three men, Lewis, Stacy and Nicholas with her kindness and consideration. She was particularly clever with irascible Lewis, who had previously terrorized all the domestic help and had at first opposed the idea of her living in at the Rectory. She cooked him his favorite English dishes. She admired the photographs of his grandchildren. She looked after him in hospital. But she never gushed over him. She was equally successful with immature Stacy, who had soon become confident in her presence. She taught him how to use the washing machine without breaking it. She baked him his favorite biscuits, she showed him the best way of mending his cassock. Stacy was willing to talk about football and his own family with her, but never with Nick or Lewis. She loved Nicholas, but she quite understood that distance had to be kept, because she knew that real love should be non-controlling and non-possessive one. As Lewis said: "She was well-informed, splendidly accomplished woman! We're lucky to have her." (Howatch, 1998, p.179)

At last, she lost the weight. Because she had finally gotten into an environment that allowed her to regain self-value, developed her personality, and moved towards integrity and wholeness.

B. Lewis' Personality Integrity

One day at a party he met Venetia, a drunken woman like his wife, she's wasted her life just as her wife did. But he suddenly realized that Venetia seemed to be offering him the chance to assuage the guilt, redeem the tragedy, put things right, in another place and in another time, all that went wrong with his marriage.

"Anyone who has gone through great suffering is bound to have a greater sympathy and understanding of the problems of others." (Forward, 2011, p.46). He was surprised to learn that her miserable marriage with a priest also damaged her, which aroused him the time when he messed up his wife. Then he advised and accompanied her to pussyfoot, help her fight binging on alcohol. And restored her self-esteem by encouraging her to believe she can triumph over the past disasters. Venetia was finally on her way to live a new life she's designed. She told Lewis: "You've given back what he took away: my self-respect, my hope for the future, my belief that life has value and meaning. It was you who finally rewrote the past and enabled me to believe in a future where everything was made now." (Howatch, 1998, p.211). These words as a reward like sunlight shattering his inner regret and guilt for his wife, and brought him courage to replace his hip and face up to his future life. He healed Venetia, and in return, Venetia had enlightened him how to beat his hang-ups.

He had founded the right tool to help himself, i.e. to develop and build a new attitude to women and life. And finally with his partner Nicholas' help, he realized that he was always controlled by his uncle, and found security by hating his mother and revering his uncle. He figured out that s no more seeing women as evil temptresses, no more refusing women priests, it depended on whether he could achieve a genuine forgiveness of his mother, and depended on whether he could forgive Great-uncle Cuthbert for brainwashing and manipulating him. But we know that it just needs time to take him to be integrity.

C. Nicholas' Personality Integrity

He was upset to realize what serious mistake he had made. He knew that he had to turn for help to regain his emotional equilibrium. With the help of his spiritual directors and his partner Lewis, he realized that what he'd done had nothing to do with healing, but behaved as a wonder-worker and manipulated his wife in the worst way of hypnosis to take away her will and made her do what she didn't want to –have sex. He also realized that it's all his fault that the marriage was in a mess, and not Rosalind, but himself needed to be healed. However, he still couldn't accept that Rosalind, never loved him and would go away.

He just wanted to make the marriage come right to ensure Rosalind would still stand by him. However, Rosalind tried to seduce Stacy, which drove him towards the brink of emotional collapse. Meanwhile, he was entranced by Alice's warmth, compassion and understanding. Although he knew Alice loved him, he realized that her love, non-possessive and utterly unselfish lit up the landscape where he had lived so long in isolation and in the end understood what his spiritual director said: "the best kind of love is always unselfish, not consumed with the ego's demands but with the desire to help the beloved." (Howatch, 1998, p.677) He understood what Rosalind had done was only trying to get him to see the truth that she wanted to get rid of his control. He regretted that he controlled and deprived Rosalind of her will so long that it caused her so much pains. He understood that now, the marriage was over, and all he and Rosalind really had in common were the shared memories of their childhood. She merely replaced his teddy bear, which made him feel safe and secure. It was very hard to let her go but it's got to be done. Because he could never provide the new life she needed and deserved as a priest. It was better to face the truth to let her go i.e. divorce.

"I may be wiped out at the moment. I may be battered and shattered and thoroughly wrecked, but I've still got my faith and I'm gong on in the belief that the best years of my life are still to come---I'm going to go on in the hope that in the end everything will be redeemed, healed and made new." (Howatch, 1998, p.679)

We know Nicholas will realized his weak points, and try to respect everyone including his wife. In the end it was all a question of health and wholeness. In the end it was all a question of integrity.

IV. CONCLUSION

Life is pilgrimage. It is a pilgrimage to health, but on the journey, always partially, always imperfectly, always with

an admixture of that illness which is its apposite or the mark of its imperfections. Family plays a very important role in the process of personality formation. Unless we know the family which we came, we can't understand our true self and the society we live in. Life is just a question of integrity. Be true to yourself and live in truth with each person in your life. Guard your integrity as a sacred thing.

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