

A Study of the Governing Traits of an Animated Animal Chef in Brad Bird's *Ratatouille*

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The inevitability of the impact of media in today's world is a known fact that its influence over the behaviour of people is witnessed everyday in the form of both good and evil. As behaviour gets affected its patterns are also changed. Once the patterns are changed there is no escape for personality. As we spend more time with virtual reality learning takes place based on the direction of the virtual materials that are available in the market. It can be in any form like social media or films. Films have more potential to influence the personality of the person one who watches it. Because, it provides a platform either to full fill or ignite the desire or fantasy of the on looker through various roles played by the characters on the screen that are ultimately associated by the audience with themselves and their lives. They exactly do the duty once done by drama with purgatory effect in the audience. Stage or screen, the impact is same. Martin Esslin in his *An Anatomy of Drama* came out with a notion that "The theatre is the place where a nation thinks in public in front of itself" (qtd. in Saddik 1). The observation on theatre by Esslin can be attributed to the films which does the same.

The representation of the above said notion has been taken to its height by the creativity and technology used in the film industries today. By which the mimeses of art and literature argued by Plato, Aristotle and Philip Sydney has taken its visual form on the popular screen. It has gone beyond Plato's example of carpenter and chair to the animals, tiny creatures and what not. Though the chief aim of all these creatures is entertainment it never fails to fulfill the ancient principle of teach and delight. This post-postmodern world doesn't need the aid of a great king or hero of a nation to satisfy the expectation of the audience. The well defined protagonist of Aristotle can be found in the notorious animals. These tiny protagonists are more capable enough to teach and delight.

Experiencing these fictional narratives on the popular screen has an ultimate connection with psychologism which in fact theorises the tendency to analyse the events in subjective terms or exaggerated the association of psychological factors. But there are challenges or alternative notions to these cinematic experiences. One of the notable arguments by Gregory Currie in his *Image and Mind* is pointed out by Dominic M. McIver Lopes in his study titled "Imagination,

Illusion and Experience in Film” as “cinematic experience is a perceptual imagining”(343). McIver argues further that reading a novel is cinematic which need explanation, whereas watching a movie is screen experience and it doesn't have mystery to be explained. Whether novel or movie both are fictional narratives in which character is mainstay.

The argument on character cannot be completed without using traits. It is quite similar to the understanding of world's history which cannot be studied without knowing about the famous personalities of every period and place. It is observed that “a personality trait is a durable disposition to behave in a particular way in a variety of situations” (Weiten 380). The trait approach has variety of arguments which suits to study personality at all walks of life. Popular screen has never failed to project protagonists with unique personalities. If protagonists associated with food are analysed, films like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Lady and the Tramp*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Aristocats*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Kungfu Panda* and *Ratatouille* comes in the front line. Food takes a starring role in all these films which is mixed up with goals of survival to fulfill the ego and ambition of the characters. One among the prolific character in the above said films is Remy in *Ratatouille (R)*, directed by American animation director Brad Bird. It received ten awards including Academy Award and Golden Globe award for Best Animated Feature Film. It attempts to unveil the desire of the protagonist that let him to dream and determine to be a chef in the face of life threatening hardships. Remy is gifted with culinary skills, risk his life in following his dream of becoming a chef and achieves it despite various hardships. It may be beyond our belief that a rat becoming a famous chef but the film proves that anyone can become anything when he/she has the inclination, determination and dedicated to do it. The major factors that govern his character are extraversion, openness and conscientiousness. He exhibits moderate agreeableness and less neuroticism.

Remy is a self-consciousness rat who has understood the hardships of being a rat. The proof for the same is explained by self narration in his very first statement. “First of all I am a rat, which means life is hard and second I have a highly developed sense of taste and smell” (*R* 00:02:03-00:02:16). The knowledge of one's own self is the only positive facet in neuroticism and Remy has it at a high degree. From his words it is apparent that he is gifted with high quality of taste and smell. The choice of food is connected with one's personality traits and it varies in degree from one person to another. As Remy's innate traits are filled with factors like openness and conscientiousness its facets like ideas, values and self-discipline makes him to be unique from rest of his community in choosing food. His perspective of food is shown in an instance when he had an argument with his dad. In the end of the argument he was finally advised to eat food from the garbage and not from houses. But he refused to eat from the garbage and said to himself that “This much I knew. If you are what you eat than I only one eat the good stuff” (*R* 00:03:39-00:03:46).

His fantasy, esthetics and ideas of openness in association with excitement seeking and positive thinking of extraversion are pictured in the film. Out of these factors and facets he loves cooking and became a great fan of a greatest chef named Gusteau by reading his book and watching his television shows. Remy always wonders about the capacity of human to invent and discover. He even goes to the extent of cooking a mushroom by using lightning and tried to steal ingredients from a house for the same. This curious action turns his life upside down; he was separated from his family, friends and driven by the rainwater to Paris. He was afraid, hungry, lonely and desperate but his hunger for fulfilling his dream led him to Gusteau's famous restaurant in Paris. His positive thinking has motivated him to not to lose his heart. This self-motivation is presented in the movie as if the illustration of Gusteau speaking to Remy. But it has to be considered as Remy's cognition which helps to manage his emotions. The words that changed life of Remy are "if you focus on what you left behind you will never be able to see what lies ahead" (R 00:14: 56-00:15:03). At the verge of his desperate search he accidentally found Gusteau's restaurant where more challenges await for him.

As Gusteau is dead the restaurant is under the control of Skinner, who wants to inherit the restaurant by fraud. Under this circumstance Remy joints with a garbage boy named Linguini. He is the rightful heir of the restaurant but unfortunately unknown to himself and simply works as a garbage boy in the kitchen. With the help of Linguini Remy executes his dream as cook. As he got a platform to test his culinary skills he excels in it. But as he is a rat he hides himself in Linguini's cap. The components like achievement- striving, competence and excitement seeking lets him to be the chef under adventures situation in the kitchen. He could overcome all the barriers and develop his culinary skills to its highest level.

Apart from the culinary skills Remy exhibits various soft skills including honesty and friendliness. His concern for his human friend Linguini is altruistic which never expects in return. It is because of Remy's life risking action Linguini became famous in the town and got the restaurant from the treacherous Skinner. The happy haven't lost for long when misunderstanding between Linguini and Remy raised to almost separate them. The credibility of Remy with his friend is completely broken when he found that Remy brought the entire rat colony into the kitchen to steel food out of depression. This is the only instance where the audience can witness Remy's mistake due to the influence of impulsiveness. The impulsive act is purely due to the impact of neuroticism. His compassion towards his friend makes him to regret for what he has done. Though he was sent out of the restaurant by his friend, Remy was unable to leave him unarmed as Linguini cannot cook on his own without the help of this rat-chef.

In the climax of the film Linguini was supposed to prepare dinner for the most influential critic of the town. The restaurant's future will be decided based on his review. Linguini was terribly in need of help from Remy. Meanwhile, Remy was caught and caged by Skinner. Soon, Remy revived his spirit by the traits like empathy, competence, trust and achievement striving and managed to escape with the help of his family and friends. Whatever may happen to him, he never quits. The trust that Remy has on him at this instance proves that he will never let his goal to die.

In the end of the film all the major traits except neuroticism come in to work together on Remy who finally reunited with Linguini and saved the restaurant for future from the hands of the critic Anton Ego and the treacherous Skinner. Remy's traits are on full show in determining his character and his behaviours are completely governed by them. Through this study it is witnessed that traits are the masters of one's behaviour in all the walk of life from choice of food to be a best chef and a better person. Traits are "habitual patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion" (Henry 37). Food is the source of life and traits are the source of character.

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