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THE BEAUTY OF THE HOUSE

LA BELLEZA DE LA CASA

A BELEZA DA CASA

Amy Nyary Gamboa¹

ABSTRACT

Personality is a complex, nuanced aspect of the human experience. In this paper, Nyary explores the theme of personality as it relates to Susanna Clarke's novel *Piranesi*. In this novel, the main character Piranesi, a London native, is trapped in the House, a labyrinth with hundreds of rooms, where he has no memory of his past life. Piranesi transforms into a different person after a prolonged stay in the House. As a consequence of human nature, individuals tend to create personas that they present to others to appear more likable while withholding their true personalities. Nyary asserts that the House represents one's true personality while London represents the version one shows to the world. Broadening the scope of this metaphor, Nyary emphasizes the importance of understanding and nurturing one's true personality and the implications this has for society.

KEYWORDS (SOURCE: DeCS): Personality; persons; ego; self-psychology; existentialism.

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RESUMEN

La personalidad es un aspecto de la experiencia humana que es complejo y está lleno de matices. En este artículo, Nyary explora el tema de la personalidad en relación con la novela *Piranesi* de Susanna Clarke, cuyo personaje principal, el londinense Piranesi, está atrapado en la Casa, un laberinto con cientos de habitaciones, sin ningún recuerdo de su vida pasada. Tras una estancia prolongada en este lugar, Piranesi se transforma en una persona diferente. Lo anterior refleja que, como consecuencia de la naturaleza humana, las personas tienden a crear una imagen pública para parecer más agradables, mientras ocultan sus verdaderas personalidades. Nyary afirma que la Casa representa nuestra verdadera personalidad y Londres, la versión que mostramos al mundo. Al ampliar el alcance de esta metáfora, Nyary hace énfasis en la importancia de comprender y nutrir nuestra verdadera personalidad y las implicaciones que esto tiene para la sociedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE (FUENTE: DeCS): Personalidad; personas; ego; autopsicología; existencialismo.

RESUMO

A personalidade é um aspecto da experiência humana que é complexo e está cheio de nuances. Neste artigo, Nyary explora o tema da personalidade com relação ao romance *Piranesi* de Susanna Clarke, cuja personagem principal é o londrino Piranesi, o qual está preso na Casa, um labirinto com centenas de quartos, sem nenhuma recordação de sua vida passada. Após uma estada prolongada nesse lugar, Piranesi se transforma numa pessoa diferente. Isso reflete que, como consequência da natureza humana, as pessoas tendem a criar uma imagem pública para parecerem mais agradáveis, enquanto escondem suas verdadeiras personalidades. Nyary afirma que a Casa representa nossa verdadeira personalidade e Londres, a versão que mostramos ao mundo. Ao ampliar o escopo dessa metáfora, Nyary enfatiza a importância de compreender e nutrir nossa verdadeira personalidade e as consequências que isso traz para a sociedade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE (FONTE: DeCS): Personalidade; pessoas; ego; autopsicologia; existencialismo.

What does it mean to be true to ourselves? To be true to others? And when are we in our truest form? As a result of human nature, people tend to present multiple personas to the world to become more palatable to whoever they are with, withholding their truest self. Susanne Clarke seeks to explore this phenomenon through her novel *Piranesi*. A servant of the House, Piranesi wanders the halls collecting seaweed for dinner and taking note of the tides while also having no recollection of how he arrived at the House or even of his life before. When he returns to London, where his former life was left behind, he feels alienated and reflects on his memories of the House, longing to go back. He felt the safest and most comforted in the House, finding joy in every statue and creature. Piranesi was in his purest form in the House and was forced to put up a persona in London to appease his family's feelings of emptiness without him. Essentially, the House represents one's personality in its most genuine form.

Depending on who we are with, where we are, and how we are feeling in the moment, our personality tends to vary. Personalities are nuanced and multifaceted, with different sides being shown to different people. When we are with our best friends whom we have known for years, it is easier to let our walls down and not worry about how we are perceived. On the other hand, being in a class full of people you have never met before can sometimes make us feel small and cause us to alter our behavior to appear more likable. There always seem to be parts of us that we keep to ourselves, never truly making us whole. We protect our being. Our true personality. Our House. In the House, Piranesi is free to wander and to simply exist with hardly any outside influences dampening his personality. He journeys to unknown halls, finding the beauty in every intricate detail. He

transforms into a gentle, empathetic person, constantly paying his respects to the dead of the House and caring for the birds. Piranesi reaches his full potential in the House due to his newfound freedom.

This freedom we find in the wholeness of our personality can be something we are reluctant to share with others for fear of it being corrupted or, even worse, criticized. Especially if we do not fully trust those we spend our time with, our personality can be something far too vulnerable to completely share. In my own experience, this is something I have struggled with when it comes to new people. When I first meet someone, I often feel like I am not even myself in fear of this new person thinking that I am weird or moronic. I end up showing a very limited part of my personality and psych myself out of talking to people I think are really interesting. However, I feel like this is contradictory because I always seem to think the best of people when I meet them for the first time and never catch myself judging them for any random remarks they make. In general, I feel like this is the case for most people to some degree. We withhold the parts of our personality that make us feel safe and unique, our Houses, so others do not judge us.

The House is limitless. Similarly, our inner selves are limitless. Because of this, I do not believe that anyone is boring. Every human being has peculiarities that set them apart from others, the components of their inner self. From an outside perspective, someone who may not be as outspoken or have as huge a personality as others could appear uninteresting to those who do not look for something deeper.

Conversely, those who may seem shallow and fake due to their larger-than-life personalities also have unique

and complex parts that make them human. Taking the time to genuinely get to know someone has always made others more endearing and real to me. It makes it that much more special when those who are more reserved or those who seem to be fully open with others share parts of themselves that most people may not get to see. Human personalities are complicated and vast, each distinct in its own way. As Piranesi respected and explored the House, I believe we should intentionally explore the depths of each other's personalities, always finding beauty in what makes that person uniquely them.

When we connect with our authentic selves, we learn more about who we truly are. Taking the time to just be with yourself can lead to discoveries of things you never realized about yourself. This was something I came to realize when we were quarantined in 2020. While there were several aspects of quarantine I did not enjoy, one lesson I took with me was that it is vital to learn about yourself. I had the unique opportunity to seriously spend time alone and enjoy my own company with no outside obligations. Because of this, I fell back in love with reading since I had endless time to do so. I also learned that simply sitting outside in my backyard and being in nature is a very healing experience for me and makes me feel small in a good way. I got to connect with my spirituality in a way I had never done before due to the unprecedented situation we were living in. Since then, I have made sure to test the limits of my personality and continue the journey of the exploration of my inner self, and I believe this journey will be a lifelong one.

While being in tune with your inner self is vital and personal, it can also be taken to the extreme, creating a reality where only you know your true self. While Piranesi

grew into a kinder and truer version of himself during his time in the House, his prolonged stay in another reality caused him to completely forget his original identity and past life. Upon his arrival back to London, he felt utterly foreign and failed to connect with his family on an emotional level. The same could be said about keeping your inner self hidden. Suppressing who you genuinely are and presenting multiple personalities to keep your true nature to yourself can be detrimental to how you view yourself. Splitting your personality in this way can not only be exhausting but confusing. If you are constantly putting out a version of yourself that is not authentically you, how do you know who you are at the end of the day when no one is around? People may also find you ingenuine if you show strikingly different personalities to certain people, leading to mistrust and confusion in relationships. In my own experience, it can be awkward when different friend groups meet because no matter how genuine you try to be with others, you are continually presenting a slightly altered version of yourself. Just the thought of my college friends meeting my childhood friends makes me feel queasy. Therefore, there should be a balance between what you give out to the world and what you keep to yourself, and boundaries should be made. You do not have to explore who you are at your core by yourself, but you should invite others into the House with discretion.

An aspect of *Piranesi* I found especially interesting was the interaction between outsiders, such as the Other and Raphael, and the House. The Other's primary goal was to attain the Great and Secret knowledge of the House. He never tried to stay too long because he knew the consequences and exploited Piranesi by making him explore the House and report what he found to the Other.

Because Piranesi believed the Other to be a friend and wholeheartedly trusted him at first, the Other used this to his advantage to repeatedly manipulate and gaslight Piranesi. He did not try to understand or respect the House but tried to find a way to use it to his gain. The Other's toxic relationship with the House represents a negative outcome of showing the wrong kinds of people your true self. When we give people vulnerable parts of ourselves, we trust them to react with kindness and love. However, people like the Other will use this information to their advantage, disregarding the other person's sentiments. This is especially true in abusive relationships. Many times, the victim has been emotionally manipulated so far to the point that they had no clue until they were able to leave the relationship. The abuser takes personal information that their partner entrusted them with and threatens them if they try to leave. This is reminiscent of how the Other constantly made Piranesi feel bad about himself if he showed an inkling of doubt regarding the Other's radical ideas. Moreover, Piranesi still had feelings of respect and empathy for the Other even after he tried to kill Piranesi, which is sadly something that victims of abusive relationships also tend to go through. While we should do our best to be our genuine selves, we should still be cautious of those we decide to share our innermost feelings with.

On the other hand, people like Raphael are what make being vulnerable to others rewarding. In the novel, she is entirely awestruck upon arriving at the House. Unlike the Other, she recognizes the beauty of the House and seeks to explore its unbounded halls. When she encounters Piranesi, she asks him to show her more out of pure curiosity and admiration for the House. She has no ulterior motives. When people show us these wholesome

acts of the friendship of the likes of Raphael, it helps us continue to grow into ourselves and can be healing. In the Bible, Raphael is one of the four archangels and is specifically associated with healing.

Clarke was clearly intentional in naming Piranesi's savior after the archangel who heals the mind, body, and spirit. Raphael's presence in the House after Piranesi had only been in contact with the Other for several years was ultimately healing for him. Because of her, he was able to go back to London, reluctantly at first, and begin his new life not as Piranesi nor as Matthew Rose Sorensen. Piranesi was given a chance to heal after his many years of confinement to the House because of someone who took the time to gain his trust and show him unconditional friendship and thoughtfulness. I believe this is a benefit of allowing others who genuinely care for you into your inner world and the depths of your personality. If you have given parts of yourself to other people and taken advantage of that, it can be challenging to open up to other people moving forward. However, when someone such as Raphael just wants to get to know you for who you are, you can begin to heal. You can learn that it is okay to be yourself and that not everyone is there to use you or criticize you but to be a true friend and appreciate you for all your complexities. Letting someone into your House can be a healing experience when you let in people with the right intentions.

Showing honorable people's vulnerability can be healing, but it can also be grounding. The longer you live in your head and try to portray someone you are not to the world around you, the more detached you become from reality and your true self. This is exemplified through Piranesi's inability to remember his life back in London

and resentment towards the House upon arriving there against his will. The more time Piranesi spent in the House, the less he remembered who he was. Whenever he was confronted with “new” information, such as the fact that another reality, London, exists or that the Other is untrustworthy, he would brush it off and conjure up a reason why the matter is not worrisome. His reliance on the House was so extreme that he was convinced by the Other to resent and be distrustful of Raphael because he forgot about the unforgivable things the Other did to him. This was detrimental to Piranesi’s sense of what was true, making it extremely difficult for him to finally muster the courage to leave the House behind and begin his life again in London. He became so infatuated with the idea and security of the House that he no longer knew how to interact with those who knew him in the real world. Without Raphael there to give him a reality check, Piranesi could have become a prisoner of the House forever, never to see London again.

As humans, we need this outside force in our lives to keep us grounded. Allowing others to help us navigate our journey of finding ourselves will enable us for another perspective and reminds us of who we really are. If you spend too much time in your head, you begin to overanalyze everything, distorting your perception of reality. As a result, you may try to alter your personality to be more palatable because you believe others are being more judgmental towards you than they really are. Further, the longer you dwell on something such as your personality, you will inevitably begin to find flaws within yourself and ruminate on them, leading to heightened feelings of self-depreciation. If we constantly create these negative depictions of ourselves in our minds, we may start to believe, causing us to live in an altered, false reality. To combat this, we must confide in others, giving

them the chance to build us up. You are your harshest critic, so letting a friend remind you of the qualities that make you valuable helps you keep in touch with your true self. It is refreshing to be around those who accept you for who you are and allow yourself to set all your internalized negativity free. Like how Piranesi allowed himself to return to London with Raphael, although it was hard to do, we must get out of our comfort zone and be vulnerable with others to have a realistic perception of ourselves through the lens of our friends.

The Beauty of the House is immeasurable; its Kindness infinite (Clarke 5). At our core, our personalities contain incalculable beauty and a gentleness that knows no bounds. Every single day I seem to learn something new about myself. Whether it be something as simple as the fact that I do not like a specific order at a restaurant or something more complex like discerning why I tend to act a certain way, I have discovered that my personality knows no bounds. What I have taken away from *Piranesi* is that we should continue to push these bounds, becoming endlessly curious. Rather than stick to the main vestibule of our House, we should venture into halls unknown with great courage, taking in every elaborate detail. Instead of exploiting parts of ourselves to appear grandiose to others, we should treat our personalities with kindness, taking great care to be as true to ourselves as we are to others without ulterior motives. Seeking to better your personality should not become a way of appeasing others or just because it is necessary for character growth. Instead, we should bask in the immense beauty of our inner beings with an admiration for all its intricacies without so much as a second thought of how this could benefit us superficially. To delve deeper into our personalities while also allowing ourselves to remain grounded and open to others is a feat, but one

that is rewarding in the end. Continually learning more about our infinite beauty unlocks potential waiting to be released and utilized to its fullest extent, allowing us to transform into the best versions of ourselves. Essentially, we are all infinite beings, and through giving into this immensity and complexity, we can learn how to live and grow in our truest and most authentic forms.

All in all, there are numerous implications associated with the meaning of the House in *Piranesi*. Through Piranesi and the unique situations he encounters, Clarke comments on the value of personality and how it can be affected or distorted. If individuals are around particular people, sometimes they only show specific sides of their personality as a coping mechanism to avoid judgment and criticism. Also, the depths of human personality are limitless, making every individual an interesting person worthy of friendship. When explored intimately, the inner self allows for self-actualization along with being careful to not get completely caught up in our heads. Additionally, being selective about the right people we allow ourselves to be fully vulnerable with is the key to protecting our peace or our Houses, keeping ourselves tied to the world around us, and reminding ourselves of

our true worth. Finally, recognizing the infinite beauty and vastness of all the wonderful qualities of our personalities ultimately lets us reach our true potential as people, making for an improved quality of life overall.

So why does this matter? So what? If everyone was more in tune with themselves, and we lived in a society where individuals were all living their lives authentically, the human connection would thrive. Without this fear of being judged by others, people would allow themselves to simply be, which would open up the door to create so many beautiful and genuine friendships. The freedom and ability to fully express and understand ourselves is of utmost importance, and I genuinely believe that the key to linking society together is by being true to ourselves and allowing that to spread into our relationships with those we hold dear. In a perfect world, this would be the case, and I hope every day we all get a little closer to allowing the infinite beauty of the House to guide us.

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