Alan Turing: How Do Biographies Represent Him

Introduction

Alan Mathison Turing was born in London on the 23rd of June 1912, he was born into a upper-middle-class family to his father Julius Mathison Turing and his mother Ethel Sara Turing, he had one older sibling named John Ferrier Turning. At an early age Turing showed an aptitude for Mathematics and Science. At the age of 9 he was enrolled into St. Michaels Primary School in Hastings, his headmistress is quoted saying: “I have had clever boys and hard-working boys, but Alan is a genius” (Simkin, 1997). Turing was later moved to Sherborne School in Dorset to further nurture these skills, followed by King’s College in Cambridge and finally Princeton University in New Jersey USA. Comment by Hazel Kent: phrasing Comment by Hazel Kent: You don’t need to put quotations in italics.

Alan Turing is often called the father of modern computer science, he developed a machine known as the Turing machine which followed his concept of algorithms and computations (Hill, 2015). He was a brilliant mathematician and had a natural ability as a logician. Through this he was able to develop the idea of the modern computer and artificial intelligence. Comment by Hazel Kent: Referencing is necessary not just for quotations but also for paraphrasing. You need to be thorough and systematic throughout your dissertation. You can provide a group reference to show that more than one source says the same thing.

During the Second World War he worked at Bletchley Park for the government in a massive top-secret codebreaking operation, Turing worked on developing a machine that would help break the German Enigma machine which was used to send coded messages to German troops. Turing’s invention was given the name the bombe which was the electromechanical machine he had designed to break the enigma code much faster than any previous attempt. By the end of the war there were over 200 bombe machines in operation (Deavours & Kruh, 1990). It was speculated during the film ‘the imitation game’ and other non-academic sources that Winston Churchill thanked Turing for all his work and that his efforts had shortened the War by as many as two to four years, However, lead biographer Andrew Hodges who published Alan Turing: The Enigma stated that there is no documented evidence that has come to light to add merit to this claim or the date it may or may not have been saying. This is backed up by the International Churchill Society (formally known as the Churchill Centre) a society founded on all things related to Winston Churchill (Schilling, 2015). It was not until later that his work was recognized for its importance, due to the secrecy of the operation very few records or accounts were kept.

“The legacy of Alan Turing’s life and work did not fully come to light until long after his death. His impact on computer science has been widely acknowledged: the annual ‘Turing Award’ has been the highest accolade in that industry since 1966. But the work of Bletchley Park and Turing’s role therein cracking the Enigma code was kept secret until the 1970s, and the full story was not known until the 1990s. It has been estimated that the efforts of Turing and his fellow code-breakers shortened the war by several years. What is certain is that they saved countless lives and helped to determine the course and outcome of the conflict” (IWM, 2018).

After the war Turing was appointed the deputy director in the Department of Mathematics and

computing lab at Victoria University in Manchester. It was here that he wrote his hypothesis on the idea of a machine that would start with a prototype of a child's mind and then educate that "mind." This test of how to determine a machine's intelligence is now known as the Turing Test (Turing, 1950). Comment by Hazel Kent: Referencing….

During his time at Victoria University, he met a boy named Arnold Murray. Both Turing and Murray had become quite close and had frequent contact over the course of a few weeks, it wasn't until Murray and a friend broke into Turing's house to which Turing reported the crime. Turing putting his full faith in the law admitted to having homosexual relations with Murray, resulting in Turing being charged with gross indecency as homosexual acts were illegal at the time. The judge offered two outcomes from the trial, the first being imprisonment or chemical castration. Fearing not being able to carry on with his work, he accepted chemical castration which lasted for a year. The hormones he was given caused him to develop more estragon which resulted in him developing breasts. This also caused his special clearance to be revoked so he was unable to continue his cryptographic work.

On June 7th, 1954, Turing died of cyanide poising, those investigating the scene discovered a half-eaten apple beside his bed which was believed to have been laced with the cyanide. His death was ruled as a suicide.

He sadly died too young, in tragic circumstances, a victim of the discriminatory laws of the day. It is often wondered how much further ahead computing would be if he had lived.

The purpose of this dissertation will be to look at the way Turing has been represented through biographical research as described by Dr. Craig Kridel a biographical historian and curator "Attention is devoted to the researcher's motives in relation to the biographical subject and with emphasis upon the stylistic presentation of the biographer's reflections and insights in relation to the factual account of the life". Focusing on different aspects of his personal and work life, the reader will see accounts from family members, academies, and movie adaptations surrounding Turing's life. Comment by Hazel Kent: You need to discuss biography as a method within the introduction, with references to reading on it. Comment by Hazel Kent: You need to provide an outline literature review. Who has written key biographical accounts of Turing? When was the earliest? What kind of themes do they discuss? Sources used? Which is considered important/reliable?

Family Representation

When reading the century edition of Sara Turing's book on her sons' biography, it is broken into two parts, the first mostly by Turing's mother talking about her son and most aspects of his life, then the other which is an essay written by his brother John adding to his thoughts about his brother but at the same time filling in the neglected parts of Turing's life his mother missed out.

The book was originally written to give a background for future biographers who would write about Turing in the future. The way it is written it, you can feel the sense of pride Sara has for her son and the work he was involved in, However, throughout the book she makes no reference to his homosexuality which was a definitive part of his identity, and Turing himself accepted this part of him and had frequent conversations with his mother about it, which he

details in a letter he wrote to his friend

He writes: “Mother has been staying here, and we seem to be getting on a good deal better. I have been subjecting her to a good deal of sexual enlightenment and she seems to have stood up to it very well. There was a rather absurd dream I had the other night in which I asked mother’s opinion about going to bed with some men and she said: ‘Oh very well, but don’t go walking about the place naked like you did before.” (Alberge, 2015).

However, It is unclear from her biographical account of Turing that she was either unaware of his meaning in regards to this part of him or if it was a dismissive choice due to the nature of her time. This part of his life is mentioned by Turing’s brother in the biography to make reference to his homosexuality and is quoted saying:

“My mother was fully aware of it before Alan’s death (not that I imagine, that she had the faintest idea of what it implied), but she makes no reference to it in her book. One can put that down to Edwardian reticence if one pleases. In my view, based on such conversation as I had with my mother about it, necessarily reduced to a minimum, her reaction was much what one might expect if a specialist had informed her that her son was colour blind or had an incurable obsession with spiders” (Turing, 2012, pp 146-147). Comment by Hazel Kent: Again please ensure you present quotations properly. Use the Handbook for Written Coursework.

He then further mentions his view on Turing’s homosexuality:

“I am trying to make this memoir as truthful as I can, so I will not go to the length of pretending that I like homosexuals. To my mind, what is intolerable is the world of the “gay crusade” and, as my unfortunate brother may be cast in the part of an early valiant crusader, this is by no means an irrelevant comment” (Turing, 2012, pp 146-147).

This was intended to give the reader a more open representation of the way the family had perceived him, from his mother’s perspective he was a kind, good and intelligent child.

Media Representation

The movie representation and adaption of the book The Imitation Game where Turing is brought to life by actor Benedict Cumberbatch, play the adult version of Turing in the film as a Cambridge University professor who specializes in computer engineering and cryptology. Cumberbatch who is an active campaigner for equality was the ideal candidate for the part of Alan Turing, he is quoted saying by just reading the adaptation of the script written by Graham Moore he was horrified by what he was reading.

“I feel like it’s part of our mission to broaden the audience of this man’s story and bring him to a wider public, because of his importance and because of how woefully treated he was in his life” (Sacks, 2014).

The film gives the viewer the understanding that Turing viewed life as a game, even though all of his struggles, the way that Morten Tyldum directed the film shows throughout Turing’s life be it during his early childhood at the Sherborne school where he and his friend Christopher Morcom created a game based on cryptographic messages creatively portrayed by actor Alex

Lawther describing this extracurricular activity to his headmaster as a way to help him keep stimulated through math classes, which were too simple for him. Turing during his interview in the film to obtain the job as a cryptographer signifies his love of games and that was all the enigma machine was. This is where the film takes its primary focus showing Turing as a self-outcasted co-worker focusing on his own ideas on how to break the Enigma codes through the construction of a machine, whilst other members of the codebreaking team would focus on the only conceivable way they knew how to achieve the same goal.

The initial representation of Turing comes across as egotistical in his desire to construct his machine, which he has fondly named after his junior school friend “Christopher”, his project is met with hostility from his co-workers and by the Military as this seemed to be a failing focus on what they needed to achieve. It wasn’t until Turing boldly writes a letter to Winston Churchill that he was given the authority to what now seemed that the machine would be the only chance of success to decrypt the German Enigma Codes. This is also where the next ‘game’ is introduced, Turing not happy with the current workforce for the codebreakers set’s a simple crossword puzzle to be completed and those who complete it successfully are invited for a group test and interview. Here we get a first look at Kiera Knightley’s portrayal of Joan Clarke, Turing’s love interest and fellow cryptographer. Not to be confused Turing lived an openly homosexual life, his affection for Clarke was genuine, however, it was more of intellectual love and friendship. REF

Turing during his lifetime had sexual relationships with men and understood that he was a homosexual, there was a full understanding that it was not permitted or legal however although Turing was never expressively public about his sexual interests’ friends and work colleagues could tell by his tendencies and the way in which he carried himself.

The machine now successful working shows the team as having fully cracked each code now coming through on a daily basis, however, the team are later seen stuck in a moral dilemma in how the machine should be used to help win the war without letting the Germans know they had deciphered their messages. Ending with a game or strategic planning of tactical wins.

After winning the war, the team is seen celebrating, however, they are later told that no evidence is to be left of their work and they are to never speak of it again. This included the destruction of the Enigma codebreaking machine Christopher. The REF

The later part of the film shows Turing being convicted of indecency through homosexual acts. Turing is offered a choice of a prison sentence or a hormone correction through chemical castration, fearing he would not be able to continue his work her chose chemical castration. Cumberbatch quotes in an interview:

“Often, as an actor, you draw on your own experience or memories, but I really didn’t have to here. [Turing] got under my skin. It was just so pitiful. Imagining the physical weakness, the vulnerability, the exhaustion, how the hormones affected his emotional state … It was all ungovernable.” (Sacks, 2014).

Turing, throughout the course of his treatment, endures physical and psychological agony, perceived as having a mental breakdown can be seen in the movie the imitation game grasping at the new construction of his newly built machine he fondly named Christopher, in reality, whilst there are no academic reference to imply this is what he has named his machines sources to

show it does in fact make reference to the real name Comment by Hazel Kent: Although this wasn't accurate. You need to look at reviews of the film and assess it critically, not just describe it.

"it fact it was not named Christopher after Turing's late friend and first love […] Instead, Turing's machine was called the Bombe, named after an earlier Polish version of the codebreaking machine" (Hollywood, 2014).

For Turing, not being able to continue being able to work on Christopher was inconceivable and going to prison was unthinkable, even at the cost of his human nature. Turing complies to his hormone treatments no matter what the cost for him, for his work was more important to him than his own desires.

Turing was chemically castrated as part of an agreement with legal officials in that he could continue with his research if he was to undergo this treatment method for his homosexuality. Chemical castration was performed by requiring the person to be administered with Diethylstilboestrol by the form of injection. Diethylstilboestrol knew as DAB is an estrogen-based compound that was used widely for pregnancy-related issues as well as cancer treatment however it was also used by medical professionals who believed this would control sexual desires in homosexual men by damaging the testicles which would prevent the production of testosterone believed to cause sexual feelings.

It has been identified in the film adaptation of Turing's life and additional literature is available through turing.org stating that that Turin had suffered depression, the cause is unclear however there are many considerations as to what could have contributed. Diethylstilboestrol is known to have side effects such as depression that result in people's decline. This could have been a prominent factor as depression had not been identified as being something Turin had experienced prior to his treatment. A further consideration is that Turing has been prosecuted and was listed as a criminal despite his efforts to end the war. This kind of demoralizing exposure would have had a big impact on Turing's self-worth and reputation with the people he knew. His break up with Joan would have had grave emotional consequences for Turin as she was his companion despite his sexuality and someone he felt safe with and was cared for. Being forced to destroy a machine that took months to build with considering Turin's compassion for machines over humans would have undoubtedly had a psychological impact on Turing's wellbeing. Then there are considerations on the way a person who possibly could have had Asperger's syndrome would have coped with the chemical castration, loss of job, conviction, and separation from Joan, all factors that could be believed to be prevalent within his is depression. There is a strong argument that there is enough evidence to warrant suicide. Comment by Hazel Kent: References – by who? This really needs to be a separate section.

Cumberbatch's adaption of Turing's life during this film completely captures who he is from what we know date, Baroness Trumpington who worked close to Turing during his time at Bletchley park said in an interview about the film that 'I think the acting is absolutely superb, the chap who plays Turing is fantastic' (Graham, 2014), the film also resulted in his work being nominated for an Academy Award for best actor in 2015 (Evans, 2015). The media is capturing what seems to be a strong theme of social awkwardness but gives no reference to what has later been diagnosed as potential autism or asperses, Turing although never diagnosed, had evident symptomatic patterns of behavior consistent with those with Asperger's syndrome, although this was never explored by himself or medical professionals. Turin was known to be

abrupt, often rude, and straight-talking when interacting with people and displayed a more empathetic way of behavior towards machines rather than people. Turing was unable to interpret humor and was often interpreted as strange by those around him, neither less, his extraordinary ability to interpret mathematical data, analyze and problem solve assured him popularity and acceptance by those with similar minds (O'Connell & Fitzgerald, 2003, pp. 28-31) Comment by Hazel Kent: How do you know this? How are you assessing its accuracy? What have other people said about the film? Comment by Hazel Kent: You need to discuss their work more overtly. I think there needs to be a separate thematic section on his mental health and qualities of mind.

Turing's way of behavior caused conflict in his relationships with authorities in his life as his brutal honesty and literal thinking were seen to make those above his station feel undermined and disrespected.

"The Imitation Game" shows the viewer an aspect of the lack of humanity through government antigay legislation and public prejudice. The film wants to open the viewers' minds to thinking, is there anyone in your life who is like Alan Turing? The "Game" asks, are you willing to listen to those you've dismissed as freakish or socially dysfunctional?