

## **ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN THE MAIN CHARACTER OTTO IN THE FILM "A MAN CALLED OTTO"**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research analyzes the character change of the main protagonist in the comedy-drama film *A Man Called Otto*, directed by Marc Forster in 2022. The film tells the story of Otto Anderson, a middle-aged man who exhibits annoying and angry traits after the death of his late wife. Otto repeatedly attempts to end his life but is always thwarted by the commotion of his neighbors. The storyline presented is quite simple yet significantly impacts his character and life changes. The aim of this study is to identify the factors that cause the changes in Otto's character. The research method used is qualitative descriptive, with data sourced from selected scenes and dialogues of the main character in the film. The results of the study indicate that the character transformation of Otto is triggered by the experiences he undergoes. Otto's character changes from being annoying and angry to becoming kind and loving, and this transformation positively affects his surroundings. The findings provide a deeper understanding of character dynamics in the context of loss, self-discovery, and the importance of human connection. This article is expected to enrich the discussion on character development in film and its impact on the audience.

**Keywords:** Otto Anderson, Character Development, Grief, Human Connection

### **INTRODUCTION**

Film plays an important role in the lives of many people. It is one of the forms of entertainment that people frequently consume to escape the fatigue of their daily routines. However, films are not merely for entertainment; they can also serve as a medium for education, cultural introduction, social reflection, and even critique. Films have the ability to convey emotions, messages, and influence the lives of their viewers through a combination of cinematic techniques and narratives. Arnheim (1957) views film as a visual art that not only records reality but also transforms it through the use of various cinematographic techniques. According to him, film has the power to express emotions and ideas in a unique way compared to other media. Chatman (1978) states that literature and film are two different forms of narrative in terms of storytelling. He explains that although they differ in medium, they share the same narrative structure, including elements such as plot, character, and theme. He believes that film is a visual narrative that conveys stories in a manner comparable to literature.

Similar to other forms of art, film serves as a reflection of human emotions and experiences. For instance, figurative language in comedy, as discussed by Fauzy, Yuwita, & Juanda (2024), is used to deliver social and emotional messages in creative ways. This highlights how various art forms utilize their medium to communicate deeper meanings and engage their audiences. Similarly, as observed in the study of hyperbolic expressions in music by Kamalia, Semi, & Juanda (2024), art often emphasizes emotional depth to connect with its audience. Speech acts in film dialogues, as explored by Adilayasmin, Avie, & Juanda (2023) through the character Emily in *Corpse Bride*, reveal how characters' words can convey complex emotional states and advance narratives. Additionally, the analysis of anxiety and defense mechanisms in *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* by Nurcahya, Raditya, & Juanda (2024) demonstrates how films delve into psychological themes, reflecting human struggles and resilience. Moreover, violations of cooperative principles in interviews, as discussed by Darmika et al. (2024), illustrate how conversational dynamics can subtly influence audience perception and emotional engagement. These insights support the notion that films, through their narratives and character development, can evoke profound emotional responses and reflections in viewers.

*A Man Called Otto* is a comedy-drama film released in 2022, adapted from the famous novel *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman. The film stars Tom Hanks as Otto Anderson, an elderly man who is angry and lonely, living in a suburban neighborhood. After losing his beloved wife, Otto becomes filled with anger and frustration towards everything around him, including his neighbors. Otto is known as a rigid person who always follows the rules and often feels irritated by those around him. He feels that his life has lost meaning after his wife's passing and even attempts to end his life several times. However, his life begins to change when a new family moves in next door. Marisol (played by Mariana Treviño), a cheerful pregnant woman, along with her family, accidentally starts to form a connection with Otto, despite his initial rejection of them. Humans are social beings who adapt to their environment and interact with others.

Character is the trait or quality present in an individual that reflects their personality, morals, and behavior. It encompasses ways of thinking, attitudes, values, and actions that demonstrate who a person is in various situations. In a broader context, the term character is also used to describe figures in fictional works such as novels, films, dramas, or other narratives, where each character has a personality, motivation, and role that influence the progression of the story. According to Maxwell (2007), character is a collection of values that serve as guidelines for an individual's thinking, attitudes, and actions. Character is the result of moral decisions consistently reflected in a person's behavior. Doni (2007) defines character as the outcome of developing moral values applied in daily life. Character is shaped through habits and the continuous practice of values such as honesty, justice, and hard work.

A factor is an element, component, or condition that contributes to or influences an outcome or event. Factors can be internal or external aspects that play a role in determining something or affecting a specific process. According to Krech and Crutchfield (1948), factors are the elements that influence individual behavior in social interactions. These factors can be internal, such as perception and motivation, or external, such as the



environment and social situations. Based on the definition above, the author uses the character theory of Edgar V. Roberts (1983), which claims that there are four approaches to analyzing character, namely:

- 1) What does the character say about himself.
- 2) What is the character doing.
- 3) What are other characters' opinions on the character under consideration.  
What was said about the character by the author.

By combining these four approaches, character analysis becomes more profound and comprehensive. Additionally, it is important to consider other factors that may influence character, such as cultural context, historical background, and social situations during which the story takes place. Understanding the interaction between these internal and external factors will enrich the interpretation of the characters and themes presented in literary works.

In addition to its narrative depth, *A Man Called Otto* offers a compelling exploration of universal themes such as grief, loss, and the power of human connection. The film not only depicts the struggles of its protagonist, Otto Anderson, but also presents a broader commentary on the ways individuals cope with emotional pain and isolation. By integrating humor, warmth, and poignant moments, the film manages to portray the complexity of human emotions in an accessible and relatable manner. This multidimensional approach allows audiences to connect with the story on both an emotional and intellectual level, making the film a rich source for analysis in terms of character development and thematic resonance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Character development has been a significant area of interest in film studies, especially when looking at how characters evolve throughout a narrative. Roberts (1983) identifies four main methods for analyzing characters, what the character says about themselves, what they do, what other characters think of them, and what the author says about them. These approaches are essential for understanding how a character's journey unfolds and how they change in response to both internal and external factors. This framework provides an in depth way of analyzing Otto's character in *A Man Called Otto*, where his transformation from a bitter, lonely man to a compassionate individual is a key theme. This type of character evolution is also explored in literature, as Chatman (1978) points out that narratives focused on characters share similarities across different media, including both film and literature.

In *A Man Called Otto*, we see a character going through a profound emotional transformation driven by grief after the loss of his wife. Grief, as a psychological condition, has been widely explored in academic literature, with many studies documenting its effects on behavior, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. Maxwell (2007) defines character as the outcome of moral decisions that shape a person's actions and choices. Otto's initial decisions, driven by overwhelming despair, lead him to attempt suicide multiple times. This reflects

Krech and Crutchfield's (1948) findings, which emphasize how internal factors like perception and motivation shape an individual's behavior in response to social circumstances.

Human connection plays a crucial role in Otto's transformation. The persistent kindness shown by Marisol and her family becomes a turning point for Otto's emotional shift. This highlights the importance of social interaction in combating isolation and fostering emotional healing. Studies by Fauzy, Yuwita, and Juanda (2024), as well as Kamalia, Semi, and Juanda (2024), have shown how emotional expression and figurative language in various art forms, whether in comedy or music, help bridge the gap between the individual and the social world, facilitating a deeper emotional connection. In Otto's case, the gradual development of his relationship with his neighbors demonstrates the power of human connection in alleviating grief and loneliness.

Moreover, films like *A Man Called Otto* offer valuable insights into the psychological and social factors that influence character development. As explored in the study of anxiety and defense mechanisms by Nurcahya et al. (2024), characters in films often experience psychological shifts that reflect their internal struggles as well as the external influences from their social environment. Otto's emotional and psychological growth is shaped not only by his grief but also by his interactions with others around him. As Otto begins to engage more with Marisol and her family, these social interactions gradually chip away at his bitterness and anger. Every act of kindness or concern from his neighbors becomes a step toward rediscovering a sense of purpose. These external influences play a critical role in Otto's character transformation, and through these connections, he starts to embrace a new role within his community. Krech and Crutchfield (1948) also support this idea, suggesting that human behavior is often shaped by one's social environment and the relationships they form.

## METHOD

This research employs qualitative descriptive methods, which involve observing and collecting data for further analysis and presenting the results. The analysis focuses on the factors experienced by Otto as the causes of his character change, grounded in the theoretical framework of Edgar V. Roberts (1983). Through this approach, the researcher aims to provide a deeper understanding of how life experiences, social interactions, and environmental contexts contribute to Otto's character transformation. Thus, this study seeks not only to describe but also to offer a more comprehensive understanding of character dynamics within the context of the film. According to Zellatifanny and Mudjiyanto (2018:86), the primary type of descriptive research includes examining attitudes or opinions about individuals, organizations, events, or procedures. This study employs qualitative content analysis to identify the factors influencing Otto's character transformation. Instead of numerical data, information is gathered through an in depth examination of dialogues, character interactions, and key scenes from the film *A Man Called Otto*. The data is then categorized and analyzed thematically based on Edgar V. Roberts' character analysis framework, allowing for a deeper interpretation of Otto's behavioral and



emotional changes. To support the findings, selected scenes are presented in the form of excerpts and screenshots, providing visual evidence of Otto's evolving character.

## DISCUSSION

Otto Anderson is an elderly man who is bitter and angry after the loss of his wife, Sonya. He is portrayed as someone who is very rigid, perfectionistic, and lives his life according to a strict routine. Otto always adheres to the rules, pays attention to small details such as neat parking, cleanliness in the environment, and often scolds neighbors who do not follow the regulations. At the beginning of the story, Otto appears very cynical and closed off from the outside world. The loss of Sonya leaves him feeling hopeless and empty, leading him to believe that there is no purpose left in his life. In fact, Otto attempts suicide several times because he feels there is no reason to continue living without his wife.

This research focuses on analyzing the character of the main protagonist, Otto, and the changes he undergoes, triggered by both external and internal factors in his life. The character of Otto in the film *A Man Called Otto* is analyzed using the theory of Edgar V. Roberts (1983). The data in this study consists of character descriptions and cut scenes from the film *A Man Called Otto*, showcasing Otto's expressions, actions, and words, supported by the theory of Krech and Crutchfield (1948).

### 1. Marisol The New Neighbor



**Figure 1.** Scene Otto attempts suicide  
for the first time.

**Figure 2.** Scene Marisol visits Otto's  
house after he helped her family upon  
their arrival.

- **Plot:** Otto, who wants to end his life, is interrupted by the arrival of Marisol's family in the neighborhood. They appear to be struggling to park their car. Seeing this, Otto is compelled to help them.
- **Timestamp:** 00:18:15 - 00:20:45
- **Dialog:**

**Otto:** What is it you want?

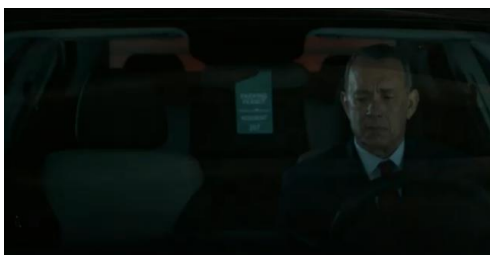
**Marisol:** I brought you some food.

**Otto:** Why?

**Marisol:** Because you look hungry. We wanted to properly introduce ourselves, because we're gonna be neighbour.

**Analysis:** In the scene of his first suicide attempt, several factors influencing Otto's character are clearly evident, both externally and internally. The internal factors relate to Otto's inner conflict, which makes him feel a loss of meaning in life. The sense of loss and loneliness Otto experiences is profound after the departure of his wife. Otto feels that his world has been shattered because Sonya, his wife, was the center of his life and his source of happiness. This leads Otto to be engulfed in deep sorrow, making him feel isolated and unable to adapt to the changes happening in his surroundings. In this scene, although Otto's intention to end his life is resolute, disruptions from his environment hinder his efforts. As Otto is about to carry out his plan, the presence of his new neighbors, Marisol and her family, becomes an unexpected distraction. Marisol, with her friendly demeanor and curiosity, slowly begins to open a crack in Otto's heart. Despite Otto's desire to isolate himself, his neighbors continually attempt to engage in his life. This interaction indirectly touches his humanity and forces him to pay attention to those around him. This scene of Otto's first suicide attempt marks the starting point of his character's transformation journey. Although he is still engulfed in frustration at that moment, the disturbance from his neighbors begins to signify that his life is not entirely empty. This paves the way for Otto's character development, where he gradually learns to open up and discover new meaning in his life through connections with others.

## 2. Marisol Family Incidents



**Figure 3.** Scene Otto attempts suicide for the second time.



**Figure 4.** Scene Marisol asks for Otto's help and interrupts his suicide attempt.

- **Plot:** Otto attempts suicide again after his previous failure. However, this time the outcome is the same as before. Otto fails once again in his effort because, once again, Marisol arrives to interrupt



him; she needs Otto's help to take her to the hospital, where her husband, Tommy, has had an accident.

- **Timestamp:** 00:45:55 - 00:46:55
- **Dialog:**

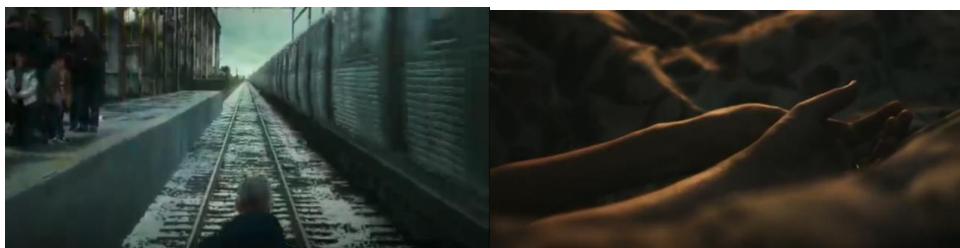
**Marisol:** Otto! Focus! Please, listen. Tommy is in the hospital, and he may be dying as we speak. So, are you gonna drive me to the hospital, or are you gonna make me take the bus?

**Otto:** I will drive you to the hospital.

**Marisol:** Thank you. Was it so hard?

**Analysis:** In the scene of his second suicide attempt, the transformation of Otto Anderson's character becomes more apparent. Although he remains engulfed in feelings of despair, at this stage, Otto is still grappling with deep inner conflict, but there is a certain development compared to his first attempt. Otto feels increasingly powerless and unable to continue living without his wife, Sonya. He is still trapped in the mindset that he no longer has any function or role in the world. While he is slightly stirred by interactions with his neighbors, feelings of loneliness and frustration still dominate. Unlike the first attempt, the second suicide attempt is interrupted by a situation and social interactions that are more meaningful. Marisol and her family begin to engage more frequently in Otto's life. As Otto is about to carry out his plan to end his life, the attention and care shown by them, particularly Marisol, become a distraction as well as a signal that there are still people who care about him. Otto starts to feel that the relationships he is building with his neighbors, although still in the early stages. Interactions with Marisol and other neighbors begin to gradually open Otto's heart. At this stage, he is still trapped in the belief that ending his life is the solution, but the interruptions from others give him a chance to rethink his decision. This event becomes a crucial turning point in the dynamics of Otto's character transformation. Although Otto still feels desperate, this second attempt shows that he is no longer completely ignoring the connections with others. At this point, he starts to realize that the people around him, especially Marisol, genuinely care about him. A sense of responsibility and involvement slowly begins to grow, even though it is not yet entirely clear to Otto that his life could have new meaning.

### 3. Flashback Of The Wife



**Figure 5.** Scene Otto, who attempts  
suicide after helping someone.

**Figure 6.** Scene Flashback of memories  
of his wife.

- **Plot:** Otto decides to leave his neighborhood so that this suicide attempt will not be interrupted by Marisol. He goes to a train station to end his life. However, who would have thought that when Otto wants to end his life, an old man falls onto the tracks, and Otto is forced to help the man because no one else is willing to assist him.
- **Timestamp:** 00:57:00 - 00:57:30
- **Dialog:**

**Sonya:** Look at me. Say hello. Take a breath, Otto. Take my hand.

**Civilian:** Take my hand!

**Analysis:** In the third suicide attempt, Otto Anderson's character undergoes a more significant development. Although Otto is still in the phase of grief and loss, his emotions begin to show changes compared to the previous attempts. Otto finds himself in a situation where he feels that his life still lacks meaning without his wife, but on the other hand, a greater doubt arises about the decision to take his own life. Otto starts to feel a sense of responsibility towards his neighbors, especially Marisol and her children. Although the desire to end his life still exists, he begins to see that there may be a role for him in the lives of others. Otto starts to wonder if ending his life is truly the solution to his suffering. He feels he is at a crossroads between continuing his suicide plan or finding new ways to live his life. In this third attempt, external influences play a crucial role, particularly from the people around him, which increasingly strengthen Otto's emotional involvement with his environment. Otto begins to realize that his presence is actually needed by his neighbors and those around him. He no longer sees himself as useless. In his social interactions, Otto experiences reflective moments where he realizes that, despite losing his wife, life can still be filled with meaning through new relationships. The scene of the third suicide attempt marks an important turning point in Otto's character transformation. At this point, he realizes that although life is no longer the same without his wife, there are still people who care and need his presence. Otto begins to question the meaning of his life and reconsider his choices.

#### 4. The Wife Shadow





**Figure 7.** Scene Otto attempts to take his life once again for the last time.



**Figure 8.** Scene The vision of his late wife interrupts Otto's suicide attempt.

- **Plot:** Otto feels exhausted after all his suicide attempts have failed. This time, he tries to shoot himself in the head, hoping that it will all end quickly, but the vision of his late wife suddenly appears before him.
- **Timestamp:** 01:27:36 - 01:31:10
- **Dialog:**

**Sonya:** That's enough now, darling. You're angry. I know, and sad. So am I. But now we have to live.

**Analysis:** In the final suicide attempt, Otto Anderson's character transformation reaches its peak. This scene illustrates how the internal and external factors that have accumulated throughout the story ultimately lead Otto to stop trying to end his life and to accept his new existence and relationships. Otto begins to realize that although life is not perfect and is different without his wife, he still has the opportunity to find new meaning. He gradually experiences an emotional healing process. Even though he still feels profound grief, he starts to accept that loss is a part of life. His desire for suicide begins to fade as he realizes that he is still needed and loved by the people around him. Social interactions in this final suicide attempt further strengthen Otto's decision to stay alive. Otto begins to accept a new role within his community. He realizes that he can be a useful person, such as helping his neighbors and improving the situation around him. This role provides Otto with a new purpose in life. The presence of a warm and caring environment transforms Otto's perspective. From someone who wanted to isolate himself and distance himself from the world, he becomes someone who starts to feel connected and contribute to his surroundings. This final suicide attempt is an emotional resolution point for Otto. In the end, he chooses not to end his life. Feelings of despair and anger transform into acceptance and gratitude for the new relationships he has found. Otto now views life from a different perspective, not just as suffering, but also as an opportunity to love and be loved.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The character transformation of Otto Anderson in the film *A Man Called Otto* is a profound journey that intertwines internal struggles and external influences. Internally, Otto is depicted as a man consumed by grief and despair following the loss of his beloved wife, Sonya. His initial reaction to this loss is to isolate himself emotionally and socially, believing that his life no longer has meaning. This deep sorrow drives him to attempt suicide multiple times, showcasing the overwhelming impact of emotional trauma. However, Otto's story does not end in despair rather, it becomes a tale of resilience and renewal. His transformation begins with an incremental process of emotional healing, where he gradually learns to accept his loss and redefine his purpose. This inner shift, though slow and marked by resistance, becomes the foundation of his eventual growth.

Externally, Otto's interactions with his neighbors, particularly Marisol and her family, serve as a critical catalyst for change. Marisol's persistent kindness and genuine concern force Otto out of his self-imposed isolation, challenging him to re-engage with the world around him. These interactions reveal the power of human connection in overcoming despair. The support and warmth provided by Marisol's family, along with Otto's growing sense of responsibility towards them, gradually chip away at his bitterness and anger. Each instance of help or care Otto extends to his neighbors becomes a step toward rediscovering the joy of being needed and valued. These relationships not only provide emotional sustenance but also highlight the importance of community in facilitating personal growth and healing.

The dual influence of Otto's internal reflection and external social interactions underscores the complex interplay between personal and environmental factors in character development. Otto's journey demonstrates that recovery from profound grief and trauma is not linear but involves setbacks, moments of doubt, and ultimately, breakthroughs. His transformation from a rigid, rule-bound man to a compassionate, community-oriented individual illustrates the potential for growth even in the face of immense loss. Otto learns to embrace life once again, not as a solitary endeavor but as a shared experience enriched by relationships and a sense of belonging.

Ultimately, Otto's story serves as a reminder of the human capacity for change and resilience. It shows that while grief may isolate, connection can heal. Through his transformation, the film imparts a universal message about the power of love, community, and the courage to face life's adversities with an open heart. The character development of Otto Anderson is a testament to the idea that hope and meaning can be rediscovered, even after experiencing great loss, reaffirming the timeless value of compassion and solidarity in navigating the complexities of human life.

In conclusion, this study identifies that Otto's character transformation is driven by both internal and external factors. Internally, his overwhelming grief and emotional distress lead him to isolate himself and attempt suicide multiple times. However, externally, his interactions with Marisol and her family gradually bring about a change, allowing him to rediscover purpose and human connection. The persistent kindness and social



involvement with his neighbors play a crucial role in shifting Otto's perspective on life. These findings highlight that Otto's transition from a bitter, withdrawn individual to a compassionate and engaged member of his community is primarily influenced by the interplay between personal loss and meaningful relationships. This study reaffirms that character development in film is not only shaped by internal conflicts but also by external social interactions, emphasizing the significant role of companionship, empathy, and resilience in overcoming grief and personal despair.

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