

OTTO'S INNER CONFLICTS IN A MAN CALLED OTTOMOVIE: A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH

¹Rafly Ade Wijaya, ²Dr. Neni Kurniawati, S.S., M. Hum.

¹Universitas Dian Nuswantoro, Semarang, Indonesia

²Universitas Dian Nuswantoro, Semarang, Indonesia

(311202202456@mhs.dinus.ac.id)

Abstract. The film *A Man Called Otto* (2022) by Marc Forster tells about the life of a man who is lonely since the death of his wife, showing the inner struggle within him that makes him traumatised and changes his character. This study aims to explore how the film presents self-trauma verbally and non-verbally. The analysis focuses on two aspects: (1) How Otto's behaviour is post-traumatic. (2) Otto's verbal and non-verbal responses due to inner conflict. This study uses qualitative analysis research method with the approach of Defence Mechanism theory (Anna Freud) and Non-Verbal Communication theory (Paul Ekman). It has data in the form of selected scenes from the film *A Man Called Otto* (2022), including dialogues, character expressions, gestures, and emotional reactions that reflect Otto's psychological condition. These data are analyzed to identify verbal and non-verbal expressions of trauma and inner conflict, as well as the defence mechanisms employed by the character. The study finds that Otto's transformation is reflected not only through his words, but also through subtle body language cues such as posture, facial expressions, and tone of voice, which align with Ekman's theory. Through these findings, the research illustrates how psychological struggles can be expressed cinematically and how emotional healing can occur through human connection and self-awareness.

Keywords: Psychological, Defence Mechanism, Post-Traumatic, Inner Conflict.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Inner conflict is triggered by a quiet voice that keeps us awake at night, when our inner feelings don't align with our worst fears or personal values. *A Man Called Otto* shows Otto, a widower who closes himself off tightly. Haunted by the dilemma between being alone or opening his heart to his neighbours. It is not an easy struggle for Otto to get away from the feelings of his past, balancing survival, giving up, being alone and other things that keep him closed. It is difficult to find the strength and desire to change when circumstances are not favourable, by living life and even being open to the surrounding environment.

When words don't match feelings, Kinesic behaviour shows the way humans speak. Smile cheerfully, look away when confused, or hold your nose when you are not confident. Usually, these gestures are unintentionally done by us. Called body language, it's how we understand someone's gestures without words. The small movements that occur are not only insignificant, but how to read someone's thoughts or feelings by reading body language. Verbal communication is closely related to non-verbal, both of which help us convey information and meaning.

Without realising it, humans protect themselves not only physically, but behaviourally and habitually to deal with pain or disappointment. Otto taking refuge behind the rigidity of his surroundings, Carl shutting himself in Ellie's memories (the old grandfather character in *Up*), or Kevin in *Split* creating

23 personalities to create a fortress defence from his past trauma. They are examples of humans dealing with pain from the past: building walls, locking away the past, even splitting apart. The important point is how Otto and Carl learnt that hiding from trauma and closing yourself off is not a good way, but by opening yourself up: Otto to Marison's kindness, Carl to Russel's laughter. Meanwhile, Kevin, who shows that his deeply held trauma will end up as an "explosive bomb" at some point in the future. All three stories mean that it's important to protect yourself in the right way, without feeling trapped.

This study is about the film 'A Man Called Otto' because of its sadness and touching feelings. Compared to other films, quite different from the extreme psychological dramatisation, here it shows the journey of Otto Anderson - an old widower trapped in the trauma of the past and his loneliness when he lost his wife, very relatable. Otto is unhappy with his surroundings, but is moved to change and wants to help his new neighbour. Things that change in him such as; taking care of stray cats, being fond of small children. Otto teaches us that self-healing doesn't come from big things, but from having the courage to open your heart little by little to the people around you, just like in the real world.

Statement of The Problems

This study addresses the following questions:

- a. What are Otto's habits after experiencing this deep trauma?
- b. How does Otto respond verbally and non-verbally to inner conflict?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In Isnaeni Zaherli's study with the title Denial as A self-Defense Mechanism in A Man Called Otto Movie, it discusses self-defense mechanisms but is aimed at denial points only, Otto does his way to deal with the emotional trauma he experiences, Otto automatically closes himself. The effects of death and being fired from work are both. In that way Otto felt covered by his pain. Refusing help from others, avoiding emotional involvement, isolating himself. However, over time Otto began to slowly open himself up and accept the reality that was bitter for him.

Miftahatul Lu'lu Aziziah discussed in her research entitled Dominant Personality of Otto in A Man Called Otto, the dominant personality in Otto is melancholy. Perfectionist, detailed, orderly, sensitive, and tend to be pessimistic are the characteristics of melancholy. Interaction with the environment is very influential with him having such principles, in a negative and sensitive connotation. The behaviour formed in Otto afterwards became a closed person and chose to avoid change.

The research Exploring Otto's Trauma Journey: A Psychoanalysis of A Man Called Otto by Muhammad Taufiq Hidayat concluded that Otto experienced deep trauma after being left by his wife and drastically changed his life. Through a psychoanalysis approach, it is shown that Otto goes through a process of trauma, rejection, anger, and finally finds a new meaning in his life after going through everything. Trauma becomes a major influence in Otto's character, including ending his life at the beginning of the film. Social relationships are shown to influence his emotional healing. This journey shows how social connection and empathy can be key in the trauma recovery process.

All three studies have shortcomings. The research on denial does not really discuss the impact of Otto's attitude towards those around him and the transformation towards accepting the situation in progress. Otto's personality also lacks external factors that influence the formation of his character. The study of trauma is not in-depth enough specifically.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach by means of critical discourse analysis and narrative textual analysis. The analysis was conducted by observing the behaviour of the main character, Otto, through verbal dialogue and non-verbal expressions that show inner conflict and the defence mechanisms used. (McLeod, 2024) The primary data came from scenes in the film *A Man Called Otto* (2022) that significantly showed signs of trauma and the character's emotional responses. The researcher identified through dialogue quotes, facial expressions, dialogue, and Otto's social interactions to be analysed using Anna Freud's defence mechanism theory and Paul Ekman's verbal and non-verbal communication theory. With this method, the research tries to understand the psychological process experienced by Otto comprehensively and how the dynamics of inner conflict are shown in the film.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on analysis result, It was found some points from theory of Anna Freud's about Defense of Mechanism and Non-Verbal from Paul Ekman.

Defence Mechanism by Anna Freud

1. Projection

Projecting negative emotions or internal conflict onto others. (*A Man Called Otto*, 2022: 00:05:55 – 00:06:11)

"Next time, I'll lock it up in the lost and found."

Otto is experiencing emotional distress from the loss of his wife, but he doesn't want to admit his sadness directly, so he projects his frustration onto others through anger over small things. According to Anna Freud, this is considered a form of projection, which is throwing unbearable internal emotions onto external objects. Non-verbally, according to Paul Ekman, Otto shows a pained facial expression, furrowed brows, and a high tone of voice as a sign of anger directed outwards.

2. Displacement

Redirecting emotions from the original source to a safer target. (*A Man Called Otto*, 2022: 00:02:40 – 00:03:10)

"What the hell kind of computer can't do simple math?"

A form of displacement, which is when emotions (in this case sadness and anger over the loss of his wife and loneliness) are diverted to a safer and less dangerous target, even below him (the cashier). Otto vents his inner anger to the system or people who are not very important in his life. Non-verbal expressions show raised voice volume, aggressive hand pointing, and dominating intonation - indicators of anger from Ekman's theory.

3. Withdrawal & Denial

Avoiding painful reality or refusing to accept it.

First attempt to suicide (A Man Called Otto, 2022: 00:12:50 – 00:16:28) Second attempt to suicide (A Man Called Otto, 2022: 00:22:10 – 00:23:05)

Otto twice attempted suicide as a response to losing his wife and feeling meaningless in life. This is a form of withdrawal and denial of harsh reality. Otto refused to accept life without his wife and no longer wanted to connect with the outside world. He even prepares everything in a planned manner, which shows that he refuses to live. Non-verbally, Otto's body looks limp, his shoulders are down, his facial expression is blank, and his eyes are unfocussed, reflecting total despair according to Ekman.

4. Reaction Formation

Acting the opposite of what one truly feels.

(A Man Called Otto, 2022: 00:19:28 – 00:20:45)

Marisol, her new neighbour, said: “*Are you always this unfriendly?*”

Otto is being rude, even though in his heart he is starting to feel an attachment. This is a form of reaction formation, which is showing the opposite of one's true feelings as self-defence. He actually longs for social connection, but chooses to reject it and act sarcastically. Ekman explains that although Otto's face appears cold and hard, microexpressions such as a slight smile or eye contact can indicate inner emotional conflict.

5. Sublimation

Channeling negative emotions into positive actions.

Otto started helping neighbours, taking care of children, and fixing things.

Otto began to channel his loneliness and trauma into something positive. This is called sublimation, which is turning negative urges or emotions into useful social actions. He no longer withdraws, but instead contributes to his neighbourhood. In non-verbal communication, this can be seen in Otto's more open posture, his emerging smile, and his soft and friendly tone of voice.

6. Turning Against the Self

Directing anger or guilt inward; self-blame or self-harm.

In the second suicide attempt, Otto remembers the past and feels guilty

Otto directed his anger and guilt towards himself, feeling that he no longer deserved to live. This reflects the mechanism of turning against the self, which is often present in severe depression. Non-verbally, Otto looked discouraged, there was no expression on his face, and his body was downcast, reflecting a deep loss of zest for life.

CONCLUSION

The film *A Man Called Otto* illustrates the psychological journey of a man coping with deep trauma and inner conflict after the loss of his wife. Through the use of Anna Freud's defence mechanism theory and Paul Ekman's non-verbal communication theory, the study reveals how Otto expresses his emotions not only through dialogue but also through subtle gestures, facial expressions, and behavior. Otto's actions—such as projecting anger, withdrawing from others, or eventually helping his neighbors—reflect various defense mechanisms that show his struggle and gradual healing. The study concludes that emotional recovery is possible through human connection, empathy, and the courage to open up, and that film can serve as a powerful medium to represent complex psychological experiences.

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