

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICT OF MAIN CHARACTER IN FREDRICK BACKMAN'S A MAN CALLED OVE

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan mendeskripsikan konflik psikologis pada karakter utama dalam novel *A Man Called Ove* karya Fredrick Backman berdasarkan pendekatan psikoanalisis Jacques Lacan. Penelitian ini menggunakan jenis penelitian kualitatif deskriptif. Sumber data utama yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah Novel *A Man Called Ove* dengan tambahan beberapa data sekunder dalam penelitian ini adalah jurnal, skripsi, buku-buku teori, dan ensiklopedia. Teknik pengumpulan data dalam penelitian ini menggunakan Teknik kajian Pustaka yaitu membaca, mencatat dan mengklasifikasikan. Analisis data dalam penelitian kualitatif deskriptif ini menggunakan pendekatan psikoanalisis Jacques Lacan dengan fokus pada struktur 3 tahap konflik kesadaran real, simbolik, dan imaginary. Hasil analisis naratif pada tokoh utama dalam novel *A Man Called Ove* karya Fredrick Backman ditemukan terdapat 13 bentuk psikologi konflik yang terjadi, terbagi dalam 5 konflik pada tahap Real, 4 konflik pada tahap Imaginary, dan 4 topik pada tahap symbolic. Konflik tersebut mempengaruhi karakter utama dalam menjalankan cerita di dalam novel. Untuk menjaga ketefokusan dan kedalaman analisis, penelitian ini hanya berfokus membahas konflik yang terjadi pada karakter utama Ove yang dianggap paling signifikan dalam perkembangan alur dan karakter yang berpuncak pada rasa kehilangan, kekosongan, namun tetap memperlihatkan sisi kebaikan dan ketulusan pada akhir cerita. Temuan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa psikoanalisis Jacques Lacan efektif dan bisa digunakan untuk mengungkapkan dinamika psikologi dan penjelasan konflik dalam suatu karya sastra.

Kata Kunci: Jacques Lacan, Psikoanalisis, Psikologi Sastra, *A Man Called Ove*, Konflik Psikologis, Real, Simbolik, Imaginer, Analisis Naratif, Penelitian Deskriptif Kualitatif.

ABSTRACT

*This study aims to identify and describe the psychological conflicts experienced by the main character in the novel *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman, using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic approach. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method. The primary data source is the novel itself, supported by secondary data including journals, theses, theoretical books, and encyclopedias. The data collection technique used is literature review, involving reading, note-taking, and classification. The data analysis applies Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, focusing on the three stages of conscious conflict: the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary. Narrative analysis of the main character in *A Man Called Ove* reveals 13 forms of psychological conflict: 5 in the Real stage, 4 in the Imaginary stage, and 4 in the Symbolic stage. These conflicts significantly influence the main character's development and drive the plot of the novel. To maintain analytical focus and depth, this research specifically examines the conflicts experienced by the main character, Ove, as they are deemed most significant in shaping the narrative arc culminating in themes of loss, emptiness, and ultimately, the emergence of sincerity and goodness at the end of the story. The findings affirm that Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic*

theory is effective and applicable in uncovering the psychological dynamics and underlying conflicts within a literary work.

Keywords: *Jacques Lacan, Psychoanalysis, Literary Psychology, A Man Called Ove, Psychological Conflict, Real, Symbolic, Imaginary, Narrative Analysis, Qualitative Descriptive Research.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Psychology and literature are fundamentally two branches of knowledge that are closely intertwined, as both are rooted in human experiences and life dynamics. Literary works, as the product of an author's creative process, do not emerge from a vacuum (Livingston, 2006). They consistently represent reality, either explicitly or implicitly. In creating their works, authors inevitably draw upon their own experiences, the social phenomena surrounding them, as well as the values that grow and develop within real life. These elements are then processed and presented in a narrative form that holds aesthetic, symbolic, and reflective value. In this regard, literature is not merely a reflection of social and cultural realities, but also serves as a powerful medium for expressing inner conditions, emotions, and psychological complexities. Characters in literary works, for example, can be understood as representations of the human soul grappling with conflict, social pressure, trauma, or the search for identity. Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the characters' dynamics, conflicts, and the underlying meanings within a narrative, an approach capable of penetrating the psychological layers behind the characters' thoughts and actions is required. In this context, literary psychology emerges as an interdisciplinary approach that combines the study of literature and psychology. Literary psychology utilizes psychological concepts, theories, and methods to analyze various elements in literary works, such as characters, plot, conflict, themes, and symbols that carry

psychological meaning. According to (Wiyatmi, 2011), literary psychology is a form of literary study that employs psychological theory as a framework to understand the content of a novel. This approach enables readers or researchers to not only interpret characters based on their outward actions but also to explore the inner structure and deepest motivations of those characters.

Characters in literary works often reflect the complexity of real individuals. They serve not only as narrative agents but also as emotional anchors for readers provoking reactions such as empathy, admiration, or even disapproval (Klaudia, 2024). As Smith (2022) emphasizes, characters are central to how stories function, acting as vehicles through which meaning is conveyed and developed. Their identities are constructed through various narrative elements, including appearance, actions, dialogue, and inner thoughts. (Alenizy & Berri, 2025) suggests that the richness of a character often lies in how consistently or inconsistently these traits are presented, allowing them to feel dynamic rather than static. In fictional narratives, dialogue plays a particularly important role. It doesn't merely move the plot forward; it also reveals deeper emotional and psychological layers, giving insight into the relationships characters form with others (Devasia & Lee, 2024).

Conflict is a compelling subject in literary studies, as it closely relates to psychological dimensions such as internal dynamics and the influence of external social forces (Siregar, 2022). According to (Alandira et al., n.d.) In literature, conflict does not merely

function as a plot device; it also reflects the psychological and social tensions experienced by characters. Every society presents distinct forms and triggers of conflict ranging from internal struggles rooted in a character's own psyche to external pressures arising from evolving social, cultural, or political structures. As (Devasia & Lee, 2024) suggest, conflict in literature can be broadly understood as a clash between opposing forces, whether these arise within an individual or between the individual and their surrounding environment. From a narrative perspective, conflict operates as a central mechanism for examining character development, moral dilemmas, and existential crises (Djumadin & Bunga, 2020). Through conflict, literature reveals not only personal transformation but also the influence of broader social contexts on individual identity.

This study employs Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory as an analytical framework. Psychoanalysis is a discipline that allows for an in-depth exploration of the psychological aspects within literary works (Maleja et al., 2022). Specifically, Lacanian psychoanalysis focuses on the development of the human psyche, emphasizing desire as a crucial factor influencing one's life (Kuntowijoyo et al., 2025). According to (Mayourian et al., 2024), Lacan argued that the unconscious possesses a structure similar to language, as desire and the unconscious are intricately connected. Therefore, language in literary texts can be effectively analyzed through Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches.

Lacan's conception of conflict as an intrinsic part of the human psyche challenges conventional views that regard conflict merely as an emotional reaction or external event. Instead, Lacan situates conflict within the structural dynamics of the subject's psychic development, where the tension between desire, identity, and

reality is ongoing and foundational (Wang, 2023) elaborates on Lacan's tripartite model of the psyche, distinguishing the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic as interconnected yet distinct registers that shape personality and experience.

The Real is defined by (Dor, 2021) as what resists symbolization elements of experience that cannot be fully integrated into language or conscious understanding. It often manifests as trauma or an existential void, representing aspects of reality that elude the subject's attempt to impose meaning. This dimension is crucial in literary analysis, as it reveals underlying forces that disrupt coherent identity and narrative continuity. The Imaginary stage is associated with the formation of the ego and the realm of images and illusions (Vélez-Bazurto, 2025). During this phase, the subject negotiates conflicts between ego desires and the constraints imposed by external reality. This tension often emerges as the character's internal struggle to reconcile self-perception with social expectations or limitations. The Imaginary can be seen as a domain of misrecognition, where the ego's coherence is fragile and liable to conflict (Kaya & Zabcı, n.d.). Finally, the Symbolic register represents the system of language, law, culture, and social norms that govern human interaction. The Symbolic order mediates the subject's relationship with others and society, imposing rules that often come into conflict with the desires emerging from the Imaginary. This dialectic between the Imaginary and Symbolic stages generates much of the psychic tension and moral dilemmas portrayed in literature, as characters struggle to navigate the demands of social order while confronting their own unconscious desires (Kaya & Zabcı, n.d.).

One novel that explores the theme of psychological conflict is *A Man Called Ove*, published in 2015 and a New York

Times bestseller for several reasons. First, through the issues raised, the study of how loneliness influences Ove's behavior and perception of his surrounding environment becomes an interesting focus to explore. By analyzing various themes and problems such as depression, trauma, and difficulties in adapting to change, as well as how these factors impact the transformation of Ove's attitudes and behaviors as depicted in *A Man Called Ove*. Second, the novel's emphasis on emotional depth is evident in Ove's significant internal changes. From a figure initially perceived as rigid and harsh, he develops into a more empathetic and open person toward those around him. The emotional complexity in the novel lies in this dynamic process of change, which involves internal conflict and moral considerations. Therefore, the strong and profound theme of psychological conflict in this novel is the main reason for choosing *A Man Called Ove* as the object of this study, as it can provide rich insights into the process of internal conflict and character development within a psychological context.

There are several previous studies considered relevant. First, a study conducted by (Qadriani & Khatimah, 2023) focuses on describing the process of self-identity formation of the main character in the novel *Isabel, The Jewel From Constantinople* by Deasylawati P, using Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. This study reveals three stages of identity formation in the character's social life. Another study by (Rahmadani et al., 2023) analyzes the desire of the character Dian Purnowo in the novel *Perempuan yang Menangis Kepada Bulan Hitam*, focusing more on the symbolic and real stages of Dian's character development using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. Next is a study by (Rohmah et al., 2023), which examines the character's personality desire in the short story *Samurai* by Kuntowijoyo, also applying

Lacan's theory, with a focus on the realm of personality desire. Lastly, there is a journal article by Devi Cintia Kasimbara, which analyzes identity, lack, and desire in the short story titled *Menyamak Babi* using Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.

Among the many previous studies, there has been no research that specifically uses *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman as the object of analysis. Therefore, this study will serve as a new contribution for readers. In addition, the novelty of this research compared to other studies using the same novel lies in its approach: this study aims to examine internal and external conflicts through Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, particularly his three stages of personality development namely, the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. The focus is specifically on analyzing the internal and external conflicts experienced by the main character. The research problems addressed in this study are as follows (1) How are the psychological conflicts represented in the Imaginary stage (2) How are the psychological conflicts represented in the Real stage (3) How are the psychological conflicts represented in the Symbolic stage. Therefore, the researcher is interested in exploring this topic because it offers the opportunity to uncover and classify the character's conflicts in greater depth using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, particularly as applied to the main character in *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis method to explore psychological conflicts in the novel *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman. Qualitative research focuses on the meaning embedded in data, which is typically presented in the form of words and images. The research process involves a series of questions, data collection procedures, and data analysis

that are systematically organized in a detailed and in-depth manner. The researcher attempts to interpret and understand the meaning behind the collected data.

The purpose of qualitative research is to uncover patterns in words or actions, which are then analyzed while maintaining a perspective that closely reflects the original experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2021). Qualitative research prioritizes the research process over the final outcome. This allows for the identification of real relationships between observed objects and provides comprehensive meaning and contextualization to the focus of the study. Moreover, this method applies descriptive-analytical techniques to conduct in-depth and detailed data analysis. Therefore, this study aims to present the entirety of the data within the literary text and focuses on identifying and analyzing how narrative elements reveal psychological conflicts in the novel.

The primary object of this research is the novel *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman, which serves as the main source of data. The novel was published by Sceptre in 2012. The study analyzes descriptions, dialogues, and character actions that reflect psychological conflicts. Documentation is used as the data collection method by reading the novel thoroughly to identify and analyze narrative and characterization elements that correspond to the identification of psychological conflict. The researcher collects relevant quotations and categorizes them based on Jacques Lacan's three stages of psychoanalytic personality.

In addition, this research also utilizes secondary sources, including academic texts that support the study, specifically the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, which highlights aspects of psychoanalysis and conflict. There are two types of data used in this research: the

first is the narrative content from the primary source, the novel *A Man Called Ove*, and the second is secondary data in the form of literature such as theses, journals, or books related to the topic. The integration of these sources provides a strong foundation for examining psychological conflicts in *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman.

3. DISCUSSION

In the novel *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman, the researcher identified a total of 13 data points related to representations of psychological conflict. These include four narratives that can be identified with the Real stage, four narratives corresponding to the Imaginary stage, and five narrative dialogues that can be classified under the Symbolic stage.

Table Identification of data with Lacan's three forms of psychological conflicts

No	Data	Psychological Conflict Types
1	"Suddenly he's a bloody "generation." Because nowadays people are all thirty-one and wear too-tight trousers and no longer drink normal coffee. And don't want to take responsibility. A shed-load of men with elaborate beards, changing jobs and changing wives and changing their car makes. Just like that."(Backman, 2012:12)	Imaginary
2	"Maybe there's something about nutty old men instead," mutters the seven-year-old. "I'm not an 'old man,'" Ove hisses. "Clauwn!" the three-year-old cries out jubilantly. "And I'm not a CLOWN either!" he roars. The older one rolls her eyes at Ove, not unlike the way her mother often rolls her eyes at Ove.(Backman, 2012:106)	Imaginary
3	To men like Ove and Rune dignity was simply that they'd had to manage on their own when they grew	Imaginary

	up, and therefore saw it as their right not to become reliant on others when they were adults. There was a sense of pride in having control. In being right.(Backman, 2012 :73)	
4	“When they went home that night, he put his arm around Ove’s shoulders and said: “Ove, only a swine thinks size and strength are the same thing. Remember that.” And Ove never forgot it. His father never raised his fists. Not to Ove or anyone else. Ove had classmates who came to school with black eyes or bruises from a belt buckle after a thrashing. But never Ove. “We don’t fight in this family,” his father used to state. “Not with each other or anyone else.”(Backman, 2012:38)	Imaginary
5	“He doesn’t know what happened to him after her funeral. The days and weeks floated together in such a way, and in such utter silence, that he could hardly describe what exactly he was doing.”(Backman, 2012:215)	Real
6	“He misses her so much that sometimes he can’t bear existing in his own body. It would be the only rational thing, just sitting here until the fumes lull both him and the cat to sleep and bring this to an end”.(Backman, 2012:178)	Real
7	“He mended the tap in the small bathroom. Put new screws into the handle of the door from the kitchen to the veranda. Reorganized boxes in the attic. Rearranged his tools in the shed and moved the Saab’s winter tires to a new place. And now here he is. Life was never meant to turn into this.”(Backman, 2012:13)	Real
8	“It wasn’t supposed to be like this. You work and pay off the mortgage and pay taxes and do what you should. You marry. For better or for worse until death do us part, wasn’t that what they agreed? Ove remembers quite clearly that it was. And she wasn’t supposed to be the first one to die. Wasn’t it bloody well	Real
	understood that it was his death they were talking about? Well, wasn’t it?”(Backman, 2012:90)	
9	Kicks the stool away. Closes his eyes and feels the noose closing around his throat like the jaws of a large wild animal(Backman, 2012:22)	Real
10	“The bespectacled woman is caught off guard when Ove charges forward and bangs on the window and she throws the file of documents into her own face. The man in the white shirt, on the other hand, is quite unmoved. He rolls down the window. “Yes?” he asks. “Vehicle traffic is prohibited in the residential area,” Ove hisses and points at each of the houses, at the Škoda, at the man in the white shirt, and at the parking area”(Backman, 2012:154)	Symbolic
11	“They say they’ll come and pick him up this week, and that I can’t manage to take care of him myself,” she says, in a voice so fragile that it hardly manages to get past her lips. “We have to do something!” cries Parvaneh, grabbing him. Ove snatches his arm back and avoids her eyes. “Pah! They won’t come to get him for years and years. This’ll go to appeal and then it’ll go through all the bureaucratic shit,” says Ove(Backman, 2012:227)	Symbolic
12	“Ove brushes some snow off the gravestone with the back of his hand and gives the flowers a little shake. “I’ve brought some flowers with me,” he mumbles. “Pink. Which you like. They say they die in the frost but they only tell you that to trick you into buying the more expensive ones.”(Backman, 2012:147)	Symbolic
13	“You get so damned worked up when I fight with people, I know that. But the reality of it is this. You’ll just have to wait a bit longer for me up there. I don’t have time to die right now.”(Backman, 2012:247)	Symbolic

1) Psychological Conflict Of Main Character in A Man Called Ove

The character of Ove in A Man Called Ove by Fredrik Backman reflects a profound psychological conflict experienced by a man grappling with social change, the loss of a life partner, and a sense of alienation from his own identity. When analyzed through the theoretical lens of Jacques Lacan, Ove's psychological turmoil can be understood across three central registers: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real.

In the Imaginary order, Ove constructs an idealized identity of himself as a strong, independent, and principled man. This ego ideal is shaped during his early childhood, particularly through the influence of his father, who instilled in him values of discipline, honesty, and hard work. Ove's self-image becomes tied to this ideal masculinity stoic, self-sufficient, and morally upright. However, as society evolves and these values are no longer recognized or respected by the contemporary world, Ove experiences a profound identity crisis. The dissonance between how he sees himself and how society perceives him leads to frustration, bitterness, and withdrawal from the social sphere. This misalignment between the ego ideal and external reality is characteristic of the tensions found within the Imaginary order.

Within the Symbolic order, the death of Sonja Ove's wife marks a critical turning point. Sonja is not merely a partner; she is the symbolic anchor of Ove's life, the one who mediates his emotional experiences and provides him with meaning and structure. Through her, Ove finds his place in the social order; she serves as the emotional and ethical compass that allows him to relate to others and

to the world. When Sonja dies, Ove feels violently uprooted from the symbolic framework that once gave his life coherence. He no longer feels needed, valued, or capable of engaging with the new societal codes and norms that surround him. His increasing sense of alienation and irrelevance in a rapidly changing world reflects a loss of position within the Symbolic order.

In the Real, Ove confronts a form of suffering that transcends language a traumatic void that cannot be adequately articulated or symbolized. This is most evidently expressed through his repeated suicide attempts, which Lacan might interpret as an encounter with a paradoxical form of painful enjoyment or destructive pleasure that lies beyond rational understanding.

2) Ove's Psychological Conflict in the Imaginary Order

a. Imaginary 1

"Suddenly he's a bloody 'generation.' Because nowadays people are all thirty-one and wear too-tight trousers and no longer drink normal coffee. And don't want to take responsibility. A shed-load of men with elaborate beards, changing jobs and changing wives and changing their car makes. Just like that." (Backman, 2012:12)

Based on the development described above, it can be interpreted that the evolution of culture or social reality among today's younger generation differs significantly from the conditions during Ove's youth. Ove's sense of frustration is expressed through his criticism and cynical attitude toward the younger generation's clothing, coffee-drinking habits, and sense of responsibility. Fundamentally, this critique does not merely concern Ove's external observations. According to Lacan, within the Imaginary Order the initial

stage in the formation of the subject there emerges a form of self-awareness through the image of oneself, known as the mirror stage. This stage produces an ego ideal, which is a complete and perfect image of the subject.

The Imaginary Order is inherently tied to the relationship between subjects, as identity is formed through mirroring. Therefore, Ove's youthful identity, which reflected the values and culture of a previous generation, stands in contrast to contemporary norms, leading him to feel a loss of his own self-image and perceive the world as no longer the same or perhaps entirely different. Ove's cynical expression, then, can be understood as a manifestation of the defense of his ideal ego.

b. Imaginary 2

"Maybe there's something about nutty old men instead," mutters the seven-year-old. "I'm not an 'old man,'" Ove hisses. "Clauwn!" the three-year-old cries out jubilantly. "And I'm not a CLOWN either!" he roars. The older one rolls her eyes at Ove, not unlike the way her mother often rolls her eyes at Ove. (Backman, 2012:106)

In the Imaginary stage, Lacan explains that the ego ideal contains external elements often referred to as the Symbolic which may take the form of others' perceptions or treatments of the subject. Internal conflict arises when there is a mismatch between the subject's expectations and the recognition they receive from their surroundings.

In the excerpt above, this is illustrated through the interaction between Ove and two children who mockingly refer to him as an "Old Man" and a "Clown." This reflects a dissonance between Ove and the children, as Ove's ego ideal positions

him as a respectable and dignified adult man someone who deserves honor and recognition. However, in reality, he is met with ridicule from two young children. Ove's emotionally charged and exaggerated response to their insults reveals that the social reality no longer affirms his ego ideal. According to Lacan, this phenomenon is referred to as "misrecognition" a moment in which the subject realizes that they are not perceived in the way they imagine themselves to be, nor is the external world responding to them in accordance with their internal expectations.

c. Imaginary 3

To men like Ove and Rune dignity was simply that they'd had to manage on their own when they grew up, and therefore saw it as their right not to become reliant on others when they were adults. There was a sense of pride in having control. In being right. (Backman, 2012 :73)

Based on the data above, it can be observed that both Ove and Rune regard independence and personal dignity as fundamental aspects of their existential identity. Within Lacan's "Imaginary" stage, the self-identity formed through the "mirror stage" is not necessarily based on factual reality; rather, it is often constructed from an illusory image created by the subject.

Ove and Rune construct a form of psychological defense to preserve their "ego ideal" by adhering to the belief that the highest form of moral truth lies in complete self-reliance that one should not require help from others. However, this belief is challenged when Sonja, Ove's wife, passes away, leaving him in a state of solitude and emotional despair. According to Lacan's three stages of psychic development, this situation illustrates a refusal to transition into a

more mature level of consciousness. Ove's insistence on clinging to his ego ideal despite the shifting reality around him can be understood as a resistance to progressing beyond the "imaginary" stage into the more complex dynamics of the 'Symbolic' or 'Real' orders, where dependency, loss, and relational vulnerability are acknowledged as parts of human subjectivity..

d. Imaginary 4

"When they went home that night, he put his arm around Ove's shoulders and said: "Ove, only a swine thinks size and strength are the same thing. Remember that." And Ove never forgot it. His father never raised his fists. Not to Ove or anyone else. Ove had classmates who came to school with black eyes or bruises from a belt buckle after a thrashing. But never Ove. "We don't fight in this family," his father used to state. "Not with each other or anyone else." (Backman, 2012:38)

Based on the data above, it can be observed that both Ove and Rune regard independence and personal dignity as fundamental aspects of their existential identity. Within Lacan's Imaginary stage, the self-identity formed through the mirror stage is not necessarily based on factual reality; rather, it is often constructed from an illusory image created by the subject.

Ove and Rune construct a form of psychological defense to preserve their ego ideal by adhering to the belief that the highest form of moral truth lies in complete self-reliance that one should not require help from others. However, this belief is challenged when Sonja, Ove's wife, passes away, leaving him in a state of solitude and emotional despair. According to Lacan's three stages of psychic development, this situation illustrates a refusal to transition into a more mature

level of consciousness. Ove's insistence on clinging to his ego ideal despite the shifting reality around him can be understood as a resistance to progressing beyond the Imaginary stage into the more complex dynamics of the Symbolic or Real orders, where dependency, loss, and relational vulnerability are acknowledged as parts of human subjectivity.

3) Ove's Psychological Conflict in the Real Order

a. Real 1

"He doesn't know what happened to him after her funeral. The days and weeks floated together in such a way, and in such utter silence, that he could hardly describe what exactly he was doing." (Backman, 2012:215)

The Real order is a realm that cannot be represented symbolically, as it exists beyond the dimensions of language and structured meaning. It is often associated with experiences of emptiness, void, and a profound sense of meaninglessness. Encounters with the Real typically arise in moments of loss or deep grief situations that language fails to adequately express.

In the passage above, it is evident that Ove experiences an existential conflict in which he cannot comprehend or imagine his life without Sonja. Her death ultimately shatters Ove's reality, which had been shaped through the Imaginary stage through language, images, and relational structures. Sonja's absence causes a collapse in Ove's symbolic identity; he no longer sees himself as a meaningful subject within a coherent structure. His ego is left hollow and destabilized, as the death of Sonja severs the symbolic ties that once anchored his sense of self.

b. Real 2

"He misses her so much that sometimes he can't bear existing in his own body. It would be the only

rational thing, just sitting here until the fumes lull both him and the cat to sleep and bring this to an end". (Backman, 2012:178)

The data above illustrates a direct confrontation with the Real, in which Ove experiences a state of alienation from his own identity. In this context, Ove faces an absolute void a form of loss that cannot be articulated through symbols or language. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, within the Imaginary stage, a loss can still be rationalized, named, or processed through representational structures. However, in the Real, such processing becomes impossible. The Real represents a domain that resists symbolization entirely when existence itself becomes unspeakable and inassimilable to language, the subject falls into the Real.

In Ove's case, Sonja functions as "the Other" the one who provides symbolic order, relational coherence, and a stabilizing structure for his subjectivity. Her presence gave Ove's life meaning through shared routines, roles, and emotional anchoring. With her death, Ove loses not only a beloved partner but also the symbolic scaffolding that allowed him to exist coherently in the world. Sonja was the mirror, the language, the law his Symbolic Other. Her absence thus creates a rupture in the Symbolic, rendering Ove's identity fragmented and ungrounded.

c. Real 3

"He mended the tap in the small bathroom. Put new screws into the handle of the door from the kitchen to the veranda. Reorganized boxes in the attic. Rearranged his tools in the shed and moved the Saab's winter tires to a new place. And now here he is. Life was never meant to turn into this." (Backman, 2012:13)

The passage above illustrates Ove's repetitive routines and activities, such as fixing faucets or organizing tools. These actions serve as a form of self-defense, allowing Ove to avoid confronting the Real the deep emptiness he feels living alone in old age after Sonja's death. These activities do not carry any real healing power; rather, they function merely as attempts to fill the void left by Sonja's absence. Ove engages in them not to recover, but to momentarily distract himself from the overwhelming sense of loss. His behavior emerges from the collapse of his symbolic order the structure of meaning and identity that Sonja once provided.

The sentence "Life was never meant to turn into this" reveals Ove's unconscious recognition of the disintegration of the life he once knew. This statement signifies not only a profound disappointment but also an absolute sense of emptiness. Although Ove tries to "act out" through the routines of daily life, these actions are ultimately an expression of his struggle to cope with the unbearable void left in the wake of his wife's death.

d. Real 4

"It wasn't supposed to be like this. You work and pay off the mortgage and pay taxes and do what you should. You marry. For better or for worse until death do us part, wasn't that what they agreed? Ove remembers quite clearly that it was. And she wasn't supposed to be the first one to die. Wasn't it bloody well understood that it was his death they were talking about? Well, wasn't it?" (Backman, 2012:90)

The Real is always confronted with existential experiences that often result in traumatic ruptures. For Ove, Sonja's death represents such a rupture a loss rooted in the external relational structures that once shaped

his symbolic identity. Through marriage, work, commitment, and responsibility toward Sonja, Ove had constructed a symbolic framework of meaning his ego ideal which gave structure to his life. However, Sonja's death dismantles this entire system.

The quote "It wasn't supposed to be like this" signifies a fracture in Ove's symbolic world, a crack that profoundly impacts his experience of the Real. This is further emphasized by the line "until death do us part," which marks the collapse of the symbolic institution of marriage in Ove's life. What was once a stable symbolic anchor is now destroyed, leaving him disoriented and emotionally shattered.

This conflict arises as Ove is forced to confront the Real and leave behind the Symbolic structure that had previously defined his identity. As a result, he becomes increasingly frustrated, angry, cynical, and overwhelmed by irrational sadness. These emotional responses reflect his struggle to cope with the loss of the Symbolic stage a stage that had once given coherence, purpose, and order to his existence.

e. Real 5

Kicks the stool away. Closes his eyes and feels the noose closing around his throat like the jaws of a large wild animal (Backman, 2012:22)

The passage above refers to a dimension of experience situated within the Real, a realm that cannot be fully interpreted or symbolized. In this moment, Ove confronts the absurdity of existence what Lacan would consider the peak of the Real stage. His action of kicking the stool and tying the noose around his neck is not merely a gesture of despair, but a manifestation of existential rupture. In this moment, the symbolic elements that once structured Ove's

life such as language, culture, and moral values no longer provide any substantial meaning.

Ove's suicide attempt is therefore not just an expression of hopelessness; it reveals a deeper existential condition. It illustrates how Ove, as a subject, becomes trapped in an existential void, where all symbolic anchors have dissolved. He perceives death not life as the only path toward meaning. In the absence of Sonja, Ove believes that embracing death offers more significance than continuing to live in a world stripped of emotional and symbolic coherence. This act reflects the painful jouissance found in the Real: a form of suffering that resists language and escapes the structures that once made existence bearable.

4) Ove's Psychological Conflict in the Symbolic Order

a. Symbolic 1

"The bespectacled woman is caught off guard when Ove charges forward and bangs on the window and she throws the file of documents into her own face. The man in the white shirt, on the other hand, is quite unmoved. He rolls down the window.

"Yes?" he asks.

"Vehicle traffic is prohibited in the residential area," Ove hisses and points at each of the houses, at the Škoda, at the man in the white shirt, and at the parking area" (Backman, 2012:154)

Based on the quotation, the development of Ove's symbolic personality can be interpreted as closely tied to rules and social structure. Ove expresses his desire to maintain order as part of the symbolic order of society. He speaks using the language of prohibition ("vehicle traffic is prohibited") as a sign that he represents the legal and social system that must be obeyed. This firm attitude shows how Ove's symbolic

personality is shaped by his attachment to language, norms, and applicable laws. Ove's desire emerges as a need to be recognized as part of an orderly and functioning social structure.

b. Symbolic 2

"They say they'll come and pick him up this week, and that I can't manage to take care of him myself," she says, in a voice so fragile that it hardly manages to get past her lips.

"We have to do something!" cries Parvaneh, grabbing him. Ove snatches his arm back and avoids her eyes.

"Pah! They won't come to get him for years and years. This'll go to appeal and then it'll go through all the bureaucratic shit," says Ove (Backman, 2012:227)

Based on the quotation, the development of Ove's symbolic personality is reflected in his response to a social issue by referring to the legal and bureaucratic system. Ove's symbolic desire is shown through his words, which refer to the appeal process and lengthy administrative procedures. He refuses emotional contact from Parvaneh, indicating that Ove feels more comfortable within the symbolic order than in emotionally driven interpersonal relationships. Ove's symbolic personality is shaped by past experiences and a sense of loss, causing him to channel his desire through structures of language and social systems rather than through direct expressions of affection.

c. Symbolic 3

"Ove brushes some snow off the gravestone with the back of his hand and gives the flowers a little shake.

"I've brought some flowers with me," he mumbles. "Pink. Which you like. They say they die in the frost but they only tell you that to trick you

into buying the more expensive ones." (Backman, 2012:147)

Ove's gesture of brushing snow off the gravestone and shaking the flowers shows how he tries to negotiate his relationship with his deceased wife within the symbolic framework: he talks to the gravestone as if he is communicating with his wife. This reflects the symbolic stage, in which language becomes the medium through which the subject attempts to re-establish connections with what is lost. Yet beneath this simple gesture lies a deep psychological conflict: Ove resists the social narrative that compels him to buy expensive flowers as a form of traditional or proper mourning. His statement, "they only tell you that to trick you into buying the more expensive ones," reveals his resistance to the symbolic order that dictates how "love" or "respect" should be expressed.

From a Lacanian perspective, this conflict emerges between desire (Ove's longing to remain close to his wife through symbols) and the Law of the Father (the social rules that dictate forms of respect and expressions of love). Ove refuses to fully submit to that symbolic order, revealing how the symbolic stage is not only a space for language but also a site of conflict between the individual and social norms. Ove's moment of hesitation torn between personal longing and adherence to convention is a manifestation of the psychological conflict that characterizes the symbolic stage in Lacan's framework.

d. Symbolic 4

"You get so damned worked up when I fight with people, I know that. But the reality of it is this. You'll just have to wait a bit longer for me up there. I don't have time to die right now." (Backman, 2012:247)

Reveals a deep internal psychological conflict within the protagonist, Ove. From the perspective of Lacan's symbolic stage, Ove is caught between the symbolic order the system of language, social norms, and roles that define his identity and the Real, the harsh and unsymbolizable truth of death. The symbolic order structures his world and gives meaning to his life, but the looming presence of death threatens to disrupt this order completely. By acknowledging that others are worried ("You get so damned worked up when I fight with people") yet insisting on postponing death ("You'll just have to wait a bit longer for me up there"), Ove asserts his refusal to succumb to the void that the Real represents.

This tension between life and death, symbolized by his decision to delay dying, reflects Ove's psychological struggle to maintain his sense of purpose and connection to the world around him. Lacan's theory suggests that entering the Real means confronting a traumatic break in meaning, an experience beyond language and symbolization. Ove's words highlight his desire to resist that break by holding onto the symbolic his social identity, relationships, and responsibilities even as he battles internal despair. This conflict embodies the fundamental human experience of struggling between destructive impulses and the drive to live a meaningful life within the structures that give it coherence and continuity.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on an in-depth analysis of the narrative data in the novel *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman, this study concludes that the psychological conflicts experienced by the character Ove can be comprehensively understood through the

psychoanalytic framework of Jacques Lacan, particularly his concept of the three psychic orders: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real.

In the Imaginary order, Ove exhibits conflicts closely tied to the formation of ego identity through reflections of the past. He constructs an idealized image of himself based on traditional values such as independence, dignity, and order. When this image no longer aligns with current social realities such as being ridiculed by children or witnessing generational shifts in values Ove experiences misrecognition (a disjunction between self-image and external recognition). This leads to frustration and a rejection of contemporary social life. Within the Real order, Ove confronts an existential void that cannot be symbolized through language. The loss of Sonja becomes a turning point that collapses the symbolic structure that once sustained his identity. He falls into a state of profound emptiness and extreme alienation, as seen in his attempts to fill the void through meaningless routines and even his desire to end his life. In this phase, Ove faces experiences that defy representation reflecting existential trauma and latent suffering (*jouissance*), as described in Lacanian theory.

Meanwhile, in the Symbolic order, Ove tries to maintain his identity by relying on language, law, and social structures that he understands and believes in. However, conflict arises when this symbolic system clashes with emotional realities and the unavoidable circumstances of life, such as his wife's death and the emergence of new relationships with neighbors. Ove is caught in a tension between submission to social norms and personal desires that cannot always be verbalized.

Overall, Ove's psychological conflict reflects the journey of an individual trapped between the idealization of the past (Imaginary), the

social structures and language that organize life (Symbolic), and the unspeakable harshness of reality (Real). His inability to fully transition from one order to another becomes the primary source of his suffering and alienation.

The implications of this study suggest that Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a profound understanding of the inner workings of the human psyche, particularly in the face of loss, social change, and identity crisis. In Ove's case, his psychological struggle is not merely personal but also structural and symbolically tied to social relationships, language, and the absence of meaningful others in his life.

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