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A Character Centered Analysis of Anna's Personal Development in the Film My Oxford Year

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Abstract

This research focuses on "A Character-Centered Analysis of Anna's Personal Development in the film My Oxford Year." The purpose of the study is to examine how Anna, as the main character, is portrayed and how her personal development unfolds throughout the film. The data were obtained from the depiction of Anna in various scenes, including her dialogue, actions, emotional expressions, and interactions with other characters. To analyze these elements, the study employs Murphy's (1972) theory of characterization, which provides a framework for understanding how a character is shaped within the narrative. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the researcher observed the film repeatedly and took detailed notes to identify patterns related to Anna's growth. The findings indicate that Anna's development appears through several dimensions of her characterization, including her changing decisions, emotional responses, and evolving perspectives as she navigates new experiences at Oxford. The analysis reveals that Anna undergoes growth in three major areas. First, emotional development, shown through her increasing maturity in managing conflicts and personal challenges. Second, relationship development, reflected in her ability to form meaningful connections and reassess her priorities. Third, identity formation, as she begins to understand her values, ambitions, and sense of purpose more clearly. Overall, the study concludes that Anna's journey in My Oxford Year represents a gradual and realistic process of personal transformation. Her growth is shaped by the challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities she encounters, illustrating a nuanced portrayal of character development within the film.

Keywords: Anna, My Oxford Year, Characterization, Murphy's Theory, Personal Development, Qualitative Descriptive

1. Introduction

Film has long been regarded as a narrative medium that serves not only as entertainment but also as a reflective tool that records social dynamics, cultural values, and human experiences across various contexts. In modern media studies, film is considered a "social text" capable of depicting the psychological and emotional realities of individuals through character representation and complex narrative conflicts [1]. Through visual depiction, dialogue, and storyline, films provide audiences with the opportunity to explore diverse human experiences, including personal development, self-adjustment, and internal conflict. Haris and Manesah (2025) emphasize that the strength of film lies not only in its visual aesthetics but also in its ability to express philosophical ideas and emotional issues relevant to real-life experiences [2]. Therefore, film serves as an effective medium to examine human dynamics, particularly through characters' journeys as they face various internal and external challenges.

In narrative analysis, character development becomes a central focus because characters are the driving force of a story. Previous studies highlight that film characters are not static; they evolve and develop in response to narrative pressures, conflicts, and social interactions [3]. This transformation is known as the character arc, defined as the internal process of change experienced by a character in response to a series of events that influence their motivation, behavior, and mindset. According to Kashaka (2025), a strong character arc enhances a story's emotional depth and meaning, as audiences can witness the gradual and realistic growth of a character. This makes the analysis of character development a key component in understanding a film's theme and message in depth [4].

A character development-based approach is also highly relevant in narrative psychology studies. In film, personal growth is usually reflected through three main aspects: emotional development, interpersonal relationship development, and self-identity formation. These aspects are interconnected and together provide a comprehensive understanding of how a character evolves when facing life challenges. According to Listyani Riyanto et al. (2025),

this process is not merely about achieving external goals but primarily about internal transformation that shapes how individuals understand themselves and the world around them. In other words, character development in film can be seen as a symbolic representation of the maturation process in real life [5].

Moreover, character analysis contributes significantly to film studies because it can reveal deeper themes such as ambition, emotional vulnerability, identity conflicts, and cultural adjustment. Pebrianti (2023) asserts that in-depth analysis of a character's behavior, motivation, and emotional responses enables researchers to understand the moral messages or social critiques embedded in a film [6]. This is particularly relevant in films addressing personal issues, cross-cultural relationships, or academic pressures all of which are real experiences for many individuals, especially adolescents and young adults. However, academic studies specifically analyzing *My Oxford Year* remain limited, particularly in Indonesian publications. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the main character, Anna's personal development.

My Oxford Year is a contemporary drama that follows the journey of a young American student, Anna, participating in an academic program at the University of Oxford. Although the premise appears simple a young ambitious woman studying abroad, the film presents complex emotional and psychological dynamics. Anna is depicted as confident, ambitious, and highly focused on her political career goals. She arrives at Oxford with clear and structured objectives, yet her academic journey is filled with challenges that force her to confront internal conflicts, cultural pressures, academic demands, and increasingly intense interpersonal relationships. These experiences prompt Anna to reevaluate her values, goals, and sense of self.

The film portrays the psychological dynamics experienced by young adults in the transition to emotional maturity. According to developmental psychology research, young adulthood is a critical period in which individuals face significant changes in relationships, career paths, and identity [7]. Academic pressure, as experienced by Anna, can trigger stress, self-doubt, and internal conflict, affecting emotional stability [8]. Meanwhile, cultural adjustment plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals respond to a new environment [9]. The film realistically depicts these dynamics, allowing viewers to understand how individuals learn to cope, adapt, and grow through challenging emotional and social experiences.

To understand Anna's development, Murphy's (1972) theory of characterization serves as a relevant analytical framework. This theory outlines nine main techniques for analyzing characters, including actions, dialogue, emotional reactions, motivations, interactions with other characters, and responses to situations [10]. This approach enables researchers to examine how Anna's thoughts, decisions, and behaviors evolve throughout the story. Murphy provides an analytical basis to observe character growth not only through explicit narrative but also through subtle behavioral details that shape personality. Applying this theory allows the study to explore Anna's journey in depth, examining how she responds to academic pressure, cultural differences, emotional conflicts, and new romantic experiences.

Anna's character development does not occur linearly. The film shows that personal growth often emerges through repeated experiences, failures, self-reflection, and shifting life priorities. In many parts of the story, Anna struggles with fear of failure, pressure to maintain a strong self-image, and uncertainty about the future. These traits reflect emotional development during emerging adulthood, a stage marked by identity exploration, relational experimentation, and social role transition. Through Anna's journey, the film demonstrates how internal conflict can act as a catalyst for more mature personal development.

Furthermore, interpersonal relationships play a significant role in Anna's development. Jamie, initially seen as a distraction from her academic focus, becomes an emotional mirror helping Anna understand vulnerabilities and emotional needs she had previously neglected. In interpersonal relationship theory, intense emotional experiences often function as reflective mechanisms that stimulate psychological growth [11]. Anna and Jamie's relationship is portrayed not merely as a romance but as a developmental experience that opens space for perspective shifts, empathy, and deeper self-understanding. This aligns with findings that interpersonal relationships can accelerate self-identity formation in young adulthood [12].

Through in-depth character analysis, this study aims to explore how the film portrays the development of three main aspects: (1) emotional maturity, (2) interpersonal relationship development, and (3) self-identity formation. By focusing on these areas, the study contributes to film and narrative psychology research, especially regarding literary works and films depicting a young woman's struggle with academic pressure, cultural adaptation, and internal conflict [13]. Additionally, it provides insight into how film can effectively portray emotional and psychological maturation.

Thus, this introduction provides a solid foundation for understanding the subsequent analysis. Utilizing Murphy's theory, supported by developmental psychology research and the film's contextual relevance, the study focuses not only on character description but also on a broader understanding of personal development processes within modern film narratives.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, in which the film *My Oxford Year* serves as the primary data source. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on an in-depth understanding of Anna's character development, including emotional changes, social interactions, and identity formation throughout the story. This method aligns with previous studies that analyzed characters and moral values in films through observation and documentation, emphasizing description and interpretation of phenomena within the narrative rather than quantitative measurement [14], [15].

Data collection was carried out through repeated observation (multiple viewing) of the film and the recording of descriptive and reflective field notes. The researcher watched the film multiple times to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the storyline and character development, noting every significant moment that portrayed changes in Anna's behavior, emotions, decisions, and interactions with other characters. These notes were then classified into main themes, such as emotional maturity, interpersonal relationship development, and identity formation, following thematic analysis procedures previously applied in film character studies [16], [17].

In addition to observation, this study also employed documentation techniques as a complementary method. This included analyzing scenes, dialogue, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and visual settings relevant to character development. The researcher also emphasized the importance of cultural and social context depicted in the film, as character interactions are often influenced by academic norms, cultural differences, and social dynamics within the university environment. By combining observation and documentation, the researcher obtained more comprehensive and holistic data on Anna's character journey, as done in previous non-formal film studies [18].

During the analysis process, the researcher applied open coding to identify initial themes from the observation notes. Every event or scene showing changes in emotion, decisions, or behavior was recorded and labeled according to thematic categories. Subsequently, these themes were organized hierarchically through axial coding to identify relationships between themes, for example, how academic pressure influences emotional maturity or how interpersonal interactions trigger identity transformation [19].

Data analysis was conducted inductively, examining information from notes and documentation to identify patterns of character development and inter-theme relationships. The researcher ensured data credibility through method triangulation by comparing initial observation notes with repeated film viewings, ensuring more valid and reliable interpretations. In addition, peer debriefing was conducted by discussing preliminary findings with colleagues to gain additional perspectives and reduce subjective bias. This procedure also allowed the researcher to trace every significant scene and assess the consistency of character changes from emotional, social, and identity perspectives.

This method provides both flexibility and systematic rigor, enabling the researcher to capture character development comprehensively without focusing solely on detailed dialogue transcripts. Its strength lies in its ability to capture psychological and social nuances often implied through scenes, facial expressions, and character interactions. With this approach, the study not only describes Anna's personal journey in detail but also provides

a clear foundation for other researchers to replicate the study using different films or characters, following the same observation, documentation, and thematic analysis procedures.

Moreover, the study considers ethical aspects of film research, including respecting the original work, providing proper attribution, and ensuring interpretations do not distort the film's meaning. This approach emphasizes that character analysis is not merely a moral judgment but an in-depth understanding of the psychological and social dynamics conveyed by characters within the film's narrative context.

Through these procedures, the study is expected to produce a comprehensive, valid, and systematic analysis of Anna's character development, while also contributing to film studies and narrative psychology, particularly regarding young adults' experiences in dealing with academic pressures, social interactions, and identity formation.

3. Results and Discussion

At the beginning of the film, Anna is portrayed as a highly confident individual with strong ambition and a clearly structured life plan. She arrives at Oxford carrying a self-identity closely tied to academic achievement and her political career aspirations. Her belief in her ability to accomplish everything independently gives the appearance of emotional stability; however, this outward composure actually reflects a rigid emotional control mechanism.

As the story progresses, the academic demands at Oxford much more challenging than she had anticipated—begin to destabilize this emotional equilibrium. Interactions within a culturally different environment further increase the pressure, and the evolving relationship with Jamie opens a new emotional space that Anna had never previously considered. These situations compel her to confront vulnerabilities she had long avoided, particularly the fear of failure, loss of control, and emotional attachment that could potentially interfere with her ambitions.

The most significant change is observed when Anna begins to acknowledge that she cannot always control everything. She gradually realizes that fear and uncertainty are not signs of weakness but natural aspects of the maturation process. This recognition encourages her to be more honest with herself, including in facing internal conflicts between her life goals and emotional needs.

Anna's ability to regulate her emotions also develops over time. Initially, she tended to suppress her feelings when confronted with difficult situations. From the middle to the end of the story, however, Anna demonstrates a reflective capacity: she allows herself time to process her emotions, reconsider her responses, and learn from minor failures or interpersonal conflicts. This process serves as an important indicator of increased emotional intelligence.

Furthermore, Anna's emotional growth is evident in how she handles pressure and sudden changes. Whereas she previously responded to stress by working harder without considering her emotional state, she now manages stress more healthily, engaging in dialogue with others, accepting emotional support, and not hesitating to seek help when necessary.

Overall, this section illustrates that Anna's emotional development is not linear but occurs gradually through a series of experiences that compel her to cultivate self-awareness, courage in facing vulnerability, and emotional resilience. These improvements serve as a crucial foundation for the development of her interpersonal relationships and personal identity, which unfold in other parts of the narrative.

3.1. Emotional Development

At the beginning of the film, Anna is depicted as a highly confident and goal-oriented individual. She arrives at Oxford with the belief that ambition and hard work alone are sufficient for success. However, this assumption begins to waver when she is confronted with the reality of Oxford's academic demands, which are far more challenging than she had anticipated. In addition, cultural differences and social pressures place her in situations that test her emotional stability. In this context, Anna experiences "emotional disorientation," a phase commonly observed in young adults when entering new environments with high demands.

As the story unfolds, these experiences compel Anna to face emotions she had long suppressed, such as fear of failure, self-doubt, and reluctance to appear vulnerable. She can no longer maintain the strong persona she had consistently presented. Acknowledging her vulnerability becomes a pivotal point in her emotional development. This shift reflects a transition from a denial-based coping mechanism to self-acceptance, signaling an increase in emotional intelligence.

This change is also evident in how Anna begins to regulate her emotional responses when confronting conflict, academic stress, and complex interpersonal situations. Whereas she previously tended to react impulsively and defensively, she now demonstrates reflective capacity, evaluating her feelings before making decisions. According to adult development theory, the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions is a key indicator of the transition toward psychological maturity.

Overall, Anna's emotional development is not merely reflected in shifts in her feelings but also in her growing ability to understand herself, accept personal limitations, and build mental resilience. This transformation illustrates a gradual developmental process, in which challenging experiences become opportunities for Anna to grow in a more mature and authentic manner.

3.2. Relationship Development

Anna's relationship development with Jamie becomes a significant aspect of her self-transformation throughout the film. At the beginning, Anna is depicted as an individual who establishes firm boundaries between herself and others. This behavior stems from her belief that emotional closeness could disrupt her focus on long-term ambitions, particularly in the political field. Her tendency to maintain distance reflects an avoidance of attachment, which she perceives as potentially complicating her life plans. In other words, romantic relationships were not part of her priorities and were something she actively sought to avoid.

However, this dynamic begins to shift as Anna and Jamie's relationship develops more intensely and personally. The closeness that emerges is not only romantic but also provides Anna with a space to understand new perspectives on empathy and emotional maturity. Their interactions make Anna realize that relationships do not always serve as obstacles but can instead be sources of support, comfort, and learning. At this point, the film illustrates how Anna begins to relinquish some control over her life, allowing herself to experience emotions more deeply than mere temporary attachment.

In addition to building trust, Anna also shows development in her communication skills. She becomes more honest in expressing her needs, desires, or concerns—things she previously concealed out of fear of appearing weak. This change indicates a shift in mindset: from someone overly reliant on self-sufficiency to an individual who recognizes the importance of two-way communication in interpersonal relationships. Anna learns that emotional honesty is not a threat to her identity; rather, it strengthens relationships and mutual understanding.

Anna's journey with Jamie also demonstrates that healthy relationships require compromise. Jamie's presence prompts Anna to reconsider her life priorities—not by abandoning her ambitions, but by finding ways to balance personal goals with emotional connections. She learns that relationships are not solely about sacrifice but about the ability to see things from another's perspective and the willingness to adapt without losing one's sense of self. This process marks Anna's transition from emotional avoidance to a more mature and realistic engagement in her interpersonal life.

Overall, Anna's relationship with Jamie acts as a catalyst in her personality development. Through this closeness, she confronts situations that compel self-reflection, understanding of her emotional boundaries, and a reevaluation of how she perceives interpersonal intimacy. This transformation illustrates that relationships are not merely narrative support but an integral component shaping how Anna understands herself, her goals, and her future.

3.3 Self-Identity Development

The process of self-identity formation emerges as one of the most prominent aspects of Anna's character journey. From the beginning, she arrives at Oxford with the belief that her identity is primarily defined by academic achievements and a political career plan she had meticulously crafted over time. This perspective leads her to

evaluate herself through productivity and formal success. However, the Oxford environment—with its distinct cultural context, academic pace, and social dynamics gradually challenges the stable identity construction she had previously taken for granted.

Academic pressures, interactions with new peers, and her relationship with Jamie push Anna toward deeper self-reflection. She begins to question long-held values, such as the belief that relentless hard work is the only path to success or that personal relationships always impede ambition. This shift in perspective reflects the emergence of identity exploration, a stage in which individuals consciously reassess their beliefs about themselves.

At certain points, Anna realizes that identity is not rigid. Rather, it develops through emotional experiences, social relationships, and the ability to reinterpret life goals. This awareness becomes evident as she starts to understand that being “successful” does not necessarily mean meeting others’ standards or adhering to old plans that may no longer be relevant. She recognizes that emotional well-being, healthy relationships, and authenticity are also integral parts of one’s identity.

Moreover, the decisions she makes throughout the film demonstrate increasing psychological maturity. She no longer acts solely based on ambition or external expectations but considers the impact of her choices on herself as an individual. By the end of the story, Anna appears more willing to embrace uncertainty and open herself to changes in her life path, even when such changes are challenging. This illustrates that self-identity is a continuously evolving process, rather than a fixed goal to be achieved once and for all.

Ultimately, the development of her identity forms a crucial foundation for her overall personal growth. Anna learns that adulthood involves understanding that one’s self can change through experiences, and that the courage to accept this change is as important as any achievement she strives for.

3.4 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Anna’s personal development in *My Oxford Year* unfolds gradually, encompassing three main aspects: emotional development, interpersonal relationships, and self-identity formation. These aspects are interconnected, forming a realistic character development arc, particularly for young individuals navigating the transitional phase into adulthood. Anna’s journey reflects dynamics commonly experienced by college students or young adults when faced with a new environment that demands adaptation and self-reflection.

From a theoretical perspective, Murphy’s characterization framework helps clarify how changes in Anna can be observed through her actions, dialogue, emotional reactions, and the choices she makes throughout the story. Through her interactions with other characters and responses to academic and emotional pressures, viewers or readers can witness shifts in her values and perspectives. This approach provides a solid foundation for assessing character development not only through explicit behavioral changes but also through subtle details that reveal her maturing process.

Moreover, the film demonstrates that personal development is neither linear nor instantaneous. Anna does not transform solely as a result of a single experience; rather, it occurs through a series of situations that teach her to cope with emotional consequences, reconsider priorities, and reevaluate her personal definition of success. This process aligns with contemporary character development theory, which emphasizes that growth happens when individuals face conflict, experience minor failures, and are compelled to step out of their comfort zones.

A more critical examination shows that cultural differences and academic pressures can accelerate psychological maturation. Adapting to the Oxford environment requires Anna to manage her independence, broaden her perspectives, and adjust to new ways of thinking. This environment indirectly serves as a learning space that enriches her understanding both of the world and of herself. In other words, Anna’s internal changes are influenced not only by her relationship with Jamie but also by exposure to diverse social and cultural contexts.

Overall, *My Oxford Year* offers a profound representation of the coming-of-age process. Anna’s development reinforces the understanding that adulthood is not merely about achieving career or academic goals but also about embracing uncertainty, building meaningful relationships, and discovering a more personal definition of success.

Consequently, Anna's experiences are not solely an individual journey; they also provide relevant insights into the challenges commonly faced by many students or young adults in similar transitional circumstances.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that Anna in *My Oxford Year* experiences meaningful personal development through emotional challenges, growing relationships, and deeper self-reflection. Her journey demonstrates that personal growth is a gradual process that requires courage, vulnerability, and the willingness to reconsider one's goals and identity. The film also shows how external pressures and meaningful connections can influence a young adult's maturity. Future research may compare Anna's development with characters from other coming-of-age films or explore how modern female characters manage the balance between ambition, personal values, and emotional well-being. Such studies can provide broader insight into the portrayal of women's growth in contemporary cinema.

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