

**FINDING MEANING IN THE TWILIGHT YEARS: AN
EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS OF *THE FATHER* (2020) AND A MAN
CALLED OTTO (2022)**

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ABSTRACT

*Existential themes have long shaped cinematic storytelling. However, the intersection of aging masculinity and philosophical inquiry remains underexplored in contemporary film studies. This article investigates the existential dimensions of aging in *The Father* (2020) and *A Man Called Otto* (2022). This present study is urgent as most existing research treats aging as a mere biological decline which fails to address the inner philosophical struggles of older male protagonists. Using a qualitative interpretive and comparative design grounded in the existential frameworks of Jean-Paul Sartre and Viktor Frankl, the analysis follows Avci and Cetin's (2022) three-stage process: data selection, thematic coding, and theoretical interpretation. Four key themes emerge: identity, mortality, isolation, and meaning. The Findings reveal that while *The Father* (2020) embodies existential dissolution through cognitive decay, *A Man Called Otto* (2022) depicts a trajectory of rediscovery through community compassion. This study contributes to an interdisciplinary understanding of aging, demonstrating that cinema serves as a vital medium for reframing later as a dynamic existential condition rather a state of passive decline.*

Keywords: *Aging, Existentialism, Film Analysis, Meaning-making*

INTRODUCTION

Existential concerns about time, memory, and the meaning of human existence have increasingly shaped contemporary cultural narratives, including film. Scholars such as Gildea (2025) emphasize that human temporality is central to understanding how individuals experience existence especially in relation to aging and mortality. Similarly, Hammelburg (2024) and Smit et al. (2024) argue that memory practices mediate how people construct meaning from lived experiences, particularly in moments of loss and reflection. In philosophical discourse, existential inquiry also addresses the nature of being and non-being, where individuals must confront uncertainty and construct meaning in their lives (Lee, 2023). Within the context of aging masculinity, studies by Sandberg et al. (2022) and Wohlmann (2025) show that older men's identities are often negotiated through cultural narratives that reflect vulnerability, resilience, and late-life transformation. These perspectives suggest that film, as a form of popular literature, provides a significant medium for representing existential struggles, where characters embody tensions between memory, identity, and the search in meaning in later life.

Aging has traditionally been portrayed in Western cinema through stereotypes of decline, wisdom, or sentimental reflection. However, emerging studies in aging and masculinity reveal that later life stages challenge conventional ideas of male strength and autonomy. Hartung et al. (2022) and Thomsen et al. (2023) argues that older men's experiences are deeply gendered and shaped by social expectations of productivity and control. Dolan (2017) further examines how aging male stars negotiate the "silvering" of their stardom, revealing ambivalence between endurance and vulnerability. These discussions indicate that the representation of aging men in film often swings between nostalgia for lost of and the redefinition of masculinity through emotional exposure.

Recent decades have witnessed the rise of the geriation subgenre, where aging action heroes reclaim their power and agency through physical resilience. Studies by Boyle and Brayton (2012), Buhning (2017), and Crossley and Fisher (2021) trace how films like *The Expendables* (2010) celebrate muscle work as a negotiation of masculine identity in later life. Similarly, Dudrah (2021) and Su (2024) show how iconic figure and hero such as Amitabh Bachchan and Indiana Jones embody renewed heroic masculinity while subtly revealing emotional fragility. These cultural representations suggest that aging men in cinema are increasingly visible but still often depicted through hegemonic frameworks of endurance rather than existential introspection. Scholars such as Medina and Armengol (2024) emphasize that cinematic industries worldwide continue to reproduce gender hierarchies while simultaneously opening new spaces for representing aging bodies and emotions.

While the geriation trend emphasizes physical competence, other cinematic narratives focus on the emotional and philosophical realities of aging such as cognitive decline, loss, and meaning-making. Medina (2018) explores how films portraying Alzheimer's disease visualize the fragility of selfhood, while Medina and Zecchi (2020) argue that aging and feminist film theory intersect in depicting embodied time and vulnerability. Tracy and Schrage-Fruh (2022) extend this inquiry to European and Anglophone cinema. They highlight how older protagonists struggle to maintain identity amid existential uncertainty. Martín (2023), on the other hand, observes that cinematic masculinity remains a mask that shaped by societal ideals of rational control. This mask leaves the inner life of aging

men largely unexplored. This lack of philosophical discussion invites a re-reading of contemporary films that center older male protagonists confronting loneliness, sadness, and emotional struggle.

Despite the existing research on aging masculinity in cinema, an important gap remains in the intersection between film studies, masculinity studies, and existential philosophy. Most existing studies in film and aging studies largely examine older male characters through sociocultural, psychological, or bodily decline frameworks. They emphasized vulnerability, hegemonic masculinity, or the loss of autonomy in later life (Dolan, 2017; Martín, 2023; Thompson, 2018). Meanwhile, discussion on geriatric cinema has expanded conversation of aging hero and late life masculinity, especially in relation to endurance, physical competence, and masculine visibility (Boyle & Brayton, 2012; Crossley & Fisher, 2021; Su, 2024). However, these studies rarely analyze how cinematic narratives represent existential concerns such as freedom, meaning, despair, and selfhood in aging male subjectivity. In addition, although *The Father* (2020) and *A Man Called Otto* (2022) have received critical attention for their emotional portrayal of aging, grief, and loneliness, limited research has examined these films through a comparative existential framework that integrate Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism and Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. Therefore, this study addresses the gap by investigating how older male protagonists negotiate identity loss, mortality, isolation, and meaning making through existential confrontation in later life.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding of how contemporary cinema reimagines aging masculinity as an existential condition rather than a stage of decline. Accordingly, this article seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do *The Father* (2020) and *A Man Called Otto* (2022) depict the existential dimensions within the context of aging masculinity?
2. In what ways do the protagonists' experiences reflect or challenge the concept of existential freedom as they navigate the crisis of selfhood in later life?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existentialism is a philosophical movement which centers on the individual's confrontation with freedom, meaning, and mortality. This study is based on two most influential thinkers of existentialism: Jean-Paul Sartre and Viktor Frankl. Their works offer distinct but complementary framework for understanding human existence about human freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning. This especially true in the context of aging, grief, and identity loss as portrayed in *The Father* (2020) and *A Man Called Otto* (2022). Both philosophers discuss how people continue to define their lives even when facing suffering, loss, and the closeness of death. Their concepts help to explain the emotional and spiritual journey of the elderly characters in these films.

Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism (2007) articulated in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* posits that existence comes before essence. This means that people are not born with a fixed nature or purpose but must create themselves through their actions and decisions. In his view, human beings are condemned to be free. They cannot escape the responsibility of making choices and giving meaning to their lives. Freedom, therefore, is not only a gift but also a heavy task. When people grow old, this awareness becomes stronger because aging limits their strength, memory, and control over life. They must face the reality that time and body are no longer entirely theirs.

Through Sartre's perspective, aging can be seen as a time when people become more aware of their limits. The loss of identity, independence, and stability often leads to anxiety and confusion. However, Sartre believes that even in such decline, individuals remain responsible for how they respond to their situation. In *The Father*, for example, the main character continues to express his will and sense of self even when his memory fades. His struggle reflects the existential question of how freedom still exists within limitation and decay.

Sartre's concept of bad faith is also relevant. He argues that when individuals deny their freedom by conforming to external roles or expectations, they live inauthentically. In the context of aging, this concept highlights the existential crisis that arises when individual's ability to choose is diminished, whether by illness, grief, or societal neglect. Sartre's framework is particularly useful for analyzing Anthony's cognitive disintegration in *The Father* and Otto's initial rejection of life in *A Man Called Otto*.

Viktor Frankl's existential psychology, known as logotherapy, is grounded in his experiences as a Holocaust survivor and developed in *Man's Search for Meaning* (2006). His theory provides another side of existential thought that focuses on hope and meaning. In his theory of logotherapy, Frankl explains that the main motivation in life is not pleasure or power, but the search for meaning. Even when life brings suffering or loss, individuals can still find purpose through love, work, or inner strength. For Frankl, meaning is often found through self-transcendence. This means the ability to look beyond oneself to values, relationships, or duties that give life a sense of purpose. This view is especially important in late life, when people may experience loneliness or grief.

Frankl's logotherapy is especially relevant to narratives of aging and loss. While Sartre emphasizes freedom, Frankl focuses on resilience and the human capacity to find purpose even in despair. His ideas illuminate Otto's transformation from suicidal isolation to purposeful engagement with his community, and they underscore the tragic absence of meaning in Anthony's fragmented reality.

Recent studies on aging support this existential view. Alonso, Defanti, Cachioni, and Neri (2023) show that finding meaning and purpose helps older adults adapt to physical and emotional challenges. Their review explains that purpose in life improves mental health and social well-being in older age. Similarly, David, Hadson, and Brody (2024) find that low-income elders see meaning as a key to surviving hardship. Their study shows that purpose gives older people strength to face daily struggles and to maintain dignity despite limited resources. These findings confirm that the search for meaning continues to be central in later life.

From a cultural perspective, Geybels (2023) observes that narratives of older individuals in literature and media consistently depict a duality of vulnerability and quiet strength. These portrayals suggest that old age serves as a profound period of reflection and self-discovery, reinforcing the notion that aging is a deeply existential process rather than a mere biological or social decline. Consequently, contemporary cinema such as *The Father* (2020) and *A Man Called Otto* (2022) may act as a visual language capable of revealing how individuals navigate the search for new meaning amid physical and cognitive deterioration.

To capture this complexity, the present study synthesizes Sartre's theories of freedom and responsibility with Frankl's logotherapeutic focus on meaning and

transcendence. This integrated framework provides a balanced lens to analyze *The Father* (2020) and *A Man Called Otto* (2022). While Sartre's philosophy illuminates the intense struggle for self-definition and the anxiety of losing autonomy, Frankl's framework highlights the redemptive potential of human connection and compassion. By bridging these two perspectives, this present study demonstrates that even in the final stages of life, individuals like Anthony and Otto Anderson are actively engaged with fundamental existential questions of freedom, suffering, and the pursuit of meaning before death.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive and comparative design grounded in existential philosophy and film analysis. It examines *The Father* and *A Man Called Otto* as cultural texts that both reflect and shape understandings of aging, mortality, and the search for meaning. The analysis focuses to reveal moments of existential tension, despair, or transformation. This analysis is guided by theoretical insights from Sartre's *Existentialism Is a Humanism* and Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. The films are analyzed both as narratives and as existential representations of the human condition. By comparing these two works, the researchers are able to identify contrasting existential trajectories of the two protagonists. One toward dissolution, the other toward rediscovery.

The research proceeds through three analytical stages proposed by Avci and Cetin (2022). First, data selection in which key dialogues and scenes are examined closely to capture expressions of existential struggle. Second, thematic coding when the data are coded inductively to identify emerging patterns of existential crisis and meaning making. Third, theoretical interpretation in which the resulting themes are interpreted through existential frameworks to illuminate how language and visual elements construct and reflect each protagonist's search for meaning.

The study utilizes triangulation to enhance interpretative credibility and analytical rigor. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple perspectives, sources, or interpretative strategies to examine a phenomenon comprehensively and reduce the risk of subjective bias in qualitative analysis (Denzin, 2017; Patton, 2014). In this study, triangulation is conducted across three dimensions. First, textual triangulation is applied by comparing dialogues across scenes and between films to identify recurring motifs of identity, aging, isolation, and meaning. Second,

contextual triangulation is conducted by situating these dialogues within the broader narrative and social emotional contexts of each film. Third, theoretical triangulation is employed through the integration of existential perspectives as proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre (2007) and Viktor Frankl (2006) to interpret the character's experiences and meaning making processes. Through these interconnected analytical layers, meaning is derived not from isolated excerpts but from the dynamic relationship among textual evidence, narrative context, and philosophical interpretation, thereby producing a more holistic understanding of existential meaning in later life.

Since this study employs interpretative analysis, the result or findings and discussion are presented integratively to maintain continuity between textual evidence, thematic interpretation, and existential philosophical analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The two films, *The Father* (2020) and *A Man Called Otto* (2022), center on male protagonists who confront the existential struggles of aging. Although both characters are different in background and condition, they share similar experiences of vulnerability, loneliness, and the crisis of meaning in late life. Table 1 below presents basic information about the protagonists and the forms of vulnerability they embody.

Table 1. Character Identity, Age, and Vulnerability

Film's Title	<i>The Father</i>	<i>A Man Called Otto</i>
Protagonist's Name	Anthony	Otto Anderson
Approximate Age	80 years old	63 years old
Protagonists Condition	Suffering from severe dementia or Alzheimer's	Grief, depression, and loss of purpose which lead to suicidal attempts
Type of Vulnerability	Unavoidable Vulnerability	Chosen vulnerability

Anthony, in *The Father*, is portrayed as an octogenarian who insists on living independently in his flat. He rejects help from his daughter and caregivers because he perceives their presence as a threat to his autonomy. His life becomes dominated by confusion, fear, and disorientation as his mind deteriorates. His vulnerability is not a matter of choice. It is an inevitable existential exposure caused by his declining cognition. Sartre's notion that "existence precedes essence"

becomes visible here, as Anthony's sense of self dissolves; his identity is no longer anchored in his choices but eroded by memory loss. He faces the ultimate absurdity of being conscious yet losing control over his consciousness.

In contrast, Otto in *A Man Called Otto* represents another form of existential struggle. He is a retired man. Recently widowed, Otto's life turns into a repetition of routines and bitterness. He lives in isolation, controlling his environment through rules and strict habits. Unlike Anthony, Otto's vulnerability is self-chosen. His despair and suicidal thoughts emerge not from illness but from grief and a loss of purpose. His existential crisis reflects Frankl's argument that the human search for meaning persists even in suffering. Otto's journey thus becomes one of rediscovering meaning through relationships and acts of care.

This study addresses two main research questions:

1. How do *The Father* (2020) and *A Man Called Otto* (2022) depict the existential dimensions within the context of aging masculinity?
2. In what ways do the protagonists' experiences reflect or challenge the concept of existential freedom as they navigate the crisis of selfhood in later life?

The comparative analysis led to the identification of four key themes that connect both films: identity, mortality, isolation, and meaning. These themes represent the stages of existential confrontation experienced by Anthony and Otto, and how they reflect Sartre's freedom and Frankl's meaning-making. The summary of these themes is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Comparative Themes

Theme	<i>The Father</i>	<i>A Man Called Otto</i>
Identity	Fragmented by dementia	Reconstructed through relationship
Mortality	Experienced as gradual disintegration of self	Transformed from despair to acceptance
Isolation	Emotional and cognitive	Social and emotional
Meaning	Found in memory and care	Rediscovered through community and compassion

Identity

The Father (2020) shows Anthony's world falling apart because of dementia. The film uses broken scenes, repeating moments, and changing characters to show how his mind becomes confused. Aging in this film is shown through the slow loss of Anthony's identity. The story moves in a non-linear way, with shifting times and

unclear spaces, making viewers feel Anthony's struggle to understand who he is.

His confusion as shown when faces, places, and events keep changing, represents the pain of losing a clear sense of self. When Anthony cannot tell the difference between past and present, it shows how his personal identity breaks down. His apartment which often changes in design and mood, becomes a symbol of his fragmented mind and the collapse of his familiar world.

This confusion also shows the loss of masculine control. Anthony's inability to manage time or space weakens the traditional image of male authority. According to Dolan (2017) old male characters in modern cinema often lose their power and stability, showing how masculinity becomes fragile in old age. In Sartre's (2007) idea, people are free to define themselves, but Anthony's freedom is destroyed by his illness. His identity collapses under the weight of confusion and dependence.

“Where's my watch? Someone's stolen it.”

Anthony keeps accusing his daughter Anne or his caregiver of stealing his watch. He hides it himself and forgets. The watch represents his control over time and reality. Losing it feels like losing himself. As his dementia gets worse, Anthony tries to hold onto familiar things to feel safe in a world that no longer makes sense. The watch becomes a symbol of his fragile identity. Its loss causes panic. This reflects Sartre's (2007) idea that identity is built through continuous self-awareness. Something dementia takes away.

“Who are you? What's going on?”

Anthony sees different people playing his daughter, her husband, and the caregivers. Faces change and time becomes unclear. He cannot trust what he sees. This shows how his self completely collapses. His inability to recognize loved ones is an existential crisis. He loses his essence and stability. The changing people and spaces show a man who is no longer sure who he is.

In contrast, *A Man Called Otto* (2022) presents identity not as a loss, but as a change. Otto begins as a man who follows strict routines to protect himself from pain after his wife's death. His identity becomes stuck in sadness and isolation. He refuses to live freely and holds onto habits that no longer give meaning. But through his connection with others including a stray cat, a transgender boy named Malcolm,

and especially Marisol and her family, Otto starts to rebuild his identity through relationships. This reflects Frankl's (2006) idea of self-transcendence, where meaning is found by caring for others. Otto shows that in old age, identity can grow again through connection, not disappear through loneliness.

At first, Otto looks like a typical strong, silent man who hides his emotions. His talk at Sonya's grave reveals his deep loneliness:

“You left me. You were the only one who saw me.”

Here, Otto admits that his wife gave him purpose and identity. Without her, he feels invisible. Frankl (2006) says that meaning often comes from relationships, and Otto's grief shows how much his self depends on love and connection.

“You're just like me. No one wants you either.”

When Otto finds a stray cat and lets it stay, he begins to see himself in it. Abandoned and unwanted. This is the first moment he reconnects with life. The cat symbolizes shared vulnerability and new hope.

“You think people are supposed to help each other? That's not how the world works.”

Otto says this to Marisol, who keeps helping him even when he pushes her away. His words show his loss of hope and belief in people. But as the story goes on, Otto learns that kindness and community bring back meaning. As Dolan (2017) points out, aging men in film often move from isolation toward emotional openness. Otto's change from a closed man to a caring one shows how identity can be rebuilt through empathy and connection.

Mortality

Both *The Father* and *A Man Called Otto* show mortality as the deepest form of human confrontation with suffering. Death in these films is not just an event but a slow awareness of the limits of life and love. Through their aging protagonists, both stories show that facing death can either destroy meaning or give life a new sense of purpose.

In *The Father* (2020), death is seen through Anthony's growing loss of self. His dementia makes him experience small deaths every day i.e. the death of memory, of reason, of love. When he converses to Laura it is clear that Anthony's has forgotten that his daughter, Lucy, passed away.

Anthony: It's amazing how like Lucy you look, my other daughter. Not
Anne. No. The other one. The one I love.

Laura : Anne told me what happened to her. I'm sorry. I didn't know.

Anthony: Didn't know what?

Laura : About the accident.

Anthony: What accident?

Laura : What?

Anthony: What are you talking about?

Laura : Nothing.

Anthony speaks as if Lucy were still alive, showing his denial of her death. The absence of Lucy becomes one of his confusion. Sartre (2007) says that people are condemned to be free, but Anthony's illness traps him in his own facticity. He cannot use freedom to create meaning.

Later, at the end of the movie when he breaks down and feels very defastated:

"I feel as if... I feel as if I'm losing all my leaves, one after another."

"The branches! And the wind... I don't understand what's happening any more. Do you understand what's happening? All this business about the flat? You don't know where you can put your head down. I know where my watch is. On my wrist. That I do know. For the journey. If not, I wouldn't know when I might have to..."

Anthony faces the final breakdown of his being. The image of losing leaves shows that life is fading away, both physically and spiritually. According to Frankl (2006), meaning can still exist in unavoidable suffering, but Anthony's dementia makes it impossible to choose a meaningful attitude. Death becomes a slow disconnection from reality.

In *A Man Called Otto*, mortality is something Otto looks for rather than fears. His repeated suicide attempts and his words:

"It's time to join you, Sonya"

This words shows that Otto sees death as reunion and escape. His choice reflects Sartre's idea of anguish which is the pain of realizing one's freedom to choose even death (2007). Frankl (2006) would describe this as a loss of the will to meaning. Otto believes that life without Sonya has no purpose. However, when he visits her grave and says that he wants to be buried next to hers, death becomes a way to stay connected rather than to disappear. It turns from destruction into devotion. By caring for others before his own death, Otto transforms his relationship with mortality. He dies peacefully, not from despair but from completion.

Isolation

Isolation in both films grows from the pain of losing connection with others. It is a lonely space where meaning disappears. Sartre (2007) explains that people understand themselves through others. However, when this link breaks, existence feels empty. Frankl (2006) calls this emptiness the existential vacuum. Both Anthony and Otto experience isolation, but they respond in different ways.

In *The Father*, Anthony's paranoia and confusion isolate him even when he is surrounded by people. When he accuses his caregiver stealing his watch, he expresses fear and mistrust. The watch which he hides and forgets, becomes a symbol of lost control and lost time. Furthermore, his anger toward others creates distance between him and the world. The same feeling appears when Anne's husband says to him:

"How long do you intend to stay in our flat and annoy everyone?"

This line shows how Anthony's illness turns relationships into conflict. He becomes a stranger in his own home. Sartre's idea of the other helps explain this isolation (2007). Anthony's world collapses because the people who used to confirm his identity now confuse or reject him. Frankl (2006) would say that Anthony has lost his ability to connect through love and trust, leaving him trapped inside himself.

In *A Man Called Otto*, isolation is chosen rather than forced. After Sonya's death, Otto closes himself off from the world. His life is quiet and routine, but it is also empty. The change begins with small acts of care. He agrees to look after a stray cat, he begins to open his heart again. Later, when Malcolm, the transgender teen who knew Sonya, tells him:

Otto is reminded of his wife’s kindness. He lets Malcolm stay in his house after being rejected by his family. These moments show the rebirth of connection. Sartre (2007) would call Otto’s decision authentic because he freely chooses to engage with others again. Frankl (2006) would see it as the return of both *experiential* and *creative values*. This means finding meaning through love and action.

Meaning

Both *The Father* and *A Man Called Otto* end by exploring the search for meaning. This is how people face suffering and still try to find purpose. Sartre (2007) believes that meaning does not exist before one acts, but it is created by one’s own choices. Frankl (2006) adds that meaning can be discovered even in pain through love, work, and the attitude one takes toward life. In both films, meaning is not a grand idea but something built slowly through relationships and small moments of kindness.

In *The Father*, meaning is not only found by Anthony, but also by his daughter Anne. When Anthony looks at her with rare clarity and says:

“You’re a good girl... aren’t you?”

A moment of meaning appears inside the confusion. Although temporary, this recognition shows that human connection can still shine even through the fog of dementia. When Anthony forgets who she is, Anne continues to care for him with tenderness. When she tells him:

“It’s all right, Dad. You’ll be fine”

She chooses love despite the emotional cost. This reflects Frankl’s idea of *that* the freedom to give meaning to suffering is by taking a loving stance toward it. Sartre would call Anne’s action *authentic*. This is because she defines herself not by despair but by compassion. Meaning in *The Father* is fragile but real. It lives in acts of care rather than in understanding.

In *A Man Called Otto*, meaning grows through love, memory, and service. In a flashback, young Otto tells Sonya:

“I’ve never known a life like this”

This line captures the joy and purpose he once had. But after her death, that meaning collapses. When Otto later admits,

*“I don’t want to clear Sonya from my life.
There was nothing before her, and there’s nothing after!”*

His words show despair and attachment, but they also express deep love. For Sartre (2007), this is the turning point where Otto begins to accept his freedom again that is an ability to create new essence through action. He saves a man on the train tracks, offers kindness to Malcolm, and helps Marisol and her family. These actions represent Frankl’s *idea of finding purpose through deeds that help others* (2006). In the end, Otto’s meaning is not in avoiding death but in the love he leaves behind.

Both films show that meaning is possible even in suffering. For Anthony, meaning appears briefly through Anne’s devotion. For Otto, it grows through renewed connection and care. Sartre reminds us that people become who they are through their choices, while Frankl teaches that those choices can still be filled with love, even in pain.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the existential dimensions of aging as depicted in *The Father* (2020) and *A Man Called Otto* (2022) through a comparative interpretative framework that synthesizes Sartre’s existentialism and Frankl’s logotherapy. Unlike previous studies that tend to examine aging either from psychological, social, or single theoretical perspectives, this study proposes a comparative existential reading that places despair and meaning making in direct dialogue across two contrasting cinematic representation of later life. Through a qualitative and comparative approach, both films were analyzed as reflections on identity, mortality, isolation, and meaning which are central existential issues shaping human experience in old age. The findings suggest that aging in film is not only represented as biological decline or social marginalization, but also as a philosophical confrontation with the instability of selfhood, freedom, suffering, and the search for meaning.

In *The Father* (2020), its fragmented narrative and visual style expresses Sartre’s idea of existential instability and the collapse of being-for-itself. Anthony’s confusion shows the gradual loss of autonomy and the fragility of freedom when consciousness becomes uncertain. The film presents the darker side of human

existence including alienation, despair, and the erosion of meaning. On the other hand, *A Man Called Otto* offers a hopeful counterpart. Otto's change from bitterness to compassion illustrates Frankl's view that meaning can be found again through self-transcendence. Otto's final acts of kindness show that even in decline, an individual can still choose to affirm life through love, care, and purpose.

Together, both films create a strong contrast that captures both the tragedy and possibility of aging. While *The Father* faces the inevitable loss of control that comes with old age, *A Man Called Otto* suggests that meaning can still emerge from that loss. This comparison helps our understanding that aging is not simply as decline but also as a meaningful passage through which an individual confront questions of identity, mortality, and renewal.

Theoretically, this study adds to existential film analysis and aging studies by extending existing scholarships in two significant ways. First, it develops a comparative existential framework that integrates Sartre's existential anxiety with Frankl's meaning centered in transcendence. This demonstrates that cinematic representations of aging can simultaneously embody despair, disorientation, resilience, and renewal. The synthesis challenges the tendency in aging studies to portray old age primarily through narrative of decline or social dependency by emphasizing aging as an active existential process of negotiating meaning and identity. Second, the study expands existential film analysis by showing how cinematic techniques such as fragmented narration, visual disorientation, emotional symbolism, and interpersonal interaction function not only as aesthetic devices, but also as philosophical expressions of existential conditions. In this way, the study positions film as a medium capable of translating abstract concepts into embodied emotional experiences. Hence, this study enriches interdisciplinary discussions between philosophy, film studies, and aging studies.

Practically, the study highlights the value of cinema as a mirror for personal and social reflection. Films like *The Father (2020)* and *A Man Called Otto (2022)* encourage viewers to think about their own relationship with aging, loss, and purpose, and to develop empathy for the elderly experience. As modern societies continue to face aging populations, these films remind us that the later years of life, though marked by loss, still offer space for meaning, connection, and human growth.

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