Louis Savinien Dupuis Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 2025: V(4) 111–112
DOI: 10.21839/lsdjmr.2025.v4.261

Research Article

ACTS OF KINDNESS IN THE SHADOW OF LONELINESS: A CHARACTER STUDY OF OVE IN FREDRIK BACKMAN'S *A MAN CALLED OVE*

UMAIZA J
Department of english immaculate college for women, cuddalore
(Received: 09-04-2025; Accepted 08-06-2025; Published Online 03-11-2025)

Abstract

This study explores the theme of kindness emerging from loneliness in Fredrik Backman's novel *A Man Called Ove*. It highlights how literature reflects human emotions, relationships, and social values. The novel presents the life of Ove, a lonely and strict widower whose life changes through interactions with his neighbors. His character represents the idea of "Sonata of Sternness," where outward rigidity hides deep emotional sensitivity and love.

The study focuses on themes such as grief, aging, isolation, and human connection. Ove's journey shows how personal loss leads to loneliness, but small acts of kindness and community support help in emotional healing. The narrative also emphasizes the importance of empathy, relationships, and belonging in overcoming life's challenges.

Overall, the novel conveys that even in loneliness and grief, there is always hope for transformation and new beginnings through human connection and compassion.

Keywords: *Loneliness, Kindness, Grief, Human Connection, Aging, Community, Empathy, Transformation, Isolation, Relationships*

Introduction

INTRODUCTION:

Literature, derived from the Latin word litera meaning "letter," refers to written or spoken works that express human thoughts, emotions, and experiences. It reflects culture, values, and social realities, acting as a mirror of life. Through literature, readers understand human behavior, moral dilemmas, and universal truths. Swedish literature includes works written in Sweden and has evolved from early religious texts to modern novels. It gained recognition through authors like August Strindberg and Selma Lagerlöf. Modern Swedish writing often explores themes like society, relationships, and human emotions.

Fredrick Backman is a contemporary writer known for emotional and character-driven stories. He is a Swedish author, blogger, and columnist known for his simple yet powerful storytelling style. His works often focus on ordinary people and explore deep human emotions with a blend of humor and sensitivity. He gained international recognition through his novels, which have been translated into many languages and adapted into films. His novel *A Man Called Ove* presents the life of a lonely old man whose routine life changes when new neighbors enter his world. The novel focuses on themes such as loneliness, grief, love, and human connection. Ove, a strict and isolated man, slowly transforms through relationships and experiences. Backman uses humor and emotion to show how people deal with loss and find meaning in life.

SONATA OF STERNNESS:

"Sonata of Sternness" is not just a description of Ove's personality, but a symbolic representation of his inner life. Like a musical sonata, his character is composed of contrasting movements - strictness on the surface and tenderness underneath. His stern behavior acts as a protective rhythm, keeping his emotions controlled and hidden from the outside world. Ove's silence and discipline are not signs of emptiness but expressions of suppressed grief and unspoken love. After the loss of his wife, Sonja, his life loses its emotional harmony. What remains is a mechanical routine, where rules replace relationships and order replaces affection. His attachment to structure reflects his struggle to hold onto stability in a life that feels broken.

Unlike typical portrayals of loneliness, Ove's isolation is active rather than passive. He distances himself from society not because he lacks feelings, but because he feels too deeply. His sternness becomes a language through which he communicates pain, disappointment, and resistance to change. In this way, his character challenges the idea that kindness must always appear gentle - sometimes it exists in quiet, unnoticed actions.

Ove's character is also shaped by strong moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and discipline. He believes in doing things the right way, which often makes him appear rigid in a modern world that seems

careless and indifferent. This creates a conflict between his traditional values and the changing society around him, adding depth to his stern nature. The novel also reflects on aging and how people understand their lives through experience. As Ernest Hemingway says, “The wisdom of old men is not wisdom. They grow careful,” (Hemingway) which reflects how aging brings caution and emotional withdrawal, as seen in Ove’s character.

The turning points in Ove’s life clearly reflect the theme “Acts of Kindness in the Shadow of Loneliness.” The arrival of Parvaneh and her family is the first major shift. Their repeated interactions break his isolation and gradually draw him into a sense of community. Though he appears irritated, he begins to help them, revealing kindness through actions rather than words.

Another significant turning point occurs when Ove saves a man at the railway station. Despite his own loneliness and grief, he instinctively acts with courage and compassion. This moment shows that his inner goodness remains strong even when he feels disconnected from life. The relationship with the stray cat becomes another meaningful symbol of transformation. Initially resistant, Ove slowly accepts the cat and begins to care for it. This silent companionship reflects his emotional healing and his growing ability to connect again.

Ove’s continued involvement in helping his neighbors - repairing things, offering support, and protecting them - marks further development in his character. These acts of kindness are not dramatic but simple and consistent, showing that true compassion often exists in everyday actions. Through these moments, his loneliness gradually gives way to a sense of purpose and belonging. Importantly, Ove’s transformation is subtle and realistic. He does not completely change his personality; instead, his sternness is softened by empathy and human connection. This shows that growth does not mean losing one’s identity but expanding it.

Backman also uses humor to balance the seriousness of grief and loneliness. Ove’s strict routines, blunt remarks, and arguments create light moments that make his character relatable. At the same time, these moments reveal deeper emotional truths about human nature.

Ultimately, “Sonata of Sternness” presents Ove as a complex and layered character. His life demonstrates that behind rigidity can exist deep compassion, and within loneliness there can still be kindness. His journey reflects how human connection can gradually heal emotional wounds and bring meaning back into life, As William Shakespeare describes old age as “sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything,” (Shakespeare) it highlights the physical and emotional challenges of aging, which are reflected in Ove’s life, perfectly aligning with the central idea of the study.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the novel highlights the power of human connection and shows that even in grief and loneliness, there is always hope for healing and new beginnings.

A Man Called Ove presents a powerful story of aging, resilience, and human connection. Ove’s journey from loneliness to belonging highlights the importance of relationships. Though he continues to miss his wife, he finds new purpose through his neighbors.

The novel emphasizes that older people need care, respect, and emotional support. It also challenges the idea that aging is only a period of decline, showing it can be a time of growth and understanding.

Through Ove’s life, the novel teaches that kindness, empathy, and community are essential for happiness. It reminds readers that behind every strict or silent person, there is a story of love and struggle.

WORKS CITED

Primary Source

Backman, Fredrik. A Man Called Ove. Atria Books, 2012.

Secondary Sources

Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*

Shakespeare, William. *Seven Ages of Man*

Web Sources

Britannica – Swedish Literature

LitCharts – A Man Called Ove Summary