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## **ROUND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT OF ELIO IN *ELIO* (2025): A STUDY BASED ON FORSTER AND MASLOW**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Literary works serve as a medium for expressing human thoughts, emotions, and experiences, and films are one of the most dynamic forms of such expression. The film *Elio* (2025) portrays the psychological and emotional journey of its main character, Elio, whose development reflects the process of achieving self-actualization. This study aims to analyze Elio's character development as a round character through E.M. Forster's theory of characterization and to explore his psychological transformation using Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Employing a descriptive qualitative method with a psycho-literary approach, the study examines the film's scenes, dialogues, and visual cues that depict Elio's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. These elements are interpreted to describe his psychological growth and the fulfillment of human needs, from safety and belongingness to self-awareness and self-actualization. By integrating literary analysis and psychological theory, the study demonstrates how narrative events and character development illustrate the stages of Maslow's hierarchy. The findings show that Elio's transformation embodies the characteristics of a round character and aligns with progressive stages of psychological development, highlighting how film narratives can reflect human emotional complexity and the pursuit of self-discovery. This research emphasizes the importance of psycho-literary analysis in understanding how storytelling conveys human experiences and supports the comprehension of personal and psychological growth.

**Keywords:** *character development; round character; self-actualization; hierarchy of needs*

### **ABSTRAK**

Karya sastra berfungsi sebagai medium untuk mengekspresikan pikiran, emosi, dan pengalaman manusia, dan film merupakan salah satu bentuk ekspresi yang paling dinamis. Film *Elio* (2025) menggambarkan perjalanan psikologis dan emosional tokoh utamanya, Elio, yang perkembangannya mencerminkan proses menuju aktualisasi diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis perkembangan karakter Elio sebagai tokoh bulat melalui teori karakterisasi E. M. Forster serta mengeksplorasi transformasi psikologisnya menggunakan teori hierarki kebutuhan Abraham Maslow. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dan pendekatan psikoliterer, penelitian ini mengkaji adegan, dialog, dan elemen visual dalam film yang menampilkan pikiran, emosi, dan perilaku Elio. Unsur-unsur tersebut diinterpretasikan untuk menggambarkan pertumbuhan psikologis serta pemenuhan kebutuhan manusia, mulai dari kebutuhan akan keamanan dan rasa memiliki hingga kesadaran diri dan aktualisasi diri. Melalui penggabungan analisis sastra dan teori psikologi, penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana alur naratif dan perkembangan tokoh merefleksikan tahapan hierarki kebutuhan Maslow. Temuan penelitian memperlihatkan bahwa transformasi Elio menggambarkan ciri-ciri tokoh bulat dan selaras dengan tahapan perkembangan psikologis yang progresif, sehingga menegaskan bahwa narasi film dapat merefleksikan kompleksitas emosional manusia dan pencarian jati diri. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya analisis psikoliterer dalam memahami bagaimana cerita menyampaikan pengalaman manusia serta mendukung pemahaman mengenai pertumbuhan pribadi dan psikologis.

**kata kunci:** *perkembangan karakter; karakter bulat; aktualisasi diri; hierarki kebutuhan*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Literary works serve as a medium for humans to express thoughts, emotions, and experiences in various forms, one of which is film (Putri et al., 2023). This corresponds to Siska's (2021) view that literature serves as a medium for conveying narratives, events, and emotional experiences. It is also consistent with Kuo & Chung's (2019) argument that literature stems from the human need to share stories and express lived experiences. They add that literature reflects real aspects of life and helps readers understand them by portraying reality in meaningful ways. For example, the film *Elio* (2025) provides a layered representation of human experiences, offering abundant material for literary analysis. Understanding film as a narrative medium is therefore essential before exploring how character development is constructed within it. Films not only convey stories but also reveal the complexities of characters, making the study of character development crucial for interpreting the narrative. This film is particularly relevant because it addresses universal themes of identity, belonging, and emotional struggle that resonate with contemporary audiences, and also this film is unique because it offers a distinct portrayal of emotional complexity and human vulnerability that is rarely explored to such depth in current animated films.

Character development is a central element in narrative studies because it reflects how a character's behavior, thought patterns, motivations, and emotions change over the course of a story (Wanggay & Sugihartono, 2023). This process drives the narrative forward and adds depth to the character, making them more authentic, relatable, and engaging. In films, character development is achieved through the combination of dialogue, visual expressions, symbolic imagery, and the sequence of events that guide the character's journey (Skowron et al., 2017). By carefully coordinating these elements, filmmakers can create multidimensional characters whose growth resonates with audiences both emotionally and intellectually.

According to E.M. Forster (1927,2005), a round character is one that develops throughout the course of the story (Marcus, 2021). Unlike flat characters, which tend to remain unchanged and are defined by a single trait, round characters exhibit a range of emotions, moral considerations, and intellectual depth. In film, this complexity is expressed not only through dialogue but also through visual storytelling, camera work, and the depiction of internal conflict, enabling viewers to observe gradual changes in thought, feeling, and behavior (Yilmaz et al., 1991). In the film *Elio* (2025), the protagonist demonstrates these characteristics as he develops emotionally, morally, and intellectually, providing rich material for literary analysis.

Although the research is centered on literary interpretation, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is incorporated as an additional theoretical lens to better frame *Elio*'s developmental path toward self-actualization (Ahdiani & Maulana, 2023). Maslow's theory supports understanding the character's psychological growth without overshadowing the literary perspective. The use of a psycho-literary perspective is affirmed by (Bunga et al., 2022), who highlights that literature and

psychology are connected disciplines since each investigates human conduct and psychological experiences. As a result, psychological concepts can assist in interpreting the mental traits of characters without diminishing the focus of literary analysis. This approach allows the study to consider both the narrative development of the character and the underlying motivations that influence their actions, offering a more complete interpretation of their journey.

The study seeks to investigate Elio's evolution as a round character through E.M. Forster's theoretical perspective, as well as to assess how the character's shifting traits align with the self-actualization stages proposed in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. By employing a psycho-literary approach, this research seeks to integrate two fields of study namely literature and psychology, in order to understand how a film can reflect the inner journey of an individual in the process of self-discovery.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

One of the crucial aspects in literary studies, particularly in film, is character analysis, as it allows us to understand the complexity of the plot, emotions, and motivations of a character (Muharsyah et al., 2025). A character in a film does not only function as a driver of the storyline but can also represent real-life issues, psychological conditions, and human morality (Stolk et al., 2025). Audiences tend to be more engaged with modern films that feature characters who develop throughout the narrative. Therefore, studying character development not only enriches our understanding of the plot structure and themes but also allows us to evaluate the extent to which a film presents a narrative that resonates with the everyday experiences of its audience. By employing E. M. Forster's ideas on character, particularly his concept of the round character who demonstrates depth, complexity, and the capacity to change, along with Maslow's model of human needs, this discussion aims to clarify how these needs appear in film characters. This can be seen through their struggles to meet physiological and safety needs, their search for belonging, their pursuit of esteem, and their movement toward self-actualization. Through these expressions of need and their evolving responses to challenges, film characters reveal complex psychological patterns and behaviors that mirror real human experiences.

E.M. Forster stated that characters in a story are one of the fundamental elements because they can represent human life through thoughts and actions within the medium of a novel or film. Forster divides characters into two main types: flat characters and round characters (Marcus, 2021). This classification aims to examine the extent to which the character's problems and actions influence their decisions throughout the storyline. Through the distinction between flat and round characters, researchers can more easily analyze character development, as each type of character carries a different role and narrative function in building the authenticity of a story.

A flat character is depicted as having a simple nature and does not experience any significant character development throughout the story (Yang, 2023). This type of character is usually constructed with one dominant and constant trait or personality. Forster believed that the purpose of a flat character is to maintain narrative stability and structure while highlighting the

main character to make them appear more vivid. In the context of film, flat characters often serve to maintain thematic boundaries and provide contrast to the main character.

Meanwhile, a round character is one that exhibits a more realistic and complex nature, capable of undergoing character development throughout the course of the story. Forster states that a round character can surprise the audience with actions that are beyond their expectations, yet remain psychologically plausible (Marcus, 2021). A round character also demonstrates internal conflicts, emotions, and shifting motivations. Therefore, the analysis of round characters is often used as a basis for evaluating the depth of narrative and psychological quality in literary works, including films.

A round character is defined by their complexity of personality, which manifests through layers of traits that often conflict and interact with one another. Characters in fictional works are not real people, and they function beyond being mere representations of people to embody and further the plot and themes of a narrative (Fischer et al., 2020). Which makes the exploration of their internal conflicts and moral dilemmas meaningful to the story. This complexity allows writers or filmmakers to explore internal conflicts, personal values, and moral dilemmas faced by the character. Consequently, a character's actions and decisions are not determined by a single dominant trait but rather result from the interplay of multiple psychological aspects. Therefore, the complexity of personality provides psychological depth that makes characters feel authentic and emotionally relevant to the audience.

One of the defining features of a round character is their capacity for change or development throughout the story. Such development can manifest as moral growth, increased self-awareness, shifts in motivation influenced by the character's experiences or from egoism to altruism (Kleemans et al., 2025). Another key trait of a round character is the ability to produce convincing surprises through actions that are unexpected yet remain psychologically consistent. These surprises arise from the character's choices or reactions that remain consistent with their prior experiences, values, and emotions, and this capacity of narrative imagination may explain why audiences are naturally drawn to and find enjoyment in complex stories that contain such unexpected yet coherent developments (Bouizegarene et al., 2024). This mechanism adds dramatic dimension and tension to the narrative while enhancing audience engagement, as viewers or readers feel surprised yet understand the logic behind the character's behavior. Hence, convincing surprises are a crucial tool for maintaining narrative credibility while deepening emotional involvement.

Finally, a hallmark of a well-developed round character is their psychological consistency, which persists even as the character undergoes transformation and delivers surprises. This consistency is reflected in their motives, emotional responses, and thought patterns, ensuring that the character remains authentic (Poel & Hermans, 2019). Without a balance between development and psychological coherence, a character can feel artificial and undermine narrative credibility. Therefore, the integration of character transformation with psychological integrity is a critical aspect in assessing the depth of characters in both literature and film.

Meanwhile, **Abraham Maslow (1943)** proposed the Hierarchy of Needs theory, which serves as a framework for understanding human motivation. Maslow's theory explains that every individual possesses five levels of needs arranged hierarchically: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Omodan & Abejide, 2022). Maslow also argued that individuals cannot progress to higher levels unless their basic needs are fulfilled. Therefore, the Hierarchy of Needs theory represents a gradual process in the journey of motivation and personal development.

Maslow identifies physiological needs as the initial and most vital tier of his hierarchy, emphasizing that they sustain human life and enable higher-level motivations to emerge. These needs involve fundamental resources such as nourishment, hydration, oxygen, adequate sleep, and proper housing (Omodan & Abejide, 2022). In the context of literature, characters often struggle to fulfill these fundamental requirements, as they represent the primary condition for sustaining life. When these needs are unmet or threatened, conflicts and actions within the narrative may emerge, emphasizing the instinctive drive for survival. As noted by Hamzanwadi, (2020) in their work, when physiological and safety needs are not fulfilled, behaviors such as academic procrastination may emerge as a consequence of motivational imbalance. Fulfilling physiological needs is vital for physical health and psychological well-being, as deprivation can cause problems that disrupt functioning. Accordingly, the literature identifies two main perspectives on human satisfaction. One view holds that basic needs must be met for well-being, often shown through characters' efforts to secure them. Another suggests that fulfilling only certain needs can be enough, since prioritizing desires like wealth does not guarantee happiness and may lead to dissatisfaction. (Bakar & Osman, 2022).

The second stage of Maslow's hierarchy is safety and security needs, which encompass an individual's desire for stability, protection, and freedom from harm. These needs are essential because they provide a sense of assurance and safety that allows individuals to function effectively in their personal and professional environments (Omodan & Abejide, 2022). Without safety, individuals may experience ongoing anxiety that limits focus and goal achievement. After basic needs are met, motivation shifts toward securing stability through employment, health, and protection of one's environment and belongings. In an educational context, Zachari & Murdianto (2024) found that safety needs represent an important level in Maslow's hierarchy that first-year university students continue to consider when choosing and maintaining their study motivation. This sense of security enables individuals to move beyond mere survival and progress toward complex psychological needs, as outlined in Maslow's hierarchy.

Maslow's third tier, love and belonging, refers to the human urge for intimacy and social attachment. These needs are met through connections with family, friends, and other forms of relational engagement (Supardi & Khoirunnisa, 2024). These bonds foster feelings of being accepted and valued, elements that play a crucial role in supporting emotional well-being and mental stability. Allen et al., (2021) indicates that a strong sense of belonging is a key predictor of emotional well-being and stability, as social acceptance and close relationships reduce anxiety and

enhance resilience. Characters who face isolation often struggle internally, while those who achieve belonging show greater psychological growth and emotional strength.

At the fourth level of Maslow's hierarchy are esteem needs, describing an individual's desire for self-respect as well as validation from their surroundings. These involve feelings of capability, respect, and success, typically satisfied through personal achievements, societal position, or admiration (Omodan & Abejide, 2022). Maslow (1943) further categorizes esteem into two types: self-esteem, which stems from personal evaluation of one's abilities and includes the desire for mastery, strength, and confidence in overcoming challenges; and esteem from others, which is derived from external acknowledgment such as respect, attention, and appreciation (Ahdiani & Maulana, 2023). Both forms of esteem are essential for identity and psychological well-being. When fulfilled, they promote confidence and satisfaction, while unmet esteem needs can cause inferiority and hinder self-actualization. Empirical studies also support Maslow's view that esteem is a core element of human motivation. Montag et al., (2020) for example, report that the fulfillment of esteem needs is strongly associated with personality traits such as openness and extraversion, suggesting that confidence and self-worth emerge from the interplay between psychological needs and individual personality characteristics.

Maslow's final stage, self-actualization, denotes the achievement of one's highest potential. Once the preceding needs are fulfilled, individuals can direct their energy toward self-growth, creative endeavors, and the pursuit of meaningful goals (Omodan & Abejide, 2022). Individuals who reach self-actualization tend to live purposefully and productively, demonstrating happiness, self-fulfillment, and a strong sense of contribution to something greater than themselves. In literary contexts, self-actualization is often portrayed through a character's transformative journey toward self-discovery and enlightenment.

Compare viewpoints shows that previous research conducted by (Omodan & Abejide, 2022) used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to examine human needs in a social context, while our research uses it to analyze the psychological needs of the character. Meanwhile, the research conducted by Marcus used E. M. Forster's theory by discussing it through a cultural context, while our research uses it as a tool to analyze the character development that we have selected in the film. Based on these comparative viewpoints, the identified gaps emerge, in which previous studies have never combined Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs with E. M. Forster's Round Character theory to analyze a character in a literary work. The relevance between this research and the two previous studies (Omodan & Abejide, 2022) & (Marcus, 2021) is that Omodan & Abejide's (2022) research helps us understand the character's motivations, while the research conducted by (Marcus, 2021) provides the foundation of character formation according to Forster. Both studies strongly support our research in integrating the two theories to explain the relationship between psychological needs and character development in a literary work.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method, as the researcher aims to analyze the character development of Elio in Elio (2025) in depth. According to Fitriyah (2024), qualitative

research focuses not on numerical representation or statistical analysis, but on gaining a profound and comprehensive understanding of the interactions, meanings, and relationships between the concepts being examined within their empirical context. This method allows the researcher to interpret the meaning behind the main character's actions based on literary and psychological theories. The data consist of dialogues, scenes, and narrative elements that clearly illustrate Elio's development throughout the film. The data were extracted through repeated viewing of the film and noting representative scenes and dialogues related to Elio's behavior and psychological changes, then classified based on Maslow's needs and Forster's round character indicators. The analysis applies the theories sequentially, beginning with Forster's round character concept to identify Elio's depth, complexity, and capacity to change, followed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs to explain the psychological motivations behind these developments. Character transformation at each stage is determined through observable shifts in emotion, behavior, decision-making, and self-awareness. Therefore, the descriptive qualitative method is highly suitable for this study, as it enables an in-depth examination of the psychological depth and narrative dynamics shaping Elio's character in the film.

The analytical aspect of Elio's character development focuses on three main dimensions: his personality transformation, emotional maturation, and behavioral evolution throughout the narrative. This study applies narrative analysis to examine how these changes unfold across the film's sequence of events, allowing the researcher to interpret character development as a product of the story's structure and progression (Sevilla-liu, 2023). The researcher examines how Elio's thoughts, emotions, and decisions shift as he faces different experiences and conflicts. The study also considers external influences such as relationships, personal challenges, and key events that shape his motivation and self-awareness. His development is traced through interactions and responses that show gradual change, revealing a progression from uncertainty to self-awareness and fulfillment, which reflects his overall character development.

## **FINDING**

### **A. E.M Forster's Theory (Flat vs. Round Character)**

#### ***Personality Complexity***

The analysis shows that Elio experiences clear character development, which can be observed through changes in his emotional reactions, behaviors, and interactions with other characters. In the beach scene (00:08:19), when Brayce approaches him, Elio introduces himself by saying, "A... a... I'm Elio Solis," while showing visible nervousness, such as avoiding eye contact, speaking hesitantly, and maintaining a hunched posture. These gestures indicate his discomfort and insecurity when forming new social connections. In contrast, the later scene (00:12:50) presents a significant shift in his demeanor. Elio introduces himself to the aliens with greater confidence and describes himself as creative, hardworking, and excited to join them. The

comparison between these scenes demonstrates Elio's progression from being cautious and withdrawn to becoming more expressive and self-assured.

### ***Potential for Development***

The film presents several scenes that illustrate Elio's emotional reactions and behavioral changes over time. In the scene at minute 00:14:16, when Aunt Olga informs him of her plan to send him to boarding school, Elio reacts with visible frustration and defensiveness. He insists that she is trying to get rid of him, claims that he does not care about friends, and expresses his belief that he needs to meet aliens instead. He further argues that among the millions of habitable planets there must be one that wants him, because he feels that his own family does not. This moment shows his impulsive emotional outburst and his sense of misunderstanding and isolation. A contrasting moment appears at minute 00:54:55, when Elio observes his clone interacting happily with Aunt Olga. Her warmth and affection toward the clone evoke a reflective and bittersweet response in the real Elio. This scene marks a noticeable shift from his earlier resentment toward a more contemplative emotional state, suggesting the beginning of a change in the way he perceives Aunt Olga and their relationship.

### ***Convincing Surprise***

The scene at minute 00:52:21 presents a significant moment in Elio's emotional journey. In this scene, he reflects on the possibility that the only people who ever wanted him are gone and questions whether there is anything about himself worth wanting. He also considers the idea that Earth may not have been the problem and that the issue might lie within himself. His thoughts appear tentative and introspective, revealing a moment of vulnerability. This internal reflection differs from his earlier externalized frustrations and shows a shift in the focus of his conflict. The scene provides clear evidence of his growing ability to confront his own feelings and uncertainties, marking a notable change from his earlier reactions throughout the film.

### ***Psychological Consistency***

The film portrays Elio's consistent desire for familial connection throughout the narrative. Earlier scenes show that he retreats or withdraws when confronted with reminders of other people's family bonds, indicating his ongoing longing for emotional closeness. His later decision to remain on Earth further reflects this recurring pattern, as it demonstrates his continued need for meaningful relationships rather than a pursuit of purely abstract or distant ambitions. This choice signals a steady thread in his emotional life, suggesting that despite his various experiences and moments of self-reflection, his core longing for connection remains intact and continues to influence his actions.

## **B. Abraham Maslow's Theory (Hierarchy of Needs)**

### ***Physiological Needs***

The scenes from 00:16:54 to 00:21:42 show that Elio is sent to a camp school by his aunt, despite his initial refusal. After arriving, he experiences bullying and discrimination from the other students. These interactions interrupt his ability to rest comfortably, as the constant disturbances make him appear tired, distressed, and physically uncomfortable.



The film further shows that Elio eventually escapes from the camp school and runs into the forest. Shortly after, he is taken by aliens. These events illustrate Elio's struggle to remain in an environment where he faces continuous mistreatment and cannot meet his basic needs for rest and safety.

### **Safety Needs**

The film shows that Elio often withdraws from social interactions and reacts nervously when others approach him. In the scene at 00:14:34, he refuses to be sent to camp school and expresses frustration toward his aunt, saying, *"I don't care about friends, I need to meet aliens... one of them gotta want me, because obviously you don't!"* This behavior reveals his fear of rejection, his discomfort in forming relationships, and his tendency to push people away as a form of self-protection. Later, when he acknowledges that *"Earth is home,"* he shows a shift toward reconnecting with his aunt and accepting his circumstances.

### **Love and Belonging**

In the scene at 00:12:50, Elio sends a message to the aliens, introducing himself enthusiastically and ending with the accidental phrase "Love you!", which reveals his emotional vulnerability. This moment shows his hope for connection and acceptance beyond human relationships. Later, at 00:26:27, while traveling through the Communiverse with the aliens, Elio expresses, *"It's like I was always meant to be here. I know you were looking for me."* These scenes depict Elio's longing to feel valued, understood, and emotionally connected, as he experiences a sense of belonging those contrasts with the emotional neglect he feels in his human environment.

### **Esteem Needs**

In the scene from 00:31:25 to 00:31:35, Elio interacts with his clone, who openly questions whether Elio needs to change himself or is simply struggling with low self-esteem and a desire to belong. The dialogue highlights Elio's discomfort, as shown when the clone asks, *"Should I change anything? Or just stick with the low self-esteem and desperation to belong?"* and Elio responds defensively with, *"What? I'm normal, just be normal."* This moment shows Elio's internal conflict and his struggle to confront his own insecurities, which are reflected through the clone's direct and critical questions.

A similar emotional tension appears later at 00:52:21, when Elio expresses feelings of deep vulnerability by saying, *"The only people who wanted me are gone, but I don't know, what if.. what if there's nothing about me to want? I thought Earth was the problem, but what if it's me?"* This statement reveals his fear that he may be inherently unworthy of acceptance. Glordon's response, *"Well, I like you,"* provides a moment of reassurance and emotional support. These scenes collectively show Elio's ongoing struggle with self-worth, his fear of inadequacy, and his longing for recognition and acceptance from others.

### **Self-actualization**

In the scene (01:23:58), Elio speaks to the alien in the Communiverse and admits:

"This place is amazing, but Earth is... home. I didn't give it a chance before, but now, I want to try, with my aunt. We're family."

This moment shows a significant emotional shift in Elio. He acknowledges Earth as his home and expresses a desire to rebuild his relationship with his aunt. The scene illustrates his transition from rejecting his human life to accepting it and seeking reconnection with his remaining family, ultimately allowing him to embrace the meaning of his earthly existence.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **A. E.M Forster's Theory (Flat vs. Round Character)**

The findings suggest that Elio fits Forster's concept of a round character because he displays multidimensional traits and undergoes psychological development throughout the story. His early behaviors, such as nervousness and avoidance of eye contact, reveal an internal conflict connected to his fear of social rejection. This pattern supports the explanation of (Xu et al., 2023), who associate such behaviors with emotional vulnerability in social situations. His increased confidence in the later scene, where he introduces himself to the aliens, reflects a developing sense of identity that aligns with (Branje et al., 2021), who emphasize identity formation as an essential part of adolescent growth. Overall, Elio's transformation highlights his dynamic nature and reinforces the film's thematic focus on self-discovery, emotional sensitivity, and the human need for acceptance and belonging.

Furthermore, the finding about ptential for development reinforce that Elio possesses the qualities of a round character as described by Forster, since he demonstrates complex emotions, shifting perspectives, and the potential for psychological growth. His initial reaction to Aunt Olga's decision shows his difficulty in interpreting supportive intentions and highlights the tendency of adolescents to perceive guidance as rejection. The intensity of his emotions, combined with his fixation on extraterrestrial possibilities, reflects both impulsivity and the inner conflict between personal desires and external expectations. His later response at minute 00:54:55 indicates an emerging ability to reflect on his experiences and recognize the sincerity behind Aunt Olga's actions. This development aligns with the concept of maturing emotional awareness, which involves understanding others' intentions and reassessing earlier judgments. Elio's evolving responses show that his beliefs and emotional patterns are not static but shaped by experience and growing insight. This progression supports his classification as a round character, demonstrating personal growth, increasing empathy, and a more balanced understanding of himself and the people around him.

Related to Convincing surprise the findings demonstrate that Elio fulfills Forster's concept of a round character through his capacity to produce a logical surprise that aligns with his ongoing development. This moment also supports the argument of (Mertens et al., 2022), who explain that self-reflection is a crucial aspect of psychological growth in adolescence. Elio's willingness to consider difficult truths about himself challenges the audience's expectations while still remaining consistent with the trajectory of his character. This internal turning point reveals his emotional depth and highlights the complexity of his psychological landscape. His ability to reassess earlier

beliefs and confront inner uncertainty illustrates the qualities of a layered and evolving character who demonstrates meaningful development throughout the narrative.

The last highlight Elio's psychological consistency, which aligns with Forster's idea that a round character can grow and transform without losing coherence in emotional identity. His persistent desire for familial connection shows that development does not require abandoning foundational emotional needs. Instead, Elio's maturation is reflected in his increasing ability to acknowledge and integrate these needs into his decisions. His choice to stay on Earth illustrates emotional resilience and heightened self-awareness, revealing that he values authentic relationships over idealized aspirations. This continuity of inner desire demonstrates that his growth maintains authenticity, allowing the audience to understand how his core motivations shape his choices. Elio's development exemplifies the nuanced interplay between experience, reflection, and emotional attachment, reinforcing his portrayal as a round character with layered psychological depth.

### **B. Abraham Maslow's Theory (Hierarchy of Needs)**

According to Maslow by (Omodan & Abejide, 2022), physiological needs such as rest, comfort, and physical stability form the foundation of human motivation, and when these needs are unmet, emotional imbalance and distress are likely to occur. Elio's constant bullying at the camp prevents him from fulfilling these basic needs, which contributes to his exhaustion and growing desire to escape. His decision to flee the camp can be understood as a response to this deprivation, as individuals naturally seek environments where their fundamental needs can be restored. This aligns with Maslow's theory that unmet physiological needs strongly influence behavior and emotional responses.

in the narrative can be understood through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly when considering contemporary research that refines the classical model. At the level of love and belonging, Elio's fascination with extraterrestrial beings symbolizes his longing for acceptance and meaningful connection, reflecting the critical role of social inclusion in emotional development (Rahmi, Hizriyani, & Sopiah, 2022). His unintended message, "Love you!", and temporary sense of belonging in the Commiverse exemplify attempts to satisfy relational needs when human interactions fail to provide adequate validation. Similarly, his struggle with self-esteem, expressed through encounters with his clone, underscores the modern understanding that esteem is shaped by both internal self-assessment and supportive social feedback (Azzahra & Asfari, 2024). These findings align with contemporary critiques of Maslow, which highlight that the fulfillment of needs can be non-linear and context-dependent, meaning that Elio's esteem and belonging needs could evolve simultaneously rather than sequentially (Huang, 2024).

Progressing toward self-actualization, Elio begins to confront his emotions and embrace genuine relationships, moving beyond escapism and external validation. His statement that "Earth is home" and his decision to reconnect with his aunt reflect emotional maturity and acceptance of reality, demonstrating integration of his experiences and the pursuit of meaningful growth. Contemporary research supports this interpretation, showing that self-actualization depends not

only on the fulfillment of prior needs but also on factors such as self-compassion, supportive relationships, and contextual opportunities for growth (Wahidatun Nisa & Zarkasyi, 2024). In this sense, Elio's journey illustrates that true psychological development involves negotiating emotional pain, nurturing authentic connections, and achieving purpose within real-life relationships, consistent with both classical and modern perspectives on Maslow's hierarchy.

## CONCLUSION

Elio's characterization aligns with E. M. Forster's concept of a round character through his clear personality complexity, demonstrated by his fluctuating emotions, social anxieties, and persistent longing for acceptance. His capacity for change appears in his gradual shift from avoidance and insecurity toward openness and emotional clarity. The moment he questions his own worth functions as a convincing surprise because it is unexpected yet entirely consistent with his inner conflicts, revealing a deeper layer of vulnerability. At the same time, his decisions continue to show psychological consistency, since his reactions throughout the story remain rooted in a stable core desire for connection and belonging.

These developments also correspond to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which helps explain how each stage of Elio's psychological growth is tied to the fulfillment or deprivation of specific human needs. His unmet physiological and safety needs at the camp school create emotional instability; his longing for love and belonging is reflected in his hopeful messages to the aliens; his struggles with esteem emerge in conversations with his clone and in moments of self-doubt; and his final recognition that "Earth is home" signals progress toward self-actualization. Through these interconnected experiences, Elio embodies both Forster's criteria for a round character and Maslow's model of motivational development, offering a coherent portrayal of evolving identity, emotional growth, and the significance of human connections.

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