The Child-Parent Relationship in Anna Quinn's *The Night Child*: An Eriksonian Approach

DOI: https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v25i1.490

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Received: 13.8.2023 Accepted: 18.5.2024 Published Online: 21.5.2024

Abstract: This article utilizes Eric Erikson's psychosocial theory, specifically his eight stages of mental and emotional development, to tackle the parent-child relationship in Anna Quinn's *The Night Child* (2018). Accordingly, this article explores Erik Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development and the various crises that Nora, the protagonist in the novel, endures. During each stage, the character either has a positive outcome that will lead to a healthy personality or a negative outcome that will make the character acquire unhealthy personality traits. Nora must go through each stage before moving on to the next stages whether she has a positive or negative outcome. The life-span developmental issues are the most significant problems in the character's life because these issues will determine how she will live her life, and how successful her relationship with others will be. Through such an analysis of Nora's psychosocial development and interpersonal interactions, it becomes evident that her relationship with her parents is the most consequential one in her life.

Keywords: Anna Quinn, child-parent relationship, Erik Erikson, psychoanalytical approach, *The Night Child*

Introduction

According to Erikson's psychological theory, most people may experience depression, low self-esteem, mistrust in the self or others, guilt, confusion, feelings of inferiority, and many other emotional states in adulthood. These negative emotions and behaviors evolve in childhood only to be released in the person's adulthood and relationships with others. The life-span developmental difficulties are crucial concerns in individuals' lives as they dictate the trajectory of their existence and the level of success they achieve in their interpersonal relationships. Undoubtedly, the bond with one's parents assumes paramount importance in an individual's life. Hence, this article focuses on Erikson's psychosocial theory as it can be applied in the analysis of Nora, the central character in *The Night Child* by Anna Quinn.

1. Review of literature

Several reviews have dealt with the psychological aspects of *The Night Child*, specifically in connection to the impact of childhood trauma on adulthood. For example, Murrays' (2017) review of *The Night Child* warns readers that this novel requires a trigger warning. Nora's story involves child abuse and sexual violence which are described in detail. The hidden truth unfolds in the therapist's office,

where he guides Nora to unlock memories and past events. The review describes the novel as challenging to read as it deals with the fragility of the human mind.

Similarly, Norstedt's review (2018) describes Nora as the teacher, the wife, and the mother in her ordinary life and how the character's life spirals out of control. She tries to link everything in her past through the help of her therapist. This review highlights how Quinn pulls the readers to the incidents until the final scene. The novel copes with past events while trying to salvage life in the present.

In another review, Brown (2018), explains how Quinn explores the effects of domestic violence and traumatic childhood and adulthood experiences on the individual's psyche. The pivotal role of family in shaping the individual has been extensively explored in literary works as well as the emotional pressure of family members on one another (Al-Ghalith and Al-Hadidi 2023). Additionally, Al-Ghammaz, Al-Khatib and AbuRas (2022) assert that emotional abuse is a "social flaw and disorder" which is detrimental to the victim's mental health. Meanwhile, Qutami (2022) affirms that structural violence has been employed as a means of control throughout history.

From another angle, it is only fitting to review some research that has highlighted the psychosocial aspects of Erikson's theory, especially regarding its relevance to childhood development and literary studies. Capps (2011) focuses on Erikson's essay "Human Strength and The Cycle of Generation" (1964), and how Erikson discusses the goals of human strength in the eight stages of Erikson's theory. It focuses on how the first four stages or strengths in the child's life are vital in developing a healthy life. Capps' article suggests that adults need to become more aware of human strength and how to develop it so they can treat children in a nurturing way because they are on their way to acquiring this strength.

One of the most important books in the field of psychosocial theory is Hoare's book *Erikson on Development in Adulthood: New Insight from the Unpublished Papers* (2001), in which she has written extensively about adult development within the stages of Erikson. Hoare gives a detailed account of Erikson as a thinker and psychoanalyst of the twentieth century. Hoare says that our existential identity moves us towards our desire to be whole. This identity tends to tell us who we are as people and who we are as part of the society that we live in. Towards that end, people need to accept differences in everything and everyone.

Freud's theories have been utilized extensively in the analysis of literary works (Krunz and Neimneh 2021Fahim, Ibrahim and Abou Alam 2024; Krunz and Neimneh 2021). Similarly, Erikson's theory has been numerously applied to characters such as the fictional character Jaafar from the short story *Blue Blood of the Big Astana* (1941) by Cyril Jude Malvar Cornelio. The paper represents how the character develops from experiences and anxieties in childhood. It also discusses the social issues and realities that shape the character's adulthood. This character is discussed through the theory of Erikson's ego psychology and Horney's psychoanalytic social theory. Erikson even has a book about Gandhi entitled *Gandhi's Truth* (1969). It is a psychoanalytical analysis of Gandhi's life and his methods to achieve non-violent political changes. Erikson provides a look at Gandhi's life from his childhood to his assassination.

1. Eric Erikson's theory

Erikson proposes a theory that includes eight stages and, in each stage, a crisis would happen. Erikson is interested in how children make use of social experiences and the factors that affect children's sense of self. Erikson explains this theory in brief:

> I shall present human growth from the point of view of the conflicts, inner and outer, which the vital personality weathers, re-emerging from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgement, and an increase in the capacity 'to do well' according to his own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him (Erikson 1968: 91-92).

Erikson underscores the significance of social factors and experiences in the development of a person's identity and personality. He believes that everyone will be affected by his or her social context. "Individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically related in continual change" (Erikson 1959: 114). He disagrees with Freud's theory that is based on the person's sexuality believing that the personality develops even after the child becomes five years old. That is why he has eight stages in his theory, and it continues till the person is old or about to die. Erikson also stresses the fact that social experiences are a huge part of the individual's personality.

All of the stages in Erikson's epigenetic theory are implicitly present at birth (at least in latent form), but unfold according to both an innate scheme and one's upbringing in a family that expresses the values of a culture. Each stage builds on the preceding stages and paves the way for subsequent stages. Each stage is characterized by a psychosocial crisis, which is based on physiological development, but also demands put on the individual by parents and/or society (Davis and Clifton 1995: 2).

Every stage in the theory has its specific features and starts and ends with an age. The eight stages are divided to include the person's development from birth till the person gets old in life. Moreover, the theory considers the social context or atmosphere that the person experiences in his/her life span. Success in every stage will lead the person to acquire virtues that will help to accept life. Failure in any of the stages will make it difficult for a person to continue to the next stages and will lead to a negative outcome on the formation of personality. Failure can turn into success if the social and/ or parental factors help the person cure any shortcomings in his/her psychological wholeness.

Freud links the analyst's ability to remember, which he argued would readily provoke "incredulity and astonishment, complimented her attentive manner of listening throughout therapy sessions" (1912: 111–112). He suggests that the analyst should engage in "evenly suspended attention," which is a similar procedure to the patient's free association:

> The technique is a simple one. It consists simply in not directing one's notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same 'evenly suspending attention' (as I have called it) in the face of all that one hears.

> In this way we spare ourselves a strain on our attention which could not in any case be kept up for several hours daily, and we avoid a danger which is inseparable from the exercise of deliberate attention. For as soon as anyone deliberately concentrates his attention to a certain degree, he begins to select from the material before him; one point will be fixed in his mind with particular clearness and some other will be correspondingly disregarded, . . . in making this selection . . . if he follows his inclinations he will certainly falsify what he may perceive (1912: 111–112).

Freud's suggestion regarding analysts' way of listening was evidently intended to enhance their recollection of their patients' vocal expressions. Freud's conviction with the analyst's ability to remember leads him to assert that the analyst is typically accurate in situations where there is a difference between what the analyst recalls and what the patient recalls.

3. The Stages of Erikson's theory

3. 1 Trust versus mistrust: This is the first stage which starts when the child is one year old. During this stage, the child is uncertain or doesn't fully grasp his /her surroundings. Children begin to solve this issue by looking for someone to take care of them and leave all of this uncertainty behind. If the child receives all the care at all times, he/she will succeed and acquire the virtue of hope. By developing hope, children feel that if they face any type of crisis, people, especially their parents, will protect them and be the source of safety and support. As a result, they will develop a sense of trust. If children fail to acquire hope, they will not have any support and no one will help them to overcome the crisis; therefore, they will develop fear that will lead to mistrust.

3.2 Autonomy versus shame and doubt: The second stage starts when the child is eighteen months old and continues till he /she is three years old. In this stage, the child develops a sense of independence. Some kind of failure is needed in this stage so that the child knows how to become independent in his/her life. Balance in this stage is important for children because they need to learn to do things on their own and not to get help from parents all the time. Success in this stage will lead the child to acquire the virtue of will.

3.3 Initiative versus guilt: This stage starts when the child is three till he/she is five. The basic element of this stage is playing. Children begin to explore everything by attempting to initiate activities and develop an ability to make decisions on their own. Balance in this stage is necessary because if children are not criticized or do not experience guilt, they will not gain self-control or conscience to know their limits. This balance in this stage will lead to the virtue of purpose.

3.4 Industry versus inferiority: This stage begins from the age of five till twelve. In this stage, children start to learn and develop new skills like reading and writing. At this age, they start to look up to teachers as role models in addition to their parents. If children are encouraged to achieve their goals, they will feel industrious and become more productive and motivated in their lives. Modesty in this stage is important so the child can experience the negative outcome of failure. If the child succeeds in this stage, he will acquire the virtue of competence.

3.5 Identity versus role confusion: The fifth stage is the most essential one because the child will have a transition from childhood to adulthood. It is between the ages of twelve to eighteen years old. Here, everyone is considered as an adolescent. Individuals search for identity and what their place in society is or is going to be. They explore their values and beliefs and start to build a sense of what their career will be. An adolescent's main task is to develop a sense of self which is important to know one's goals in the future.

Success in every stage is based on the previous stages. If adolescents fail, it means that they could not assert their identities and did not accept the changes that happen to their bodies. Identity conflict may arise. Failure will lead to confusion regarding the position an individual has in society; therefore, the feeling of unhappiness with the self will arise.

3.6 Intimacy versus isolation: This stage happens between the ages of eighteen to forty years old. During this stage, the person starts to share himself/herself with someone from the opposite sex. This stage succeeds if the person feels his self-worth during the adolescent period. The relationships transpire with people outside the family, so individuals attempt to have long term-commitments. If individuals complete this stage with success, they will acquire the virtue of love.

3.7 Generativity versus stagnation: The seventh stage starts at the age of forty to sixty-five. People at this age begin to realize what they want in life and what their place in society is. They establish their career and feel the need to be productive at work. Also, they settle down in a relationship and have a family. If people succeed in this stage, they will feel happy and satisfied. They will help others to feel productive in life. Success will lead them to acquire the virtue of care.

3.8 Ego Integrity versus despair: This stage begins at the age of sixty-five till the person's death. This is where we see the results of all the previous stages. People will slow down and become unproductive. They come to a point where they need to sit back and watch what they have done in the years that went by. If people look back at what they have done and see it fruitful, they will succeed in this stage and acquire the virtue of wisdom. Therefore, they will accept death without any fear and without regret for what they have done in life. If people feel that their past is something not to be proud of and that they did not accomplish what they were planning in life, then they fail and experience despair.

4. *The Night Child* within the framework of Erikson's theory

The protagonist of this novel is Nora, a married middle-aged high school English teacher who has a six-year-old daughter named Fiona. Through a series of hallucinations and anxiety attacks, Nora and her psychiatrist begin an arduous journey to reveal her traumatic past in which she had suffered from various forms of abuse from her parents.

In this research paper, the analysis of Nora's character begins from stage seven and then goes backward till stage three. The reason for this order is that Nora is in her forties and stage seven starts from forty years old till sixty-five, and when she goes to the psychiatrist, she will remember what has happened to her in the

form of flashbacks. The final stage, which is stage eight will be a prediction based on the ending of the novel.

Within the context of stage seven which starts at the age of forty and ends at sixty-five, people establish their careers, settle down in a relationship, and begin a family, similarly to what Nora has done with her life. It seems at first glance that she has gone through the previous stages with successful results in her life. According to this stage she succeeds in continuing her life normally and happily. The problem is that her mind sometimes traps some events in her past and she neglects them. Freud (1915) states that there are some unacceptable events and desires that appear to be too frightening or painful for the patients to notice or acknowledge. He also believes that information about these events is locked away in the unconscious through repression as a defence mechanism. Meanwhile, Jung (1921) believes that the unconscious is a storehouse for the repressed memories that he calls the transpersonal unconscious.

Nora's psychological ordeal begins one day in class when she suffers from a severe headache; she imagines that a girl's face with blue eyes appears before her, but the mysterious figure is only a hallucination. The apparition of the child triggers childhood memories, causing Nora to panic. The face stays for a few seconds and then disappears, and then she hears a voice for a child and this voice is not in her mind; it says:" Remember Valentine's dress" (Quinn 2018, ch.2, para.7).

In a sequential session with her psychiatrist, Dr. David, he tells her that her health report of her medical history shows no physical disease, and her hormones are balanced, so she seems normal. Dr. David asks her about the first time of her strange headache. She immediately remembers that it was at her daughter's birthday, three weeks ago.

Dr. David asks if the face said anything to her and Nora tells him that she has mentioned the Valentine dress. Nora recalls that her grandmother sent her a dress once for Valentine's Day when she was five or six years old. She explains that she was closer to her grandfather than her grandmother while living with them in Ireland after Nora's mother's death. Nora and her brother lived with them and their father never came back.

She then mentions the day her mother died; she says that when she arrived home after school that day, she was singing and her drunk mother told her to stop the noise but Nora continued, and then suddenly she looked back to see her mother's body falling on the stairs crashing down the basement. The next thing she knows is holding her father's hand and staring at her mother's casket with bare eyes.

During the next visit to Dr. David, Nora's mind starts flashing memories of childhood abuse that she suffered at the hands of her mother. She painfully remembers how her mother used to throw her down, slap her so hard on the cheek and how the slaps sent her reeling against furniture and walls, and how she would pull her hair out, and then Nora remembered how she wanted her mother to die. She doesn't say any of this to Dr. David, but instead, she says:" She was sick, she was sad", she stops talking for a little and continues "An alcoholic" (Quinn 2018, ch.5, para.17). Dr. David tells her that if a parent is alcoholic, it doesn't give them the

right to hurt their children. The tension that she is feeling in the office as her past and present are colliding with each other, has made her irritable so she goes home.

Her brother comes to visit her and she remembers how he has been telling her that they need to search for their father. She tells him:" Who would leave their children and never come back? Especially when their mother had just died! Who would do that? And who lets his wife beat the crap out of their child?" (Quinn 2018, ch.8, para.11). He gives his father an excuse and says that he has been to war and it has messed him up. James then changes his mind and tells her that their father has done so many horrific things to them.

After cancelling two appointments with her psychiatrist because she has not seen any face and has not heard any voice, she goes back to Dr. David because she feels the anxiety coming back to her life. She tells Dr. David about her father and how she is confused between truth and reality. Dr. David asks her:" What would you do if you ran into him on the street?" (Quinn, 2018, ch.10, para.4). Suddenly, a door slams from the hallway and makes her jump and feel that her father is outside and she is not ready to face him. Dr. David tells her that she is safe and does not have to worry. Now with a little girl's voice, Nora says" I am Margaret" (Quinn 2018, ch.10, para.10). He asks her about the reason for visiting him but she keeps silence; he then asks how old she is and she says that she's six years old. Dr. David tries to address Nora's alter ego, Margaret, trying to bring her back. However, Nora can't understand what he is saying, so he moves his chair and tells her:" You are allowing yourself to remember something. I believe she is assisting you" (Quinn, 2018, ch.10, para.15). Before she goes home, he says:

It seems to me that your brain is working hard to remember something. If we could somehow connect with that past wiring, the past memories, we could understand how to rewire the pathways so your brain could be healthy again.(Quinn, 2018, ch.10, para.19)

Dr. David explains that she is probably suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which can be triggered by something horrible that has happened in her life. She might have symptoms like flashbacks, hallucinations, anxiety, and nightmares. He continues to say that her mind has pushed a trauma into her unconscious and now the memory is coming through the conscious with the voice of the little girl.

Nora now goes through something called free association when some word or image suggests an event or image without any logical connection. Freud (1914) argues that by doing free association, the patient will succeed in recognizing the transference and will make a replacement of the original neurosis with a transference one.

In one of her sessions with Dr. David, Margaret accuses Nora of being a liar; at that point, Nora remembers an incident that happened to her while she was young. Her mother discovered a rosary and she could not believe that Sister Rosa had given it to Nora, so she ripped the rosary apart and called Nora a liar. Then she found an empty package of cookies on Nora's bed, but Nora could not figure out where they had come from. Then the third incident that Nora could not know the truth about is when her mother got angry because Nora had spit on the priest and Nora said that

she had not, but her mother again called her a liar. To this day Nora does not know how these incidents happened and why she had got the blame.

Suddenly, Nora feels sleepy and she knows it is time that Margaret comes out. Subsequently, Margaret tells Dr. David why she has called Nora a liar. She confesses that she is the one who has eaten the cookies on the bed and has spit on the priest's face. Then she confesses that she has stolen money from her father and Paul, and she keeps the money in an orange box with the rosary beads in Nora's closet. He asks her why she's stealing money, and Margaret replies:" Because…because… I need it. I was saving up for me and Nora to run away" (Quinn 2018, ch.15, para.10).

Dr. David continues to prompt Margaret to reveal Nora's hidden and traumatic past. She remembers going to the church with her mother. She then enters a room where people confess to the priest and only see his shadow. She says" Bless me Father for I have sinned" (Quinn 2018, ch.15, para.12). Then hesitantly she tells the priest that she has touched her dad's private area. She continues giving details, but he screams at her to stop and wonders why a little girl like her would say bad things about her parents. Now the priest wants to know more and she says that her father is the one who has taken her hand and put it there. Suddenly, she stops talking because she hears him breathing hard and he asks her sexual questions. She hears him sound more and more like her father and she is certain that something is wrong. She stands up and spits on the screen between her and the priest and runs away. When Nora awakens from her trance, she insists on knowing what Margaret has said, so the doctor tells her about the orange box and her father.

Nora is desperate to prove that Margaret is not real and that she is a symptom of fatigue, so she goes to the closet to see if there is an orange box. She feels safe in there because she used to hide in it when her mother was drunk. She finds the box and stares at it shaking, and then she sees everything in it that has been in her forgotten past; the rosary beads, a crucifix, and a white envelope that has a picture of St. Margaret in it. Her mind now connects everything, so when her daughter gives her candy that says "kiss me", she puts her hands on her mouth and goes to vomit and when she hears Fiona repeating the same phrase, she slaps her daughter's hand to knock what is in her hand. She remembers her father when she showed him the Valentine's dress with his sneaky smile, and how he gave her a candy that said "kiss me"; he asked her to read the words and when she did, he kissed her then continued to molest her. While her father was molesting her, she prayed in order to get out of this situation:" St. Margaret, please help me, please take me away" (Quinn 2018, ch.20, para.15). In the midst of all these horrendous recollections, the phone rings and makes her come back to reality, and while talking to her brother, she hears her father's voice. Panicking, she drops the phone and hurriedly leaves the house, so she gets hit by a car and is rushed to the hospital.

While looking outside the hospital window, everything reminds her of her father's sexual abuse. Dr. David comes to visit and quickly asks her if she has remembered anything, and she writes on a piece of paper because she has lost her voice:" I remember Valentine's dress. Margaret is telling the truth" (Quinn 2018,

ch.22, para.11). He asks if her father has hurt her and she nods her head crying, so he says:" Nora, when your father abused you, you were a child. You couldn't make sense of what was happening to you" (Quinn 2018, ch.23, para.4). Dr. David continues to explain to Nora that it is not her fault. It is not about sex, it is about lacking power and control. She has been an easy target. He continues to say that she has created Margaret with her last power to feel safe and be in control and now she is the child who is trying to heal.

Lacan (1977) argues that the normal fragments of personality are called ego states, and in contrast, multiple personality disorder is an abnormal condition in which the personality becomes so fragmented that many parts cannot even connect. This is exactly the case for Nora and her alter ego, Margaret, who sometimes appears. Nora is shocked whenever Dr. David tells her that she exists in her past.

According to Erikson, people in stage seven establish their careers, settle down, and begin families. Nora has blocked every memory of her father's molestation and mother's emotional abuse. Margaret represents little Nora who needs help in order not to blame herself for everything that has happened to her. She has guided Nora during her healing process, so she could regain her mental health. Nora's unconscious has managed to lock everything for a long time which has allowed her to have a family and a career, but she does not know that some incidents can trigger events and experiences from her painful past.

Failing this stage will make the person stagnant and unproductive while success will lead to the virtue of care. In Nora's case, she has been successful in raising a daughter but not in being a wife because she has explained that Paul, her husband, is the first man she has been involved with. There is no close relationship with him. Paul even says to her that when they are intimate, he feels she has no emotions. Red flags have been appearing in her life over and over but her unconscious does not allow her to remember. This is the defence mechanism that her mind shows. Nevertheless, she partially succeeds in this stage and acquires the virtue of care as demonstrated in her affection to Fiona, Paul, Margaret, and herself.

Since the stages are now backward, Nora's character will be analysed according to stage six of Erikson's theory, "Intimacy versus Isolation", which is from the age of eighteen to forty. In this stage, people begin to share themselves intimately with others. As Nora has never experienced any relationship with men, she does not achieve any success in this stage. The only man she has shared something with is Paul, which is not normal for a woman at her age in American society. She has been scared from her past experience of sexual harassment, being hit by her mother, and witnessing her mother's death. People, like Nora, avoid intimacy and commitment. She has not been sure if her decision to marry Paul was right or not. Nevertheless, she gets through this stage with the virtue of loving her daughter and not herself. She has managed to go to the next stage with the help of her unconscious after locking every traumatic memory she has been through.

As for stage five, "Identity versus Role Confusion", which occurs from the age of twelve till eighteen, adolescents start to search for their identities and explore the sense of self. When Nora was thirteen, she had already blamed herself for the

death of her mother because she had not stopped singing when her mother asked her. This is the stage where individuals start to transfer from childhood to adulthood and become independent. At that time Nora is struggling to act positively, but she is confused. Erikson asserts that a person has two identities; the occupational identity and the sexual one. The sexual identity is the most consequential on Nora because of what her father has done to her. This experience has made this stage a difficult one for her because her mother died and she just remembers the good times with her father. In fact, Nora's unconscious has blocked every bad memory with him. She does not realize that her traumatic past will cause a lack of intimacy with her husband. Failing this stage will make the person unsure about himself/herself which leads to unhappiness.

Going through stage four, "Industry versus Inferiority", which occurs between age five and twelve, children begin to learn new skills like writing and reading. In Nora's case, this is the period in which she has experienced the traumatic events that scarred her life forever. Her mother is a strict parent who always shouts at her and her brother. Her father is the one who plays with them all the time and is a good parent, but he uses that to his advantage, which makes him a dangerous and sick parent for her. Nora and James would always go to the closet after their mother's crazy attitude and cry together. They say:" Let's never go out" (Quinn 2018, ch.16, para.23). Nora is surrounded by dangerous and traumatic situations to the point that she could not tell neither of her parents about what the other is doing.

At this stage, the role of the teacher is a very important one as he/she teaches the child skills and gives them a special type of care. Nora goes to a Catholic school and met her teacher, Sister Rosa. She reads Nora's stories about St. Margaret and likes them. Nora's tears start to fall on her cheeks. Sister Rosa gives her a rosary after she refuses to tell her the reason of her sadness. It resembles the rosary that her mother has destroyed when she was mad. Nora used to love being with her father as a child because they used to do everything together. She was an innocent child and he had been a sick father who used to molest her.

Hating home at a young age is a problem that faces many children. One day Nora traps herself in the coat closet of her classroom and begins counting repeatedly from one to ten. Sister Rosa tells her that it is time to go home by bus. Nora refuses and could not tell her that she hates going home after school. When her teacher wants to call her mother, Nora gets panicked and says that her mother will kill her. Then Nora asks Sister Rosa to take her home and she agrees. When Nora's mother arrives, Nora stares at the ground. The teacher explains that Nora has been helping her with a project and she has missed the bus. Her mother acts nicely and Sister Rosa praises Nora for being a special daughter. When they leave the teacher's house, the mother picks a glass of gin and continues drinking. She asks Nora if she has told her teacher anything about her but Nora denies that. She comes closer to her daughter while Nora is shaking repeating the word "No", then she starts to hit her again. The mother screams at her saying:" You stupid girl! You've shamed us!" (Quinn 2018, ch.26, para.29).

At this stage, the children need to develop a sense of pride in whatever they accomplish, which is something that is not happening in Nora's house. She could

not do anything while being yelled at or hit. If children are not being encouraged or reinforced for their initiative actions by the parents or the teacher, they begin to feel inferior which is what Nora feels for the rest of the novel. She doubts if she will ever be a good mother or a wife. She blames herself for the suicide of her student when she could not do anything about it. She fails to acquire the virtue of modesty. Nora has been in a horrific atmosphere during this stage.

As for stage three, "Intiative versus Guilt", which begins from the age of three continuing to age five, the child wants to play with others, but Nora cannot even play with her brother. If they raise their voices while having fun, they will be hit by their mother. At one point, Nora writes a story called "Promises" about her family going to Ireland to baptise her because her mother said that the priests there are closer to God than the ones in Chicago. She mentions the priest saying:" Do you promise to love this baby with all your heart and soul?" Then he asks:" Do you promise to protect her from all harm?" (Quinn 2018, ch.16, para.35). They answer both questions with yes. Ironically, after the baptism, the mother places Nora on a hard bench because she is tired and wants to go to the bar to have a drink. Nora starts to cry and her grandfather sings to her until she falls asleep.

At this stage, the child starts to ask many questions that need to be answered in order to learn, but all that Nora gets is abuse. If the parents treat the question as an embarrassment, nuisance, or a threat, the child will feel guilty and remain a follower. What has happened to Nora is beyond threatening and it scars her forever to the point that her unconscious locks every memory from the early stages deep down in her mind.

The final stage that can be applied to Anna Quinn's protagonist, Nora, is stage eight "Ego Integrity versus Despair". This stage occurs from sixty-five years old and above in which people begin to become less productive and start to explore life. People start to contemplate their accomplishments and develop integrity. At this stage Nora has made a great achievement after deciding to undergo psychological therapy for her traumatic past. She also realizes that she has made a wonderful accomplishment by raising her daughter well. She hopes that her daughter can find the suitable partner to continue her life with.

Erikson believes that if a person feels unproductive, guilty about the past, or unfulfilled, he/she will feel dissatisfied with his/her life and become desperate. These feelings will be the result of this stage. In Nora's case, she will never feel guilty because her parents' actions are the reasons of her suffering. Nora will acquire the virtue of wisdom which helps her gain the feeling of completeness and self-actualization. Nora is satisfied and will accept death without any fear because she has made amendments to her past.

Conclusion

To conclude, Erikson's theory provides a platform for the psychological analysis of characters in literature. This research paper demonstrates the use of this theory to gain insight into the protagonist's life in *The Night Child* as it is portrayed from an early age until she is above sixty-five. It reveals how the eight stages represent life-changing stages in childhood and adulthood. Erikson's eight stages of

development emphasize the vitality of the parent-child relationship as an integral component in his /her ontological well-being as well as interpersonal maturity. The foregoing theory-based analysis of the novel focuses on how the central character has reacted towards events in her life based on the experience she has had during her childhood throughout various crises. It comes to light that Nora has been blocking every horrific event in her past to the point that she cannot remember them, until Margaret, her alter ego, appears. Eventually, she manages to find peace within herself by seeking help from a psychiatrist who unveils every traumatic event in her past. Nora feels free after she unlocks all her repressed childhood memories. As she continues to go to her psychiatrist, she has embarked upon the biggest accomplishment of her life which is healing from her childhood trauma. Nora does not feel guilty because all her sufferings in life are due to her parents' faults and abuse. She acquires wisdom which provides her with a sense of self-actualization. Thus, she will continue her life overcoming any residual feelings of shame, regret, parental resentment and fear.

Erikson's theory evaluates the character's behavior in each stage of life. It also explores how parents can have a drastic effect on their children during their childhood. Not only does this theory illustrate how the person succeeds or fails in his life, but it also gives people insight on how to overcome failure.

Erikson in his psychosocial theory demonstrates that the parents' method of raising their children alongside their genetics will affect the children's lives. This theory connects the child's past with his/her future. Hence, Erikson's theory is effective in proving that human beings continue to change and develop, and their personalities do not form only during their childhood years but also continue alternating throughout their entire life.

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