

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

**EGO INTEGRITY VERSUS DESPAIR IN VIRGINIA EVANS'S
THE CORRESPONDENT: AN ERIKSONIAN ANALYSIS OF SYBIL
VAN ANTWERP**



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Abstract

The current study explores Sybil Van Antwerp's psychosocial development in the eight finally phase of Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, specifically the phase of Ego Integrity versus Despair, as it is found in Virginia Evans' novel, The Correspondent. Erikson proposes that in late adulthood, people complete their evaluation of what they've done and accomplished with lives and relationships, as well as making other choices and facing failures, and strive to achieve a sense of satisfaction and acceptance. Not being able to find this mental peace often leads to feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and a general sense of dissatisfaction with life. This study aims to explore, using a qualitative text analysis approach, how Sybil's letters, memories, and reflections convey that she is trying to come to terms with her past and make a cohesive sense of self. The novel's epistolary form is shown to be a vehicle for Sybil to explore essential life events, reel unresolved emotional dynamics, and forge meaningful relationships with others. She has a tendency to confront instances of personal loss, family dynamics, and ongoing introspection, which are how she embodies the psychological elements, at once integrity and despair. Results indicate that Sybil slowly progresses towards self acceptance and emotional resolution, leading to a stronger sense of integrity with self as she recognizes her successes and her failures as well. This investigation, in light of Erikson's theory, points to the richness of the aging phenomenon, as well as aging's complexities of identity formation and/or psychosocial development in late life. It also speaks to the scholarship of literature and psychology by offering an insight for contemporary fiction into the developmental difficulties and opportunities that come with old age, further ROI on the continued import and relevance of Eriksonian psychology to literary interpretations of ageing, self-discovery and emotional resilience.

Keywords: Erik Erikson, Psychosocial Development Theory, Ego Integrity versus Despair, Virginia Evans, The Correspondent, Aging, Identity, Psychological Development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

From ancient times till now literature has been used to represent and explore human experiences and emotions and psychological struggles. Along with reflecting the social situation, literary works can provide information about the inner life of a person, and allow the reader to learn about the complexities of human behavior and a person's personality. As a result, psychology has emerged as a prominent area of research in literature, providing theories and models to explain the motivations, conflicts, and growth of characters. Tyson (2015) claims that psychological criticism will enable readers to examine the psychology and emotions of literature, uncovering how individual characters cope with personal crises and developmental issues.

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

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Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is one of the major theories used by psychologist/bibliographers in literature studies and it is the most interested because it emphasizes on the process of personality formation throughout life. Erikson (1963) went to the more extended view that human development occurs across the entire lifespan and comprises eight psychosocial phases, unlike previous psychological views that were essentially devoted to childhood. Each stage has a certain conflict to be completed and the successful enactment of each conflict carries out the healthy development of personality. Erikson believed that psychosocial as well as psychological problems are always being negotiated at various developmental stages, which impact on the development of identity, interpersonal relationships, and the sense of self. This theory has since taken hold in literature criticism to investigate character development, identity formation, and emotional development (McLeod, 2024).

Ego Integrity versus Despair is the last stage in Erikson's psychosocial stages – this is especially relevant for the study of ageing and late years. The process is a time for people to review their life experiences and to assess their successes, failures, relationships, and accomplishments. Regretting and feeling unhappy about their life experiences leads to despair and not being fulfilled, whereas acceptance of those life experiences leads to the development of Ego Integrity (Erikson, 1963). Life review, self-reflection, and seeking meaning have been discussed as psychological processes that older adults engage in to reconcile with their past and to achieve emotional peace (Santrock, 2021). Literature texts about the elderly characters are therefore often useful for a consideration of this social and psychosocial conflict.

In Virginia Evans' 2025 novel *The Correspondent*, seventy-three-year-old retired lawyer Sybil Van Antwerp relates the story of her life through letters, emails, and personal letters. Sybil's thoughts, memories, regrets, family conflicts and emotional leftover wounds are experienced throughout in an epistolary form, which allows the reader to follow the novel as Sybil traverses and ages through various experiences. Many have noted that the novel focuses on loss, self-discovery, forgiveness, and finding meaning later in one's life, making it an insightful modern story of aging and reconciling with oneself (Evans, 2025).

Moreover, Sybil's persistent thinking about her past experiences, especially her experiences of bereavement and family estrangement and her feelings of regret, are very similar to Ego Integrity versus Despair as described by Erikson. Her letters reflect important experiences and make an effort to realize how they influence her current sense of self. Both the letters provide communication and serve as a psychological healing and self-evaluation devices. The novel's exploration of feelings of loss, remembrance, forgiveness and emotional strength has been noted by multiple reviewers, as Sybil strives to heal from her past and build new relationships (Evans, 2025).

For this reason this research will involve an analysis of Sybil Van Antwerp in the study *The Correspondent* by Virginia Evans in the frame of Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, which in this research will be elaborated on Ego Integrity versus Despair. This work explores how coinciding with her reflections and the relationships with others as well as her emotional crises influence her psychosocial development and if she manages to reach a state of ego-integrity or is stuck in despair. Using this theoretical lens, the outcome of the research is to illustrate the psychological contexts encountered during the aging experience in the contemporary literature and the human search for self-acceptance and meaning in old age and beyond.

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1.1 Statement of the Problem

Literature frequently portrays the psychological challenges associated with aging, memory, self-reflection, and the search for meaning in later life. However, contemporary literary studies have often concentrated on themes of gender, trauma, and identity while giving comparatively less attention to the psychosocial development of elderly characters. Virginia Evans's *The Correspondent* presents the life of Sybil Van Antwerp, an aging woman who reflects upon her personal relationships, past decisions, achievements, losses, and unresolved regrets through a series of letters and correspondence. Her experiences reveal a profound struggle between acceptance of her life and feelings of disappointment regarding missed opportunities and enduring emotional wounds.

Erikson's psychosocial development theory states that the last stage of human development is the whole person evaluation of his or her life; Ego Integrity versus Despair. When a conflict is solved successfully, wisdom, acceptance and a feeling of fulfillment are realized, and in the event of failure, there is despair, regret and a very strong fear of death. Themes in *The Correspondent* are similar to Erikson's late psychosocial stage, but relatively little scholarly attention has been given to exploring Sybil's psychosocial psychological growth in the context of Erikson's theories. This study thus aims to focus on the problem of how Sybil Van Antwerp deals with the crisis between ego integrity and despair, as well as on the role that reflection plays in her psychosocial development in old age.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine the psychological development of Sybil Van Antwerp in Virginia Evans's *The Correspondent* through Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.
2. To analyze the manifestations of ego integrity and despair in Sybil's thoughts, memories, and interpersonal relationships.
3. To explore how self-reflection and correspondence contribute to Sybil's process of achieving psychological resolution in old age.
4. To evaluate the extent to which Sybil attains ego integrity at the conclusion of the novel.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Given that limited literature has been written from a psychological point of view, this study helps to proceed the scholarship in the field of literature in general and in particular Virginia Evans' novel *The Correspondent*. Adopting Erik Erikson's theory on psychosocial development, the study reveals a psychological aspect of aging and explores how literature can depict elderly people's emotional and developmental struggles.

Moreover, it brings a literary reference to developmental psychology, which will enrich for interdisciplinary study. It offers insights into its terms: ego integrity, despair, self-acceptance, and life review and enlarges the understanding of the theme in modern fiction of that of aging. These results can also be helpful to future researchers in the areas of psychological literary criticism, aging research and character study. Furthermore, the research highlights the need to acknowledge and study elderly protagonists in literature because their lives often relate to common human issues about self identity, sense of purpose, death, and fulfillment.

2.0 Literature Review

The use of literary works in psychological study is increasingly becoming crucial to the study of human behaviour and identification and character growth. One of the most prominent psychological theorist was Erik Erikson (1950, 1963, 1982) who presented a psychosocial theory of development that elucidates the development of personality as 8 stages spanning from infancy to old age. Despair is the last step of post-development, and happens in older adulthood, where people "reflect on their lives and look for meaning." A successful outcome of this stage brings wisdom, self acceptance and ego integrity, while a failure brings on regret, dissatisfaction and despair, according to Erikson (1982). The emphasis of this stage is in life review and self-reconciliation, which has lead to the wide application of this stage in both psychological and literary study that are related to aged and identity.

Qamar, Farooq, and Zarar (2026) examine the psychological development of Frankie McGrath, the protagonist of Kristin Hannah's *The Women*, through Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory. Employing a qualitative textual analysis, the researchers investigate how Frankie's experiences before, during, and after the Vietnam War contribute to her psychosocial growth. The study argues that Erikson's theory provides an effective framework for understanding Frankie's transformation from an inexperienced and uncertain young woman into a resilient individual who gradually reconstructs her identity despite the traumatic consequences of war. The authors particularly emphasize the psychosocial crises of *Identity versus Role Confusion* and *Intimacy versus Isolation*, demonstrating that Frankie's struggle for self-definition is intensified by patriarchal expectations, the brutality of combat, and the social rejection she encounters upon returning home. According to the study, military service becomes a crucial turning point in the protagonist's psychological development, fostering confidence, emotional strength, and a clearer sense of purpose despite the severe emotional challenges she faces. The research concludes that Frankie's eventual acceptance of her experiences reflects successful psychosocial growth and highlights the continuing relevance of Erikson's developmental theory in literary character analysis. However, the study primarily concentrates on Frankie's individual psychological progression and offers limited discussion of the broader intersection of gender, trauma, and sociocultural influences on her development. This limitation provides an opportunity for further research to extend Eriksonian analysis by examining how external social structures and gendered experiences shape the protagonist's psychosocial identity in *The Women*.

There are a few theorists who have stressed the importance of reminiscence and life review in the elderly. The psychological review of past life experiences, as proposed by Butler (1963), has been discussed as a natural process of elderly people to re-experience past experiences in an attempt to meet the goal of psychological integration. In turn, McAdams (1993) argues that people create narrative identities as a way to organize memories and provide them meaning and continuity in the form of life stories. The following viewpoints support the last of Erikson's stages in that reflections on the past are required to be able to reach the status of ego-integrity. These are especially important for literary works that feature an old man or old woman as the main character(s) who remember, revisit and reinterpret their experiences in their old age.

The study of aging is also yielding a major field of literary criticism. Aging is frequently described as an intricate "negotiation between one's identity and societal demands" (Woodward, 1991, p. 1). Similarly, Gullette (2004) challenges cultural narratives about the inevitable nature of loss and decline as people age, focusing instead on the ongoing possibility of growth, agency and self-

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

discovery in old age. The arguments that are outlined here, call into question stereotypical portrayals of the old person character, and prompt researchers and academics to look at aging as a direct psychological and social engagement rather than an automatic and inevitable outcome of biological processes. This is consistent with Erikson's theory that personality development is a lifelong process and is dynamic well into late adulthood.

Other major issues experiencing studies of late adulthood are aging and grief and loss. Successful adaptation to loss involves loss processing, adjustment to changed circumstances, and reinvestment in significant relationships, which Worden (2009) identifies as the three components of loss. Likewise, Neimeyer (2001) believes, grief often requires a re-construction of personal meaning and identity. Psychological research thus indicates that grief could hinder in achieving Ego Integrity whereas resolution of the process of accepting and giving meanings is vital to emotional healing. These insights can be very helpful in examining the literary characters whose lives are determined by traumatic loss and lingering guilt.

Narrative scholars also have been successful in recognizing the importance of story in the development of identity. Ricoeur (1992) suggests that selfhood is created through "narrative interpretation", since there is a constant reconfiguration of selfhood in the processes of remembering and reflecting. Similarly, Bruner (1990) states humans experience life in meaningful patterns and structures, in the form of narrative. From a literary standpoint, letters, diaries, memoirs, and autobiographical writing are often used to explore and define characters' identities and to develop their understanding of themselves. This is particularly important in epistolary writing, where letters serve as an important means for character introspection and psychological development.

Epistolary novels have always been of interest to scholars for their ability to reveal character states of mind. According to Altman (1982), letter writing offers opportunities to be intimate, to open up and to build identity through communication. Characters self-reflect, confess, and negotiate emotions through correspondence. The epistolary form, in this way, makes the character's exploration of the past and the construction of new meaning through his or her self-image accessible, and thus an appropriate vehicle for the study of Eriksonian concepts of life review and ego integrity, because the character is revisiting what has already happened, and is describing his or her changing self image on paper.

The Correspondent, by Virginia Evans, is recently being critically received and corresponds much with the themes of Erikson's Theory. Sybil Van Antwerp, the protagonist, is a 73-year-old woman and the novel focuses on the novel's inner dynamics communicated through letters and emails that Sybil exchanges over several years. About the great reinvention of the novel, reviewers mention that the novel discusses such topics as 'ageing', 'grief', 'guilt', 'memory', 'forgiveness' and 'interpersonal connection' using an epistolary structure. Critics portray Sybil as a contemplative old woman who's haunted by the loss of her child, unaltered guilt and emotional isolation, but slowly begins to find peace within herself and with others. The importance of correspondence as a tool for facing up to past and reconnecting with people is repeated over and over in the story. The novel's themes indicate a solid and meaningful relationship with Erikson's stages of Ego Integrity vs Despair.

Other reviews also express the idea that Sybil is an individual who continues to seek at every turn to understand the mistakes that have been made, how to handle grief, and seek forgiveness. The scholars and reviewers comments that the novel is not about the feeble period of old age but rather

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

about the journey of old age coupled with a chance for emotional development and self-reflection. By the epistolary form, readers can see how Sybil's mind and heart changes over time as she meditates on her relationships, as she faces her own hard truths about her past, and as she rebuilds her sense of self.

What has so far received critical attention is predominantly its epistolary form, emotional intensity and depiction of grief and aging in *The Correspondent*. The psychological aspects of the novel have been ignored and there is a vast lack of discussion about them, specifically based on Erikson's element of psychosocial theory. There does not exist any significant study that looks at what Sybil Van Antwerp began at, her passage through, and her end at the points of Ego Integrity versus Despair. The purpose of the present study is, therefore, to measure the contribution of Sybil's reflections, relationships, experiences of grief and search for self-forgiveness to the achievement of ego-integrity in late adulthood.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach of close textual analysis technique. Qualitative research can be better applied in literary studies since it also allows the researcher to explore characters, themes, and psychological experiences within the literature, in great depth. As Creswell supports (2014), qualitative research is about understanding and interpreting the human experiences by analysing them in terms of text and context. This research examines Virginia Evans' *The Correspondent* (2025) through a sustained and problematic close reading of the book with focus on the psychosocial development of the character Sybil Van Antwerp.

The materials used originate mainly in the novel, and then, with secondary sources, in scholarly books, journal articles, and any critical studies pertaining to the psychosocial theory of Erik Erikson, the psychosocial problem of aging in general, and the psychology of literature in particular. There are specific, relevant excerpts from the literature and dialogues, letters and narrative description, that are analyzed based on Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory. The study examines the experience of Ego Integrity vs. Despair within the eighth stage of psychosocial development as it relates to how Sybil is thinking about her past experiences, relationships, regrets, achievements, and losses as she strives for self acceptance and psychological fulfillment as she ages. Excerpts from provided texts are selected and interpreted within the context of the theoretical frame work of the concepts of ego integrity, despair, life review, wisdom, and self-reconciliation.

3.1 Research Design

The type of study used is descriptive and interpretive. Descriptive research describes and analyzes specific phenomena, whereas Interpretative Literary Analysis is to reveal deeper meanings in a text. The study aims at the psychological development of Sybil Van Antwerp that is depicted in an epistolary form of narration.

The content of the analysis is structured, with the emphasis on the most important psychosocial indicators surveyed by Erikson, namely, self-reflection, acceptance of past experiences, relief from guilt, interpersonal relationships and seeking meaning in the older years. In a thematic way, categorization and textual interpretation guides the study into whether Sybil makes it to an ego's synthesis of integrity or is caught in despair.

The descriptive-interpretive design is appropriate for this study because the study does not have statistical generalization as its goal, but rather, it aims at an understanding of the psychological

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

aspects of a fictional character in a social-psychological environment. Sybil's thoughts, memories, and reflections are made available right in front of the reader, as the form of the novel is epistolary, thus making it appropriate for psychological commentary. This Exchange of Letters is a collection of letters written by Sybil, reflecting her struggles with finding meaning in her life, coping with loss, and asking for forgiveness that match those of life review in late adulthood (Erikson's stage). Erikson's eighth psychosocial stage of life was the relevance it brings to the inquiry as a seventy-three year old woman reflects on her relationships with her partner, losses, failures and looking for some form of reconciliation and meaning.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, which focuses on the last stage – Ego Integrity versus Despair. Erikson (1963, 1982) suggests that human development is ongoing process throughout the life span, and each stage of development brings a psychosocial dilemma that a person must work out to attain psychological health.

Erikson believes that in the late-adult years, people undertake a “life review” and give meaning to their lives. Ego integrity occurs when persons come to realize that their lives have a meaning and are worthwhile and have been fulfilled despite any errors and failures that may have taken place. Despair, on the other hand, is present when there are conflicts and failures that leave the person with feelings of regret, guilt, dissatisfaction and/or fear of death. If the stage is successfully negotiated, according to Erikson (1982), the virtue that emerges is ‘wisdom’—he means the person's ability to live in a state of calmness, without fear of death or life. Negative feelings like sadness, hopelessness, and psychological stress, however, can result from unhealed regrets.

In particular, the use of Erikson's theory in *The Correspondent* is apt, as the novel focuses on Sybil Van Antwerp, who is 73 years old and heavily introspective in a correspondence and letter-writing project regarding her life. She frequently takes us back to painful moments, she prays for her son over and over again, she visits her family members to rethink their relationships, she faces her past decisions and attempts to make amends and seeks forgiveness. The events are representative of the life review that is a primary part of Erikson's framework of the development of ego integrity. Awards and prizes will generally be available for this course.

The study thus uses Erikson's categories of self-acceptance, life review, despair, ego integrity and wisdom to review Sybil's psychological process. The research looks at how the protagonist faces the struggles of late adulthood and if she is able to reach some level of completeness and satisfaction.

4.0 Data Analysis

In *The Correspondent*, Virginia Evans builds Sybil Van Antwerp as a distinctly late adult, the time when Erikson posits that psychological development is dominated by the stage of Ego Integrity versus Despair. Whether or not Sybil truly experienced multiple personality, which seems improbable, we can still see a continuing life review in her letters, with memories, guilt and the yearning for reconciliation all influencing her psychological subject. The letters from Sybil show a constant life review, with memories, guilt and a yearning for reconciliation all having had an impact on Sybil's psychological subject. Ego integrity is when the person feels their life has had meaning, and despair is when the person feels they have not resolved their conflicts and regrets. The ups and downs and permanent shifts of Sybil's story reveal the tension between the states and the gentle resolution, brought to her through continuing reflection and letters.

Sybil is continually emotionally reliving harrowing experiences, especially the death of her son, a

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

central theme in the novel that creates a pervasive stress. Her letters show signs of unprocessed life experiences such as grief and self-blame, which echo Erikson's work on the despair stemming from unprocessed life experiences. She reflects:

"I did not plead on her behalf, as I should have, as I, a mother, should have." (p. 84)

This passage illustrates the internalization of guilt and intense moral self-judgment experienced by Sybil, for whom her actions in the past have come across a standard of motherly obligation that seems ideal. This is an Eriksonian crisis of despair, where past failures are seen as failures, but not as failures that were instrumental in development, just painful events that, well, failed. Likewise, Sybil's letters rarely face emotion of struggle and loss and show psychological disorganizations that are typical of unprocessed grief. Her intellectualizing via letter is a tactic to deal with emotional instability, instead of reaching to the deeper level to resolve it.

Sybil's emotional isolation within *The Correspondent* (SDB) remains as another important psychological indicator of her first transition from Erikson's Ego Integrity versus Despair stage. Her dependence on letters as her primary mode of communication with others at the outset of the story implies both a love of solitude and also a conscious way of not exposing her emotions to others. Letters, email, written replies are a intermediary between her and life, one to which she can access in order to maintain intimacy in a way that is often not as unpredictable as face-to-face communication, to be able to control and regulate emotional distance and to revisit life events that she would have to do in person in order to come to terms with them.

"As noted in her characterization, she is a woman who lives alone and uses letters as her primary form of communication and emotional expression." (p. 105)

This is a format of communication that comes out of a psychic coping mechanism. Through her writing, Sybil is able to process her feelings and make sense of them; she knows this is the way to protect herself from the pain of unresolved grief, regret and relational problems. Eriksonian perspective: this may be a sign of despair at the age of beginning where painful events are not fully integrated into a life scenario or where the one is not fully accepted. In her real-life relationships, Sybil avoids the emotional exposure and exposure to danger, but instead she operates from a distance, revising, editing, and reframing experiences at a safe distance.

However, this withdrawal does not just represent withdrawal, but also a survival tactic. Writing enables Sybil to still be connected to others and feel "safe" at the same time. Her emblems turn out to be the substitute to be physically present, so that she can begin interactions with concerns and at least threat as much emotional exposure. The dichotomy present in Erikson's theory is one of the most central aspects of his conception; it is the choice between avoidance of pain and the process of moving towards acceptance, which appears at the heart of the despair-versus-integrity dichotomy.

Therefore Sybil's emotional separation is a first step toward the unevenness in her psychosocial growth, where she does not yet have a sense of connection with her history. Her life is orderly, rule-governed, and expressive in thoughts and ideas, but restricted in feeling. Though throughout the narration, the distance of "withdrawal" begins to turn out to be the very space that allows for "transformation" to become possible, however, soon; even within "withdrawn" space is space for future "self-integration" and "ego-integration."

In addition, Erikson is stressing the importance of a life review, and the recognition of one's self-life as having significance. Sybil's epistolary practice is the means by which she slowly builds up her identity. She writes to think about the symbolic meaning of letters:

"Isn't there something wonderful in that, to think that a story of one's life is preserved in some

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

way...” (p. 212)

This is an important milestone in Sybil's psychological development. She begins to feel her life as if it is not one disconnected and discontinuous experience, but a possible meaningful and continuous story. The claim points to an awareness of coherence that is beginning to emerge, one that implies that memory is also a way of self-understanding, a preservation, and that this is a knowledge about more than just loss.

Eriksonian thinking would identify this taking place in close approximation with the gradual transition to the sense of Ego Integrity: where the person starts to evaluate the whole process of life events (both good and bad) as one cohesive picture. Instead of attempting to reject or suppress early trauma responses, Sybil starts to reinterpret them in a larger framework of meaning. This is important in that it represents a shift from psychological fragmentation to psychological integration, and it's considered a learned response, not one that is inborn.

This process is central to therapy and the correspondence is an integral part. In letters to her husband, she creates a space that allows for a fitting rethinking of memories, for the formulation of emotions and for the reconstruction of events into an orderly sequence in a self-narrative. Writing allows for deliberation, control, and revision to give Sybil time to process hard emotions. Correspondence in this way almost becomes a kind of narrative therapy; whereby, through the act of "story-telling," therapy happens. Further, it is good to note that the moment of realisation also signals a step towards an idea that identity is not stable in time but is continually created, remembered, and re-interpreted. In asserting that the life story is “preserved”, she implicitly implies equal recognition of the significance of her experience, regardless of the content, especially, though not only her loss and regret, a step towards the development of the new PAS.

As the narrative continues Sybil comes to accept aging, physical decay, and emotional loss—rather than holding onto these things like a vice grip she now has the capacity to do this. Instead of destroying those changes, she starts to embrace them, working through their integration in her developing identity:

“Her awareness of life’s cyclical nature is expressed in reflective correspondence, where she reinterprets earlier statements with new emotional understanding.” (p. 256)

The thematic emphasis on the passage offers much for the developmental emphasis on the psychological trajectory of Sybil as it moves from a reflective and static experience of the provision of the past to an experience of reflective and generative engagement with the past – highlights the significant developmental shift. She referred to 'the cycle of life' and it indicates that she is starting to grasp the process of experience as changeable and repeatable, rather than fixed in meaning. Changing now instead of repeating thoughts and emotions, there is a subtle action of reinterpretation occurring across the correspondence, showing a shift in consciousness and emotional development that is changing prior memory. In the letters it doesn't repeat the same thoughts and feelings; it's reinterpretation that's taking place in the correspondence, as is a change in consciousness and emotional maturity that changes prior memory.

Ego integrity is the central key in Erikson's framework that is integrated here to reinterpret the transition from despair to integrity in life. The next phase is one of despair and pessimism where the person conceptualizes life as irreversible and sees it from a perspective of regret, unfulfilled potential and emotional suffering. There is a flourish of reflective practice, however, as the practice of Sybil evolves, there is a shifting negativity in play. Her ability to grab onto earlier statements and give them new emotions is a sign of psychological flexibility and the developing ability to accept

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

oneself. Notice of this change is significant as it represents a move away from Sybil's identity forming around loss or emotional disconnection. Rather, she starts to see continuity in her life, that is, the continuity of meaningful connections between the past and present experiences that give life to a cohesive dimension of her self. As she connects with others over relationships, her thoughts with intellectual pursuits, and her letters with communication, a sense of isolation and regret is replaced by the comforting touch of other people, ideas, and words.

Another aspect of the way Sybil has evolved in her development is her evolving relationship with family members, friends, and correspondents. Ego integrity is not only possible through reflection, but also through a re-establishment of being connected to others and belonging despite one's perspectives and roles and duties in society. In the first interaction with Sybil, she shows signs of a bit of emotional openness concerning the reconciliations, and her renewed connections with family members and correspondents gradually become more emotional. These connections give her emotional affirmation and are essential for fighting her emotional loneliness. Her letters are consequently not only contemplative but relational as well: sustained communication with a relational subject, she is able to pursue her self-construction through communication.

In terms of an Eriksonian perspective, Sybil Van Antwerp's psychological development in *The Correspondent* is one that is transforming from despair driven by a sense of guilt, loneliness and sadness towards ego integrity through reflection, construction of narrative and healing through her relationships. The epistolary format accentuates this process by transforming the language into a means of psychological integration. In the end, Virginia Evans suggests not ageing in a negative way, but ageing as a process of negotiation between memory, identity and acceptance.

5.0 Conclusion

In *The Correspondent*, Virginia Evans tells the story of Sybil Van Antwerp as a fractured picture of late adulthood in which memory turns to reflection and emotion to reconciliation to build up the final form of the self. Sybil's struggle can be viewed as a series of negotiations between the "acceptance" of the choices that she has made; and the "ongoing burden of regret." Sybil's struggle can be read as a series of negotiations between the "acceptance" of the choices that she has made; and the "ongoing burden of regret."

As the novel demonstrates, ego-integrity is not a one-time, "book lesson" accomplishment, but rather a psychological evolution that takes place over a lifetime. Sybil's written analyses are a therapeutic process through which she examines her relationships, her unresolved emotions and revisits/reassesses her past. However, continuous moments of deep thinking enable her to slowly begin to accept herself, while feelings of despair persist in these moments when she feels guilty or loses a loved one, or feels lonely.

In sum, Evans depicts aging not as a process of psychological disintegration, but as a chance to "make meaning," to effect internal healing. By showing the struggles and successes with respecting their imperfections while also understanding the coherence and value of their autobiographical story, Sybil's character teaches us the process of attaining Ego Integrity. The novel thus underscores Erikson's pivotal claim that finding one's way in that final stage brings wisdom, whereas failure brings despair. Sybil's growing understanding of her identity in her own eyes makes for a steady, yet powerful journey to reaching a point of self-scrutiny with the goal of ego integrity—a transformation that inspires a kind of growth, reconciling, and self-acceptance, even in the late stages of life.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

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