



**IDENTITY CRISIS IN SELECTED WORKS  
BY ALICE OSWALD, CAROL ANN DUFFY,  
AND LOUISE GLÜCK**

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## THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that in my opinion the thesis submitted by Najmah HASAN titled “IDENTITY CRISIS IN SELECTED WORKS BY ALICE OSWALD, CAROL ANN DUFFY, AND LOUISE GLÜCK” is fully adequate in scope and in quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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The degree of Master of Arts by the thesis submitted is approved by the Administrative Board of the Institute of Graduate Programs, Karabuk University.

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and all information included has been obtained and expounded in accordance with the academic rules and ethical policy specified by the institute. Besides, I declare that all the statements, results, materials not original to this thesis have been cited and referenced literally.

Without being bound by a particular time, I accept all moral and legal consequences of any detection contrary to the aforementioned statement.

**Name Surname:** Najmah HASAN

**Signature:**



## **FORWARD**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt at closely examining the subject of identity crisis in selected poetical works by Alice Oswald, Carol Ann Duffy and Louise Glück from a psychoanalytic perspective using Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Identity crisis is a crucial stage in the life of every human being due to the fact that the resolution and outcome of the crisis determine the type of personality individuals could have and whether their role in their communities would be positive or negative. Chapter One is an introduction to identity crisis as described by Erik Erikson in his theory of psychosocial development. The chapter examines the developmental stages leading to the crisis, its resolution, and the possible identities that emerge as its outcome. The various internal and external factors that affect the outcome of the crisis are also described in the chapter. Chapter Two examines the subject of identity crisis as presented in Alice Oswald's book *Dart* (2002) to show how the various characters sketched in her work manage to resolve their identity crises by relying on the forces of nature, symbolized by the river Dart, to relinquish their limited and immature sense of self-concept and personal identity in favor of a wider cultural and collective genuine identity. Chapter Three discusses Carol Ann Duffy's approach to the subject of identity crisis in her book *The World's Wife* (1999), where the successful resolution of the crisis is conceived as the result of the individual's will power, intellect, resourcefulness and self-determination, rather than the result of external natural and physical forces. In Chapter Four, Louise Glück's treatment of the subject of identity crisis as presented in her collection *The Seven Ages* (2001) is examined closely. Glück perceives identity crisis as a stage that is not resolved in favor of the individual experiencing it because internal and external pressures and conditions often contrive to bring about a negative identity as the outcome of the crisis. She therefore recommends experiencing the identity crisis as a detached, intellectual, spiritual and hypothetical phenomenon using one's insight, wisdom, imagination and previous second-hand experience. In this way, one can avoid the negative consequences of the crisis and at the same time carve a true lasting collective identity that transcends personal experience and, according to Erikson, encompasses all human thought and experience.

**Keywords:** Identity Crisis, Alice Oswald, Carol Ann Duffy, Louise Glück, *Dart*, *The World's Wife*, *The Seven Ages*, Erik Erikson, Postmodern Poetry



## ÖZET

Bu tez, Erik Erikson'un psiko-sosyal gelişim teorisini temel alarak psikanalitik bakış açısıyla Alice Oswald, Carol Ann Duffy and Louise Glück'ün seçilmiş şiirlerindeki kimlik krizi konusunu derinlemesine incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Kimlik krizi, bu krizin çözümü ve sonucu itibariyle bireylerin nasıl bir kişilik sahibi olacaklarını ve mensubu oldukları topluluklarda olumlu ya da olumsuz roller üstlenmelerini belirleyeceği için önem arz eder. Tezin birinci bölümü, Erik Erikson'un psiko-sosyal gelişim teorisinde ele aldığı şekliyle kimlik krizine giriş niteliğindedir. Bu bölüm, kimlik krizine giden yoldaki gelişim aşamalarını, kimlik krizinin sonucunu ve krizin neticesinde ortaya çıkması muhtemel kimlikleri ele alır. Krizin sonucuna şekil veren iç ve dış etkenler de bu bölümde betimlenmiştir. İkinci bölümde Alice Oswald'ın *Dart* (2002) isimli kitabında ele alındığı haliyle kimlik krizi incelenmiştir; bu sayede eserde tasvir edilen çeşitli karakterlerin, Dart nehrinin temsil ettiği doğanın güçlerine yaslanarak, sınırlı ve olgunluğa erişmemiş benlik algılarını ve bireysel kimliklerini geride bırakıp daha kapsayıcı ve özgün niteliğe sahip kültürel ve kolektif kimlikler benimseyerek kimlik krizlerini çözmeyi nasıl başardıkları ortaya koyulmuştur. Üçüncü bölüm Carol Ann Duffy'nin *The World's Wife* (1999) eserinde krizin çözümüne dış kaynaklı, doğal ya da fiziksel güçlerden ziyade bireyin irade gücü, idraki, mahareti ve kendi kaderini tayin yetisi sayesinde ulaşılmasını tartışır. Dördüncü bölümde ise *The Seven Ages* (2001) isimli derlemesinde sunulan haliyle Louise Glück'ün kimlik krizini ele alışı detaylı biçimde incelenmiştir. Glück, kimlik krizini bu krizi tecrübe eden bireyin lehine çözülmeyen bir aşama olarak düşünür çünkü dış baskı ve koşullar genellikle krizin sonucunda olumsuz bir kimliğin ortaya çıkmasına sebep olur. Bu yüzden şair, kimlik krizinin kişinin iç görüşüne, bilgeliğine ve geçmişte başkalarının yaşadığı deneyimlere dayanarak tecrübe edeceği soyutlanmış, düşünsel, ruhsal ve varsayıma dayanan bir olgu şeklinde yaşanmasını salık verir. Bu sayede kişi, krizin olumsuz sonuçlarından kaçınabilecek ve aynı zamanda bireysel tecrübenin ötesine geçen ve Erikson'un nazarında tüm insan tahayyül ve tecrübesini içinde barındıran gerçek anlamda süreklilik arz eden kolektif bir kimlik şekillendirebilecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kimlik krizi, Alice Oswald, Carol Ann Duffy, Louise Glück, *Dart*, *The World's Wife*, *The Seven Ages*, Erik Erikson, Postmodern Şiir

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## ARŞİV KAYIT BİLGİLERİ

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## ABBREVIATIONS

APA: American Psychological Association

Ed.: Edited / Editor

e.g.: *exempli gratia*

etc.: *et cetera*

i.e.: *id est*

Ltd.: Limited

OED: Oxford English Dictionary

p. / pp.: page / pages

UK: United Kingdom

USA: United States of America

Vol.: Volume

## **SUBJECT OF THE RESEARCH**

The present thesis examines the subject of identity crisis as one of the elements of the psychosocial development theory introduced by Erik Erikson, in Alice Oswald's *Dart* (2002), Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999), and Louise Glück's *The Seven Ages* (2001). Each book is discussed in a separate chapter to show how the poet presents the subject of identity crisis and how the characters in the texts experience the crisis and resolve it. Although the confrontation of identity crisis is mainly experienced by the characters in these works, as the study reveals, it is also examined at the biographical level to show the authors' own experiences and resolutions of the crises that they themselves also faced and reflected in their poetry. The crisis is also at times carried over to symbolically include inanimate objects as well. The identity crises depicted in these works vary in their scope, as they may be personal, cultural or collective. They also differ in their resolution and outcome, since they could be either positive or negative, and in the factors that shape them and lead to their resolution, for these determining factors could be internal, external or a blending of both.

## **PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

The purpose of this study is to examine the different approaches to the subject of identity crisis in selected poetical works by Alice Oswald, Carol Ann Duffy and Louise Glück in terms of the causes, scope, resolution and outcome of the crisis. The significance of the study lies in the light it sheds on these selected works and on the poets' innovative methods of approaching the subject. It reveals how the characters sketched in the poetry composed by these three poets face different and at times opposing outcomes of the various identity crises they experience, and how some of the characters are able to overcome the negative consequences of the crisis and transcend the limited personal self-concept to establish a wider, mature and collective identity that encompasses human experience as a whole.

## **METHOD OF THE RESEARCH**

The study is qualitative and it adopts the psychoanalytic method of analysis according to the theory of psychosocial development in the human life cycle as formulated by Erik Erikson. The analysis focuses on the crucial stage in this development where individuals confront an identity crisis and attempt to resolve it by relinquishing their former self-concept formed during childhood or adolescence and establishing an adult identity. The identity established is the result of various internal and external factors that have caused and affected the resolution of the crisis. The researcher shows how the postmodernist poets Alice Oswald, Carol Ann Duffy and Louise Glück tackled the subject of identity crisis in their works. The characteristics and symptoms of identity crisis as elaborated by Erik Erikson are applied in this study to the characters created in the poetic works *Dart* (2002), *The World's Wife* (1999), and *The Seven Ages* (2001).

## **HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH**

It is hypothesized in this thesis that the three postmodern poets Alice Oswald, Carol Ann Duffy and Louise Glück address the issue of identity crisis in their works *Dart* (2002), *The World's Wife* (1999), and *The Seven Ages* (2001) respectively to express their views on the factors that lead to the crisis and the different possible resolutions of the crisis resulting in the assertion of a new identity. The characters sketched in their poetry are exposed to various situations, events and problems in their lives which they encounter alone, with physical and natural forces, with other human beings, or even with animals and supernatural creatures. These experiences lead to an identity crisis and contribute to its resolution and the establishment of a new identity according to the principles of the Eriksonian theory of human development.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The research addresses issues arising from the transformation of an immature personality or a childhood and adolescent self-concept to an adult identity as a result of the resolution of identity crisis confronted by the characters in Alice Oswald's *Dart*

(2002), Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999), and Louise Glück's *The Seven Ages* (2001). It attempts to identify the implications and the message the three poets communicate about identity crisis and its resolution.

## **SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS / DIFFICULTIES**

The current study is confined to the discussion of the subject of identity crisis in Alice Oswald's *Dart* (2002), Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999), and Louise Glück's *The Seven Ages* (2001) focusing on the poets' presentation and treatment of the topic. The difficulties confronted throughout the research lie in the attempt at clarifying the intricate web of internal and external factors that lead to identity crisis, determine its resolution, and shape its various possible outcomes. This is primarily due to the fact that, as Erikson once explained, a large number of beliefs, views and different, even conflicting, conceptions have grown around the term "identity crisis" that made even its definition very difficult to establish. Besides, owing to the subtle, concise and intricate nature of postmodern poetry, the researcher found the application of the theory of psychosocial development in general and the subject of identity crisis in particular to the selected works a challenging and quite demanding task.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the study is to establish a relation between Erik Erikson's concept of identity crisis as part of his theory of psychosocial development of the human life cycle and Alice Oswald's *Dart* (2002), Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999), and Louise Glück's *The Seven Ages* (2001). In this respect, a new psychoanalytic layer of meaning is identified in these texts which brings to light an important message conveyed by the poets discussed regarding perspectives of human development and self-improvement.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study finds that the three postmodern poets Alice Oswald, Carol Ann Duffy and Louise Glück present the subject of identity crisis in their works *Dart* (2002), *The World's Wife* (1999), and *The Seven Ages* (2001) respectively, as a crucial stage in the development of the characters they sketch. It also finds that although the three poets showed interest in the subject, they differed in their way of portraying and approaching identity crisis, and they incorporated their different approaches into the themes and poetic techniques they employed. In this way, they opened a new vista of the interpretation of identity crisis within a literary framework and at the same time arrived at solutions and recommendations regarding identity issues that might be encountered in reality.





# CHAPTER ONE

## AN INTRODUCTION TO IDENTITY CRISIS

Even a negative identity, as society defines it, is preferable to no identity, although it is not as satisfactory as a positive identity.

Duane and Sydney Schultz, *Theories of Personality* (2005)

### 1.1. DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF IDENTITY

In his book *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Erik Erikson (1968) states that the terms “identity” and “identity crisis” are, on the one hand, so broad that defining them would be inadequate, because they encompass a wide range of ideas, and, on the other hand, so narrow when used for purposes of psychoanalytic measurement that their meaning would be lost in the definition (Erikson, 1968, p. 15). Jackson (2006) likewise contends that “identity is not easily defined” (p. 179). Erikson’s paradoxical view of the two terms as both too broad and too narrow to define requires a detailed introduction that could provide an adequate description and a thorough explanation of their elements and aspects as well as the mental processes, ideas and factors associated with identity and identity crisis.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “identity” refers to “the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else” (*OED*, “Identity”). The branch of psychology concerned with the study of human identity is known as “ego psychology” (Kazdin, 2000, p. 235), because, according to psychoanalysis, the ego is the part of the human mind responsible for the formation of identity (Engler, 2013, p. 66). Stephanie Taylor (2014) points out that the many uses of the term “identity” have rendered it difficult to define. She states that identity involves any answer to the question “Who am I?” and can be defined in terms of a person’s connection to a group or disconnection with it (p. 933). In the field of social sciences in general, the word “identity” is used as a general term to describe how an individual understands himself or herself and the way he or she is recognized by other individuals. It also refers to the “stable sense of self,

including commitment to social and sexual roles and beliefs about the purpose and meaning of life” (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 246). Bonnie Strickland (2001) defines identity as “a person’s mental representation of who he or she is” (p. 322). A more detailed definition is provided by Gary Vandebos (2015), who holds that the term “identity” denotes

an individual’s sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles. Identity involves a sense of continuity, or the feeling that one is the same person today that one was yesterday or last year (despite physical or other changes). Such a sense is derived from one’s body sensations, one’s body image, and the feeling that one’s memories, goals, values, expectations, and beliefs belong to the self. (p. 519)

The search for and establishment of an identity constitute an essential need for individuals and an essential requirement for a healthy personality. In her book *Personality Theories*, Barbara Engler (2013) observes that children at a very early stage set out on a quest for identity and, as they grow up and enter the period of adulthood, they make it their mission to continuously review and reflect the identity they attain (p. 2). Identity is regarded as one of the six basic needs that every individual should fulfill in order to achieve a mentally healthy, stable and fully developed personality (Engler, 2013, p. 125). Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2009) in their book *Human Development* stress the fact that the “main developmental task of adolescence is the search for identity – personal, sexual, and occupational. As adolescents become physically mature, they must deal with sometimes conflicting needs and emotions as they prepare to leave the parental nest” (p. 7). Duane and Sydney Schultz (2005) point out that “to have an identity as a unique individual is a basic human need” (p. 187). The consequences of the absence of identity in a person could be very unpleasant. In his book *The Sane Society*, German social psychologist Erich Fromm (2002) states that establishing an identity is an imperative need for every individual, and if this need is not fulfilled, human

beings would become insane and this in turn would produce an insane society. He believes that the human need to have an identity is even more powerful than the need to survive:

The problem of the sense of identity is not, as it is usually understood, merely a philosophical problem, or a problem only concerning our mind and thought. The need to feel a sense of identity stems from the very condition of human existence, and it is the source of the most intense strivings. Since I cannot remain sane without the sense of "I," I am driven to do almost anything to acquire this sense. Behind the intense passion for status and conformity is this very need, and it is sometimes even stronger than the need for physical survival. What could be more obvious than the fact that people are willing to risk their lives, to give up their love, to surrender their freedom, to sacrifice their own thoughts, for the sake of being one of the herd, of conforming, and thus of acquiring a sense of identity, even though it is an illusory one. (p. 61)

As Erik Erikson once put it, "Deprivation of identity can lead to murder" (Erikson, 1950, p. 216). On the other hand, the presence of a sense of identity is important because it serves as a prime motivator and a call for action and behavior. Daphna Oyserman (2015) states that "once an identity (and its implications for behavior) comes to mind, people prefer to act in ways that are consonant with it" (p. 9).

## 1.2. HISTORY AND TYPES OF IDENTITY

In terms of scope, psychologists distinguish four different types of identity that can be detected in individuals: personal, relational, group and collective identities. These types have their roots in human history. According to Fromm (2002), the emergence of types of identity can be traced back to medieval Europe when the feudal system pre-determined one's identity as either a lord or a peasant. It was after the feudal system broke down that people found themselves in an identity vacuum and consequently had to think of acquiring one. It was this vacuum situation, Fromm

contends, that compelled the French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) to introduce the philosophical dictum “Cogito, ergo sum” (translated into English as “I think, therefore I am”). Few took the hard way and followed individualism, establishing their own personal and unique identities, but the majority took the easy way and resorted to religion, nation, class and occupation that readily provided them with a group identity (Fromm, 2002, pp.59-60).

A personal identity is defined in modern psychology as a set of traits that distinguish an individual from other individuals (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 244). It is distinct from a relational identity, which is defined as a set of characteristics that an individual displays when interacting with other people. A person may for example display tenderness when interacting with his or her spouse (or with members of the other sex), cheerfulness when interacting with friends, and cautiousness when interacting with strangers. As David Matsumoto (2009) explains, tenderness, cheerfulness and cautiousness in this case would be considered part of that individual’s relational identity (p. 244).

In contrast to personal and relational identity, a group identity involves risks to personality and identity formation. Succumbing to a group often results in the loss of personal identity, and this in turn renders an individual passive to external motivations and ideas, eliminating critical thinking and self-evaluation. Duane and Sydney Schultz (2005) state that

People who conform completely have sacrificed their personality. This loss of self leaves the person with insecurity and doubt. No longer possessing a separate identity or personality, the person functions ... like an automaton or robot, in response to what others expect or demand. This new identity, the false one, can be maintained only through continued conformity. (p. 180)

This process of identifying oneself with a group is referred to as “deindividuation”, and people who are deindividuated do not discern themselves as distinct from the group they

belong to (Roeckelein, (1998, p. 135). Individuals in such societies do not make their decisions on their own without the consent or approval of the group they identify themselves with (Murphy, 2009, p. 303). An example of a readymade identity is religious identity, which is established through “self-identification with a religious tradition” (Spitzer, 2010, p. 776).

Group identity has been elaborated by Polish social psychologist Henri Tajfel as part of his social identity theory (McLeod, 2019). Tajfel (1984) proposes that a group provides an individual with a sense of self-esteem, pride, security and a feeling of belonging. According to Tajfel, the acquisition of social identity takes place at three consequent stages. The first of these stages is referred to as “categorization”, during which the individual classifies the group in question in terms of race, religion, occupation, educational background, ethnic background, nationality or in any other terms. The purpose of categorization is to understand the group at this initial phase. The second stage is called “identification”, at which the individual, after recognizing the group as worthy, begins to identify himself or herself with the group. This identification process is associated with emotional attachment and imitation of the group patterns of conduct and frame of mind. The last stage is called “comparison”, during which the individual compares the group he or she now belongs to with other groups. This stage is necessary to maintain one’s identity, self-esteem and integrity, and it may generate feelings of prejudice and hostility, particularly when rival groups come into play and compete with the individual’s group (Tajfel, 1984, pp.526-538). It may also lead to “identity denial”, a term used to refer to the situation when a community or a social group does not acknowledge or recognize an individual as one of its members (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 246).

Another type of identity is the collective type. It is defined as a set of characteristics that make an individual similar to other individuals. They include gender, nationality, language, occupation, religion, race and ethnicity (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). In times of social upheavals and turmoil, the presence of these cultural components of identity might be threatened resulting in “the breakdown of symbols of collective identity” (Erikson, 1963, p. 39). In Jungian psychology, an individual’s sense of collective identity might widen to encompass all traits of the human race. This type

of development results in the integration of the diverse aspects of personality into these traits. Carl Jung refers to this process as “transcendence” (Engler, 2013, p. 76). In their study *Living Deeply*, Schlitz, Vieten and Amorok (2007) sum up their findings on identity as follows: “Our research shows that through the transformative process your personal identity and circle of concern expand to include other people, future generations, and ultimately all of nature” (p. 188). The process of transcendence, which is responsible for shaping the collective identity, is the opposite of “individuation”, which is the process responsible for the development of a personal identity whereby an individual feels autonomous, independent and unique (Hogan, 1997, p. 218). The collective identity is regarded as the ideal type because it encompasses culture as a whole and transcends time (Meyer, Engel, & Pickering, 2011, p.13). Erikson (1963) explains that “one of the chief tasks of identity formation is the creation of a sense of self that will link the past, the present, and the future” (p. 179). This ideal state of identity could be achieved when a person has the capacity to “lean on all previous experience, maintaining awareness and creativity with a new grace” (Erikson, 1987, p. 7). Erikson also calls it the “existential identity” and it constitutes the

integration of past, present, and future. It transcends the self and underscores the presence of intergenerational links. It is universal in its acceptance of the human condition. Part of the human condition is to lack wisdom about ourselves and our planet. We must become aware of how little we know. Perhaps we could wisely become like little children who are willing to live, love, and learn openly. (1987, p. 7)

To arrive at this elevated mode of thinking, an individual needs a special mental capacity that can “operate on hypothetical propositions and can think of possible variables and potential relations-and think of them in thought alone, independent of certain concrete checks previously necessary” (Erikson, 1968, p. 245). In other words, a person can create countless mental scenarios of identity crises and their probable resolutions without having to go through them in order to gain wisdom and predict outcomes. Erikson (1966) notes that this mental capacity had already been observed by the Swiss psychologists Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder during their experiments on the

thought processes in adolescents, in whom they detected a rapid development of a hypothetical and deductive mode of thinking. Erikson (1966) states,

the adolescent, before beginning to manipulate the material at hand, as the pre-adolescent would do with little hesitation waits and hypothesizes on the possible results, even as he lingers after the experiment and tries to fathom the truth behind the known results. (p. 49)

A recent development in psychoanalysis in line with Erikson's explanation is the interpretation of identity as a life story. In their book *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative*, Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich (2006) view identity as a cohesive entity that lends unity to an individual's past, present and future. Identity is formed by a set of "imagoes", which the authors define as images of the self constructed around experiences and interpersonal relations (p. 20). This view of identity helps make predictions about an individual's future conduct and evolving personality.

### 1.3. IDENTITY FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The process by which an individual establishes his or her identity is referred to as "identity formation" (Crocetti and Meeus, 2015, p. 108). The term "identity development" is used to refer to the manner human beings improve or alter their views about themselves in relation to their social environment (Ollendick, 2003, p. 303). Prior to identity formation and development, an individual has a primitive version of identity which psychologists generally refer to as "self-concept". Although the terms "identity" and "self-concept" are used interchangeably in layman discourse, in psychoanalysis they are distinct from each other. As Hogan, Johnson and Briggs (1997) explain,

Identity differs from self-concept in that it is socially defined. That is, the self-concept is wholly contained in the person's own mind, whereas identity is often created by the larger society, although individuals typically have some opportunity to refine or negotiate the identities that society gives them (p. 682)

Richard Ryckman (2008) likewise states that self-concept is based on the expectations of other people. It is shaped and driven by the need to please other people and win their approval (p. 473). David Statt (2003) describes self-concept as set of incoherent and inconsistent images a person has of oneself, including the “self-image” which is the self a child believes itself to be (p. 119). Boeree (2017) describes self-image as “the looking-glass self, the me as others see me. This is the impression I make on others, my look, my social esteem or status, including my sexual identity. It is the beginning of conscience, ideal self, and persona” (p. 153). A raw and primitive version of identity could be traced back to infancy when it is crudely limited to self-awareness. When infants are two months old, they begin to realize that they can manipulate their environment because they find out that they are the cause of specific events. This realization makes them aware that they, and not others, are making these events happen, so they become conscious of their independence and separation from others. When an infant is one and a half years old, it begins to develop self-recognition in addition to self-awareness. Self-recognition means that infants start building a physical image of themselves as they explore their bodies, such as their hands and legs, and as they begin to realize that these bodies belong to them. Psychological research experiments involving infants viewing their reflections in mirrors have supported this theory (Ollendick, 2003, p. 303).

At the age of two when infancy turns to early childhood, children begin to add a new layer to their self-concept. This layer comprises their awareness of the differences between them and others, particularly differences in terms of gender and age (Ollendick, 2003, p. 303). The period of early childhood normally ends at the age of five, when children move up to the period known in child psychology as middle childhood. Just before the transition to middle childhood, a crucial development takes place. Children for the first time begin to realize that other people may not share their thoughts. This awareness of the disparity between their ideas and others’ ideas is referred to as “theory of mind” (Ollendick, 2003, p. 304). The development of this theory of mind is important in the child’s later acquisition of identity. It helps children shift their ability to view themselves from a hitherto external, physical and concrete perspective to an internal, psychological and abstract perspective. They start describing their mental capacities in comparison to others, especially their significant others. However, at this stage they



tend to believe that their mental traits are consistent. It is not until they reach adolescence that they realize their traits may change with the changing social setting or environment. Middle childhood is also the period when children become aware of their talents and start defining themselves in terms of the skills they possess in contrast to other people (Ollendick, 2003, p. 304).

#### 1.4. ERIKSON'S THEORY OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

After the death of Sigmund Freud in 1939, German-born American psychoanalyst Erik Homburger Erikson (1902-1994), who followed in Freud's footsteps, came to be regarded as "the leader of the psychoanalytic movement after Freud" (Ewen, 2003, p. 2). His expansion of Freudianism is fourfold. First, he showed how the ego is affected by social, genetic and cultural factors. Secondly, he provided further details on the social aspects involved in Freud's explanation of the stages of human development. Thirdly, he broadened these stages of human development to encompass the entire period of human life from birth through old age. Finally, he examined closely the effect of cultural and historical factors in shaping and developing an individual's personality (Engler, 2013, p. 139).

Erikson's major contribution to the field of psychoanalysis is his theory of psychosocial development, which builds on Freud's psychosexual stage development theory (Roeckelein, 1998, p. 167). There is also an essential point of discrepancy between Freud and Erikson regarding the time they believe an individual's identity ripens. While Freud states that an individual's sense of identity is established during adolescence and at times even prior to adolescence, Erikson argues that an individual's fully fledged identity cannot be formed until at least the end of the period of adolescence. This is in fact the main difference between the Freudian and Eriksonian theory of identity (Evans, 1995, p. 29).

Erikson's analysis of identity and the issues related to it as well as his psychosocial theory of development, are more elaborate than Freud's psychosexual theory and "took a more expansive view of development" (Kendra, 2019). For this reason, Erikson is also regarded as the "architect of identity" and his theories on personality development and identity formation have remained valid and practical to the

present day and are still being used within the fields of psychology, education and sociology (Salkind, 2008, p. 351). Phillip Hammack (2015) notes that “no scholar is more associated with the identity concept in the social sciences than Erik Erikson” (p. 17). One reason could be Erikson’s deep personal concern with identity due to the fact that he himself suffered from an identity crisis, a term which Erikson is said to have coined later in the 1940s, owing to issues related mainly to his parentage as well as other ethnic, religious and vocational issues he faced. His parents concealed from him the fact that they were not his biological parents, so that by the time he realized the truth he had to struggle with the quest for his true identity (Engler, 2013, p. 138; Schultz, 2005, p. 220). What added to his identity crisis was his departure from Vienna in 1933 and settlement in Boston. This made him confront various immigration issues, launching a new phase of severe culture clash and the need to adapt to a new social, political and economic background (Hoare, 2002, p. 9).

Erikson’s theory of the developmental human life cycle and the notion of identity crisis have had a lasting influence on western culture (Schlein, 2016, p. 2). In his book *Childhood and Society* (1950), and particularly in Chapter 7 entitled “Eight Stages of Man” in the book, Erikson introduces his theory of the stages of psychosocial human development and he coins the term “identity crisis” discussing it as part of this development. This work has been hailed as an “important book extending Freud’s developmental theory” (Crews, 1970, p. 286). Erikson in this book emphasizes the interaction between the individual and society as a significant factor in personality development. He states that a person’s development depends on his or her involvement with the surrounding environment. This interaction entails a struggle between external social forces and internal psychological forces, hence the term “psychosocial” development (Roedelein, (1998, p. 167). These stages occur from infancy through adulthood to old age. Each stage involves a crisis of some sort which could affect personality in a positive or negative manner depending on how the crisis is resolved by the ego. The successful resolution of the crises pertaining to these eight stages would result in developing a psychologically healthy personality, defined as “the sum total of all the factors that make an individual human being both individual and human” (Statt, 2003, p. 100). Each developmental stage depends on the resolution of the previous stage for its outcome. For the personality to be developed in a healthy and effective manner,

the resolution of the stages should be successful, and the term “successful” in this Eriksonian context refers to the individual’s ability to synthesize conflicting personal needs with social requirements in a way that an adaptation is achieved (Cordón, 2005, p. 77). In other words, mental health is the outcome of the “configuration” of self to society (Erikson, 1987, p. 20). One should avoid the two extremes of either “individualistic identification with the self” or the “obedient fusion with an available set of social roles” (Erikson, 1975, p. 72). The failure to establish a sound identity is ascribed by Erikson (1958) to either the absence or incoherence of the provision of identity elements during childhood, or the pressure of acute perplexing circumstances during early or even late adulthood (p. 33).

The fifth stage in the Eriksonian epigenetic sequence of psychological development is called “Identity versus Role Confusion”. It occurs during puberty and adolescence around the ages thirteen through eighteen. It is the crucial stage that involves a transition from childhood to adulthood when the ego is at work to form an identity (Statt, 2003, p. 48). Puberty precedes adolescence and is defined as “the period of life when the sex organs become fully functional” lasting approximately from thirteen to fifteen years of age (Sutherland, 1995, p. 375). Adolescence follows puberty and is defined as “the period of human development that starts with puberty ... and ends with physiological maturity” (Vandenbos, 2015, p. 23). It starts around fifteen years of age and ends at the age of eighteen, though age parameters vary from one individual to another.

### 1.5. IDENTITY CRISIS

Erikson is often referred to as “the father of the identity crisis” (Kazdin, 2000, p. 235). In the chapter entitled “Crisis of the Identity Crisis” in his book *Discussions of a New Identity*, Erikson (1974) tries to show how the notion of identity crisis itself is confronting a crisis due to the various complications, interpretations and conceptions that have grown around the term along the years (p. 34). For this reason, it is important in the present study to provide an accurate and detailed description of the term.

Following the birth and evolution of psychoanalysis, the experience of identity crisis came to be regarded as a normal phase in life that individuals should confront in

order to establish their personalities and attain mental stability. Prior to the twentieth century, however, when neither the term itself nor psychology as a science were known, individuals facing an identity crisis were condemned as lacking in religious faith, discipline or common sense (Hogan, 1997, p. 684).

According to the unabridged *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “identity crisis” is defined as “a phase of varying severity undergone by an individual in his need to establish his identity in relation to his associates and society as part of the process of maturing” (*OED*, “Identity”). As a specific psychological term, “identity crisis” is said to refer to

A state of uncertainty about one’s role, purpose, and meaning in life which is typical of adolescence and tends to resolve in late adolescence or early adulthood as the individual gains a sense of place and purpose in the larger society and gains a sense of commitment to social and sexual roles (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 246).

Barbara Engler (2013) describes identity crisis as used in Erikson’s theory as a “transitory failure to establish a stable identity” (p. 460). It is typically and normally characterized by an acute sense of instability, disorientation and uncertainty as to what part one should play in the community and what one’s goals are (Sutherland, 1995, p. 216). In their attempt to overcome this crisis, adolescents may identify, or even over-identify, with popular figures, pop stars, movie stars, teachers, fictional heroes, or film heroes (Strickland, 2001, p. 322; Harper, 2006, p. 60). One of the salient characteristics of identity crisis is the individual’s attempt to be less reliant on his or her parents and to be associated with, and influenced by, friends and peers (Ollendick, 2003, p. 11). The word “crisis” in this psychoanalytic term should not be confused with its popular layman usage. As Jess and Gregory Feist (2006) point out, “Contrary to popular usage, an identity crisis is not a catastrophic event but rather an opportunity for either adaptive or maladaptive adjustment” (p. 248).

Identity crisis could occur at any point in time in human life. Matsumoto (2009) makes this point clear when he states that “in some individuals the crisis continues throughout adulthood, preventing them from settling into identification with particular adult social roles” (p. 246). Bohleber (2010) likewise points out that this prolonging of the process of identity formation is particularly true in the modern world where “Identity formation no longer ends in late adolescence; it remains open and frequently assumes the character of a life-long project” (p. 20). It has been observed that “Erikson saw the search for identity as a lifelong task” (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2009, p. 256). Erikson himself states that the term originated at the time he and a group of other psychiatrists were administering therapy to patients who had suffered from a sense of loss and confusion during World War II (Erikson, 1960, p. 17). Similarly, Strickland (2001) states that a “variety of changes that affect one’s work, status, or interpersonal relationships can bring on a crisis that forces one to redefine oneself in terms of values, priorities, and chosen activities or lifestyle” (p. 323). Papalia, Olds, and Feldman (2009) also contend that “an identity crisis is seldom fully resolved in adolescence; issues concerning identity crop up again and again throughout adult life” (p. 390). They observe that “the midlife crisis was conceptualized as a crisis of identity; indeed, it has been called a second adolescence” (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2009, p. 522). Boeree (2017) observes that whenever an individual asks the question, “Who am I?”, he or she is suffering from identity crisis (p. 47). Even at the eighth stage of the Eriksonian psychosocial development, which starts at the age of fifty, “the old person must learn to finish himself or herself as an ego and establish a new and broader identity” (Boeree, 2017, p. 52). Kenneth Hoover (2004) notices that identity crisis is integrated within what is commonly known as “midlife crisis” (p. 52). In her book *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life*, Gail Sheehy (2013) states that the mentally healthiest period for experiencing and resolving an identity crisis is adolescence. She argues that “If one doesn’t have an identity crisis at this point, it will erupt during a later transition, when the penalties may be harder to bear” (p. 25). She also points out that this delay in resolving the identity crisis is more common in women than in men, due to the restrictions and limitations that are traditionally and socially imposed upon women in general: “The problem has been that most young women wouldn’t dare or weren’t allowed to have an identity crisis. And so they never quite grew up” (p. 44).

In addition to the time of its occurrence, the duration and frequency of an identity crisis likewise depend on internal and external factors and vary from one individual to another. Jess and Gregory Feist (2006) observe that it may last for a short time or it may “last for many years and can result in either greater or lesser ego strength” (p. 255), and it could even occur more than once in an individual’s lifetime (pp.433-436). According to Erik Erikson, an identity crisis occurs whenever a person’s objectives and wishes are posed against the expectations of the social environment of family and the other community members to be evaluated. It is the pivot point between person and society (McAdams, 2006, p. 167). During adolescence, an individual’s self-concept confronts an “identity crisis”, during which images and concepts of oneself are combined, integrated and made to cohere into a consistent identity (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). There are two factors, Erik Erikson explains, that render this period – at which self-concept develops into an identity – a “crisis”. The first factor is internal, and it comprises abrupt physical, biological and emotional changes an adolescent undergoes at this time. The abrupt occurrence of these changes generates a sense of loss, confusion and instability. This is a state that Erikson calls “identity confusion”, and it could happen to an individual at any age (Erikson, 1960, p. 142). Confusion, according to Erikson (1987), is defined as “the antithesis of identity” (p. 20). The other factor is external, and it consists of the amount of psychological pressure placed on the adolescent at this stage by society, peers, elders and parents, all of whom require the adolescent to perform new tasks, shoulder new responsibilities, live up to new expectations, redefine his or her social relations, and adapt to new challenges (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). It is important for the success of identity formation process that an individual possesses a degree of social commitments. In other words, a number of social or group values should go into the making of an individual’s healthy identity. Otherwise, an individual would suffer from a sense of “fragmented self” (Salkind, 2008, p. 352). Robert Ewen (2003) also observes that the state of identity crisis involves “feelings of inner fragmentation, little or no sense of where one’s life is headed, and an inability to gain the support provided by a social role or vocation. The sufferer may feel like an outcast or wanderer, or not quite somebody” (p. 171).

## 1.6. IDENTITY CRISIS RESOLUTION

The resolution of an identity crisis denotes the establishment of an identity. The identity established could be positive, incorporating such traits as courage, honesty, generosity, kindness, intelligence, resourcefulness, talent and optimism. This is the form of identity whereby an individual succeeds in playing a meaningful role in a community. His or her role is characterized by productivity and a significance attached to it by the other members of the community. Such an accomplishment of identity requires external support from other members of the community. Erikson defines the successful process of establishing a positive identity as “identity consolidation”, and this process involves “making adjustments to the changing demands of our social world” (Schultz, 2005, p. 239). The resolution of a crisis could, on the other hand, result in a negative identity, comprising such characteristics as laziness, weakness, reluctance, pessimism and a shortage of self-confidence. The outcome is the individual’s failure to adopt a positive role or to become productive. The role adopted instead violates the principles or values set by the community. According to Erikson, the term “negative identity” is defined as “an identity at odds with the dominant values of one’s culture” (Engler, 2013, p. 462). The cause of the development of a negative identity is either the lack of support or the unavailability of favorable circumstances. The consequences of a negative identity may range from a mild case of prejudice to serious crime (Engler, 2013, p. 143).

Erikson outlines three stages, referred to as “identity commitments”, through which an identity crisis could be resolved and an identity may consequently be established. The first of these commitments is the individual’s selection of an occupation. This decision would help identify the individual’s notion of his or her future career path and define one’s relations with a number of other members of the community. The second commitment is forming and maintaining a view of and an attitude towards the world, religion and politics. The third commitment is identifying and living up to a specific gender role deemed fit for one’s age and social environment (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245).

Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice (1985) as well as Hogan (1997) state that the resolution of a crisis could bring about two outcomes. The first is “identity deficit”, which occurs during the period of adolescence and during middle age. It is characterized

by the individual's rejection of the values that he or she has been previously observing. A teenager in this condition typically rejects parental authority. A middle aged individual with an identity deficit typically experiences a mild case of depression over the passing of time and the brevity of life. The second type of outcome is known as "identity conflict". It is experienced when the individual has several conflicting commitments, such as domestic responsibilities as opposed to occupational duties, or one's belief in religious values as opposed to one's ethically vague professional commitments. Examining the factors that determine the outcome of an identity crisis could help in controlling the desired resulting identity and in understanding the individual's personality and thus guiding him or her towards achieving sound and positive goals (Hogan, 1997, p. 696).

By the age of twenty-one, fifty percent of adolescents resolve their identity crisis and are ready for adulthood, which is the next phase in life. The other half of the number of adolescents, who are not ready for adulthood, have either not resolved their identity crisis or have not faced a crisis at all (Strickland, 2001, p. 322).

### 1.7. THE ERIKSONIAN EPIGENETIC SEQUENCE

In *Childhood and Society* (1950), Erikson introduces the term "epigenesis" – which derives from the Greek words "epi" (meaning "upon") and "genesis" (meaning "emergence") – to describe the sequence of stages of psychosocial development that a person undergoes from birth to death, through which psychological maturity can be achieved, if these stages are addressed and resolved effectively (Erikson, 1950, p. 247). The successful resolution of an identity crisis depends on the outcome of the previous four stages in the Eriksonian epigenetic sequence of psychological development. Through synthesis and assimilation, an individual should incorporate previous experiences into new present experiences and form a compatible entity that would become part of one's identity (Salkind, 2008, p. 352).

The first of these four stages is called "Trust versus Mistrust". It occurs during the first year of a child's age. This period is crucial because it is the time when a child develops a feeling of either trust or mistrust about the surrounding environment. The outcome of this stage depends on whether the basic drives of the child, which at this



phase of life are confined to food, comfort, sleep and attachment, are satisfied or frustrated. Drive satisfaction results in a trusting relationship, whereas drive frustration leads to mistrust. The psychosocial virtues within this stage are hope and faith. The maladaptation and malignancies during this period are sensory distortion and withdrawal. The second stage of development occurs at the age of three and Erikson calls it “Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt”. At this stage, children learn how to be independent. If they are given the chance, the freedom, the encouragement and the support to learn and investigate their environment, they exhibit a desire for independence and creativity. On the other hand, if they are restricted and reprimanded for their attempts to investigate their world, they develop a sense of shame, self-doubt and reliance. The psychosocial virtues at this stage are will and determination. Its maladaptation and malignancies are impulsivity and compulsion. Between the ages of three and five, children pass through the third stage of development called “Initiative versus Guilt”. Within this period, children begin to take initiatives towards their environment, expecting specific results from their social environment. If these results fulfill their expectations, they develop a sense of leadership and initiation. If, on the other hand, their expectations are thwarted and if they find the consequences of their initiatives contrary to what they expected, they develop feelings of guilt. This stage has purpose and courage for its psychosocial virtues, and ruthlessness and inhibition for its malignancies.

The fourth stage is called “Industry versus Inferiority” and it lasts from five to twelve years of age. Children during this period make attempts at becoming industrious and try to acquire various types of skills within their domestic and school environment. If their attempts are met with sufficient support, encouragement and reward, they develop a general sense of competence. On the other hand, if their attempts are thwarted, curbed or ridiculed, they develop a feeling of inferiority (Strickland, 2001, pp.183-184). Competence is the main psychosocial virtue at this stage, while narrow virtuosity and inertia are among its malignancies. The outcomes of these stages together combine to contribute to the eventual resolution of one’s identity crisis. It is therefore important that the outcome of each stage is mentally healthy. Establishing a negative identity could be as psychologically unhealthy as not establishing an identity at all. For example, obtaining an identity with low self-esteem could lead to depression, low self-confidence,

low academic achievement and inability to have effective social relationships (Ollendick, 2003, p. 305; Boeree, 2017, p. 43).

## 1.8. FACTORS DETERMINING IDENTITY CRISIS AND ITS RESOLUTION

A complex web of internal and external factors and the interaction among them determine the resolution of an identity crisis in an individual in terms of type, time and duration and shape the resulting identity that is established. While some of these shaping factors are external, others are internal. These factors are discussed below.

### 1.8.1. EXTERNAL FACTORS

Robert Hogan (1993) points out that “Although we like to imagine identity crises as somehow bubbling up from inside, they seem instead to occur in response to various life and environmental demands” (p. 182). Most prominent among these external factors that determine the resolution of a crisis and the shaping of the resulting identity are the culture, type of community and social environment, social context, and race that an individual is associated with.

The identity established after the resolution of a crisis could be culture specific. Personal identity in some cultures prevail over collective identity, while in some other cultures the latter identity type dominates (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). In the United States and Western Europe, for instance, personal identity seems to be the norm due to the high value placed in these cultures on individualization, democratization and self-independence (Bohleber, 2010, p. 16). In South American and East Asian nations, on the other hand, collective identity is the norm, owing to the priority given in these communities to collaboration, social integration, blood ties and family relations (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). The term “persona” as used by the psychiatrist Carl Jung is akin to the idea of social identity discussed earlier, but it differs from it in purpose. While social identity functions as a means of establishing personality, the persona functions as a means of concealing one’s true identity. Consequently, a persona represents a compromise that strikes a balance between an individual’s true identity and his or her collective or social identity. If an individual suppresses his or her persona, he or she becomes “asocial”. Conversely, giving rein to the persona marginalizes one’s

true identity and this may curb the development of important and potential personality traits in an individual (Engler, 2013, p. 69).

The community individuals live in can affect the resolution of their identity crises. People who live in a capitalist society, for instance, often find themselves obliged to resort to the acquisition of wealth in order to possess a sense of identity. A community which tends to be authoritarian, on the other hand, compels its members to align themselves with leadership and patriotism in order to achieve a sense of identity (Engler, 2013, p. 125). Of the members of community who affect the development of one's identity, the individuals often referred to as "significant others" have the greatest impact on determining the resolution of the crisis (Engler, 2013, p. 159). These significant others include family members, friends, classmates, colleagues and any other people a person would associate himself or herself with most. It is through interaction with these significant others that an identity becomes gradually crystalized established. Even when new people are encountered and new social relationships are constructed, there is often a human tendency to repeat the conceptions and patterns of behavior experienced and established with one's significant others. Variations in social relationships may ensue, but such variations are difficult to make or maintain (Engler, 2013, p. 159).

General social dysfunction and social restrictions could also negatively affect the process of identity crisis resolution. French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) introduced the term "anomie" to refer to a condition where social values collapse and, as a result, the individuals in such a society experience a sense of loss and confusion as to the meaning and establishment of their identity (Statt, 2003, p. 7). The age-old struggle to acquire or impose an identity has also complicated the process of resolution. As Stephanie Taylor (2014) points out, human history teems with cases where identities have been stripped from people or imposed upon them, alternative identity claims have been denied, and calls for self-definition rights have been silenced (p. 934). Botting (1996) sees the postmodern dehumanized environment with its focus on technology and machines as the cause of the "loss of human identity and the alienation of self from both itself and the social bearings" (p. 157).

Prior to the nineteenth century, young individuals spent most of their time with their families. Their occupation, religious and political views, and their gender roles were therefore to a large extent both influenced and shaped by their parents. A young man, for example, would have to follow his father's profession. Remaining in close and constant contact with their parents and relatives would eliminate any chances of being influenced by outsiders or developing their own personal and independent notions, views and attitudes. Marriages were arranged by parents and spouses were approved of, if not selected, by them (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 246). With the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century and its further development and social impact during the nineteenth century, family ties were severed as a result of the rising obligation of finding work and accommodation outside the familial sphere. When adolescents would grow up and have to carve their own career elsewhere outside the family business, they find themselves compelled to depend on their own resources, form their own views and attitudes and be influenced by a host of other people they meet (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 246). Furthermore, the post-Marxist world rejected class stratification and therefore eliminated the old traditional class identity as an option (Taylor, 2014, p. 934). This is the case in the modern world, particularly in Western societies, where a high value is placed on individualism and self-independence. Individuals find themselves alone with their identity crises with no elders and experienced adults to offer guidance, provide advice or assistance to help them resolve their crises (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 246). Erikson (1950) states that in an industrialized world individuals need to "redefine" their sense of identity (p. 237). In the modern age, with its promotion of individual differences, uniqueness, originality and individuality, people have to face the "the social and psychological problems of achieving self-identity on a more mature basis, and of finding one's place in society" (Erikson, 1963, p. 64). The challenges that modern life has placed in front of individuals have made it difficult to resolve the crisis and establish a sound and stable identity. As Stephen Frosh (1991) observes:

It is in the nature of modernity to provoke crises of identity: that is what modernity is about, that is what supplies its immense energy and productiveness. Old rules have constantly to be re-written, as nothing can be taken for granted, no previous identity

accepted unquestioned; without 'identity crisis' there would be no momentum, no ever-stirring, never-ceasing change. (p. 191)

Werner Bohleber (2010) agrees upon this difficulty of resolving an identity crisis in modern communities and points out that

The erosion of social structures through rapid economic and technical developments has led to the dissolution of former identity-guiding social roles and schemata, entities that had previously helped the individual to construct a somewhat coherent identity. Today, lifestyles have become increasingly atomized, as freedom of choice and the right to individuality and self-realization emerge as guiding principles. (p. 49)

The term “self-identity” in psychoanalysis thus refers to the way individuals perceive themselves (Ryckman, 2008, p. 272). The identity crisis that such individuals experience could therefore be prolonged and might be carried over through adulthood. Failure to resolve the crisis could lead to serious mental problems such as “dissociative identity disorder” (Kazdin, 2000, p. 57). Its resolution might take place late in life or might not occur at all. This tends not to be the case in East Asian and South American communities, where commitment to one’s family and social traditions and norms are still of an essence. In these communities, the individual’s identity crisis is by contrast resolved early in life (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 246).

Context is another factor that determines the resolution of an identity crisis. In situations where individuals find themselves with peers or in a group where they feel similar to other group members, the sense of personal identity is triggered (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). Personal identity also tends to prevail when individuals are alone or isolated from others. On the other hand, when individuals find themselves surrounded by people whom they feel different from, the sense of collective identity is triggered. “[A]n American,” contends Matsumoto through an example, “is more likely to be thinking of her national identity when she visits a foreign land than when she is in her home country” (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). The same could be said of English people

(Webster, 1998, p. 10). Consequently, while personal identity is activated by the individual's awareness of being similar to others, the sense of collective identity is triggered by the individual's awareness of being distinct from others (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). Relational identity prevails when an individual is interacting with others, as when an individual is conversing with his / her father or mother. Thinking about other people can also trigger relational identity, as when a person meets or sees a woman who resembles his or her mother (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). In addition to people as shapers of an individual's identity, other factors include the activities an individual engages in, and a place or even an object that individual is associated with. As Boeree (2017) points out, "Some find their identity in activities: I'm a psychologist, a student, a bricklayer. Some find identity in a place: my house, my hometown. ... If someone scratches my car, why do I feel like they just punched me?" (p. 153).

Erikson (1950) states that "under favourable circumstances children have the nucleus of a separate identity early in life" (p. 217). Particularly significant in this case are the two feelings of rejection and betrayal. Rejection is a denial of allegiance and betrayal is a violation of trust, both of which disrupt one's established identity and may lead to anger, disappointment and depression. The consequences these two feelings have on one's sense of identity depend on the degree of rejection and betrayal and the depth or type of relationship one has with the instigator (Hogan, 1997, pp.475-476). Examples of rejection and betrayal include suspension from school, conviction of felony or admission into a mental institution. Such acts may encourage the individual involved to adopt deviant behavior which may lead to a negative identity as a result of identifying oneself with the group forced into (such as school droppers, criminals or mentally disturbed patients). The outcome of identifying oneself with these groups reinforces the view of the rejecters who in turn may apply "additional stigmatization" (Hogan, 1997, p. 603). Traumas and exposure to harsh experiences in life such as accidents, loss or disease can also trigger an identity transformation process. In such painful circumstances, it is possible that an individual "steps away from the former life and the former identity and is completely out of control and completely surrenders –and then is reborn with a larger, expanded identity" (Schlitz, Vieten and Amorok, 2007, p. 37).

The problem of establishing an identity and the issues related to the resolution of its crisis become more prominent in individuals who choose to, or are forced to, move from one country to another. Immigrants often confront the dilemma of preserving their old identity, relinquishing it for a new identity, or trying to strike a balance between the two (Evans, 1995, p. 29). As a case in point, this is applicable to immigrants who choose to settle in the United States. Erikson, who himself faced this dilemma, explores this situation and states that “It's not only the first generation of Americans who face the problems of change, for they at least know where they came from and why they came. For the following generations apparently the problem of identity becomes a very central and disturbing one” (Evans, 1995, p. 29). A person who has not resolved his or her identity crisis yet before migration may have more options than those who already formed their identities prior to migration. According to Erikson's theory, “the person who has not adequately solved his identity problem earlier will frantically try to see whether he can still develop another identity. His life is not quite acceptable to him as the only life he will ever have” (Evans, 1995, p. 41). Erikson (1950) also observes that countries whose population is mainly formed through immigration like the United States attempt “to make a super identity out of all the identities imported by its constituent immigrants” (p. 256).

Research studies have also found that mobility in general has two major effects on an individual's sense of identity. It either weakens it or renders it ambivalent. On the one hand, when individuals find themselves within a new community, their feelings of alienation, inferiority and loss of communication weakens their sense of identity. On the other hand, they feel torn between their old identities which they possessed in the former social environment they had left behind and the new identity they strive to acquire within the new social context (Hogan, 1997, p. 433). Hogan (1997) states that an identity conflict is a serious issue for individuals who leave their homeland to settle in a heterogeneous country such as the United States where they mingle with multiple subgroups and subcultures with conflicting views (p. 602). This hybrid cultural environment may lead to a type of identity known as “multicultural identity”, which is defined as “the condition of having attachments with and loyalties toward different cultures” (Celenk and Van de Vijver, 2014, p. 277).

Since race is the classification of the human species into groups and sub-groups whether justifiable or not (Schaefer, 2008, p. 563), it is regarded as an external factor determining identity resolution and shaping its outcome. Erikson incorporates the notion of race into the umbrella concept of identity crisis. He states that race is one of the safe havens that individuals resort to when they try to resolve their identity crises. When people identify themselves with a particular race, they settle their identity issues and establish what Erikson terms “racial identity”, which is one type of identity that combines with others – such as professional identity and national identity – resulting in the phenomenon he names “identity explosion” (Evans, 1995, p. 28).

Robert Hogan applied Erikson’s theory of psychohistory to cases where racial identity is involved. For example, when examining the character of Malcolm X in the light of racial identity, he found out that Malcolm X had struggled through the period of his identity crisis and had even adopted several negative identities before establishing a positive one. Owing to his ethnic background as an African American, he was denied the opportunity to pursue law despite the fact that he was more intelligent and more innovative than his white classmates. His English-language teacher disapproved of his wish to be a lawyer and even cynically advised him to become a carpenter. However, Malcolm X’s determination and strong will power eventually secured him his final positive identity of a leader who successfully stood for the rights of the African Americans and their cause. Hogan’s case study illustrates how essential ethnicity is in the shaping and development of the African American sense of identity. It also supports the theory referred to as Nigrescence, which states that the acquisition of a sound African American identity requires the individual to move from the preexisting stage of non-Afrocentric identity (where the individual is either ignorant or partially aware of his or her ethnic traits) to the stage of Afrocentric identity that involves the process of “immersion” – which indicates that the individual has immersed himself or herself in ethnic identity (cited in Engler, 2013, pp.147-149).

### 1.8.2. INTERNAL FACTORS

The other set of factors that exercise control over an identity crisis, affect its resolution and shape the emerging identity are internal forces such as genetic determinism, personal needs, unconscious drives, and gender.



Regardless of community and culture, genetic determinism has also been construed as a factor in shaping an individual's identity. One of the common tendencies in human beings is personal distinctiveness, and it plays an essential role in resolving the crisis in favor of personal identity and in helping it dominate over the other types (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). Hogan (1997) classifies individuals into three groups in terms of identity development. One group is highly concerned with social assessment and always struggle to establish and improve identity within social communities. The second group comprises individuals whom Hogan describes as "tactless pumpkins". Members of this group are not concerned with social evaluation and are consequently careless about developing their sense of identity. The third group forms the majority whose members are regarded as hovering "between these two poles" and are therefore considered the norm (p. 467).

Personal needs and unconscious drives may at times determine the type of identity an individual may have. The need to socialize or build friendships may compel one to give up his or her own identity to be accepted by others. Relinquishing one's own identity in order to avoid feelings of loneliness or to avoid criticism can lead to loss of uniqueness and potentiality, which in turn may lead to a sense of "ontological guilt", which means blaming oneself for not fulfilling one's perceived potentialities (Engler, 2013, p. 366).

In addition to distinctiveness, gender is yet another factor that shapes identity. The term "gender identity" is used in psychology to denote the "awareness of one's femaleness or maleness and all it implies in one's society of origin" (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2009, p. 256). Men are more inclined than women towards letting their collective identity prevail. Women, on the other hand, define themselves in terms of their relational identity (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 245). It has been observed that females in general find it more difficult to establish or assert their identities than males. Even after reaching adulthood and establishing her identity, a woman continues to feel that she is still confronting an identity crisis and experiencing a sense of "disequilibrium" which "invokes the need for revision", as Ruthellen Josselson (2017) states in *Paths to Fulfillment: Women's Search for Meaning and Identity* (p. 264). A study conducted by

Archer (1985) on males and females found that the latter were three times more likely than the former to experience a deeper and longer identity crisis as a result of the conflict they faced between their domestic responsibilities and their career demands (cited in Hogan, 1997, pp.302-303).

Since the development of the psyche in males and females is not identical, individual differences related to the development of identity are bound to ensue as a result. A person's awareness of sex differences leads to the establishment of gender identity. In males, this gender identity is established through non-relationship activities in the sense that males view themselves as distinct, independent and separate. In females, on the other hand, this it is developed through relationship activities in the sense that it is defined in terms of the female's interpersonal and social communication with other members of society (Engler, 2013, p. 165; Schultz, 2005, p. 237). Duane Schultz and Sydney Schults (2005) likewise observe that "when women establish an identity, they depend heavily on social relationships. Men focus more on self and individual skills and abilities" (p. 237).

Erikson regarded Freud's evaluation of female identity as lacking in depth due to the fact that Freud's writings and ideas had the nineteenth-century male-dominated world of intelligentsia for their background. Freud's evaluation was also clouded by the contemporary notions of inhibition and religious taboos that confined the lives of women. The main point upon which Erikson disagreed with Freud was the latter's depiction of masculine identity as the envy of females. Women, according to Freud, regard masculine identity as superior and hence more significant than their own, and they are forced to unwillingly accept their inferior identity. Women had to associate themselves with the identity of the men they selected for marriage as they identified themselves with their husbands. This psychoanalytic interpretation of female identity and this mode of behavior on women's part in the past, states Erikson, took time to be replaced with a more developed concept that portrays women as having an identity that is no less important and even enviable as that acquired by men. Such a development in the concept of female identity was made possible by the rise of feminism in the twentieth century and the clearer insight it brought about into female psychology. For this reason, a woman's identity has come to be regarded as equal in significance to man's identity,

though never the same (Evans, 1995, pp.43-49). Another point related to the subject of identity in relation to gender is women's capability of incorporating multiple factors as shapers of their sense of identity. For example, a woman's identity is very likely to be based on her role as a mother, a wife, a daughter, an employee, etc. A man's identity tends by contrast to be centered on his profession (Engler, 2013, p. 149).

According to Erikson, biological differences between men and women play an essential role in shaping their identities. A modern development in psychoanalysis is the Object Relations Theory, which states that the development of the human psyche from infancy to old age, including the development of identity, is oriented towards interpersonal relationships and intimacy. These relationships are particularly more influential in the formation of female identity compared to male identity, because men generally prefer autonomy over reliance. The formation of identity in a man is vocation-based (in the sense that a man defines his personality in terms of his occupational relations with others), whereas the formation of identity in a woman is based on what he describes as her "inner space", by which he means her capability of reproduction, parenting and partnership (Hogan, 1997, pp.294-295). Ruthellen Josselson (2017) showed that the building blocks a woman's identity is constructed from are the intimacies and relationships she experiences throughout her life. Josselson calls these significant relationships "anchors" and she coins the term "anchor identity" to refer to a female identity founded upon these anchors (p. 18).

Conflicting situations in life may also lead women to experience what Hogan (1997) refers to as "identity negotiation" (p. 664). Being more assertive and independent than women, men are less likely to engage in identity negotiation. An example provided by Hogan to illustrate identity negotiation is the case of a female employee whose manager appreciates competitiveness and whose husband opposes competitiveness and appreciates team spirit instead. A woman who is caught between these two opposing values tends to assume two identity roles. She would let her manager view her as a competitive person and would act accordingly in his presence, but she would simultaneously let her husband see her as a cooperative person and would behave accordingly in his presence (p. 664).

## 1.9. TYPES OF INDIVIDUALS IN TERMS OF IDENTITY CRISIS

### RESOLUTION

Erik Erikson classifies individuals in terms of the process through which identity crisis is resolved. There are two parameters involved in this classification. The first is commitment, which implies the construction and formulation of a sense of identity. The second parameter is the presence of a crisis involving an active attempt to search for and construct an identity. Based on these two parameters, Erikson explains, four possibilities emerge as the outcome of their interplay: commitment with a crisis (achievement), crisis with no commitment (moratorium), commitment with no crisis (foreclosure), and finally the absence of commitment and crisis (diffusion) (Salkind, 2008, p. 354). These four types are elaborated below.

Erikson uses the term “identity achieved” as an adjectival attribute to refer to a status where both commitment and crisis are experienced. This status pertains to individuals who manage to face and successfully resolve their identity crisis and establish an identity by defining their three identity commitments: occupational commitment, world view commitment, and gender commitment (Schultz, 2005, p. 236). The term “moratorium” is described by Erikson (1963) as the situation where individuals are still in the process of resolving their crisis that is eventually bound to lead to establishing an identity (p. 3). This is the stage where a crisis is confronted without making commitments. The term “identity moratorium” does not apply to individuals who are bound to fail in their attempts in establishing an identity. This is the period of experimentation during which people explore various options and select the commitments that form their identity. It is also during this period that significant others such as parents, teachers and other adults can serve as role models to identify with, and the individual becomes “eager and willing to fuse his identity with that of others”, as Erikson explains in *Childhood and Society* (1950, p. 237). This type of behavior is referred to in psychoanalysis as “introjection” and it “involves taking into your own personality characteristics of someone else .... For example ... we find the older child or teenager imitating his or her favorite star, musician, or sports hero in an effort to establish an identity” (Boeree, 2017, p. 10). Identity moratorium is very crucial, since identification with negative models (whether real or fictional) may most probably lead to a negative identity that turns an individual into a rebel, an outcast, an alienated or

unsociable figure (Schultz, 2005, p. 236). Furthermore, over-identification is another risk of this type, as Richard Moss (2010) explains:

The boundary between roles and identities can easily become blurred when our role becomes our identity. For example, if we over-identify with making money and with the value of money, we may look at every situation in terms of how it furthers the growth of our own wealth. (p. 92)

Erikson warns against this tendency “to over-identify, to the point of apparent complete loss of identity” (Erikson, 1950, p. 235).

Erikson describes another group of individuals who establish an identity without undergoing an identity crisis. This is the status where commitments are made without confronting a crisis. Such individuals do not pose any questions to themselves as to what career they prefer to follow, what religious and political views to adopt, what gender roles to play, and who to establish partnerships with. They let their parents make their decisions for them and they prematurely and unquestioningly accept and embrace all their parents’ beliefs and commitments. Such individuals are often led by others (such as their parents, teachers, friends and coaches) whose values and principles they adopt without examining whether these values are compatible with their personalities or not. Erikson (1960) calls these individuals identity foreclosed (p. 186). In such cases, a person exhibits a strong tendency towards conformity and peacekeeping at the cost of individuation and innovation (Auerbach, 2005, p. 78). Individuals who are entangled in their identity crisis and feel lost as to how to resolve it are labeled as “identity diffused” individuals (Erikson, 1960, p. 132). This is the case where neither a crisis is experienced nor any commitments are made. Such individuals do not possess a stable and clear view of themselves and are unable to identify what goals, wishes and attitudes they have (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 246). Research conducted within the field of personality development and clinical psychology has shown that identity-achieved individuals possess the highest degree of mental health amongst the four identity types, whereas the identity-diffused individuals have the lowest degree of mental health and are very likely to suffer from mental disorders (Salkind, 2008, p. 354).

Capacity for intimacy is another factor that influences the identity type to be acquired. Capacity for intimacy refers to the individual's willingness for openness, transparency, sharing, trust and sacrifice (Marcia, 1993, p. 111). Individuals prone to have intimate relationships succeed in affiliating themselves with social groups and making commitments. They also have the ethical stand that helps them follow these commitments. There are three criteria used to judge capacity for intimacy: presence / absence of intimacy, permanence / transience of heterosexual intimacy, and finally depth / shallowness of intimacy (Salkind, 2008, p. 354). These three criteria yield five different cases, two of which are regarded as extreme – namely, the intimate case and the isolated case. The intimate case is characterized by the presence of commitment and a feeling of love. The isolated case, on the other hand, is characterized by the individual's alienation from the social environment and the absence or lack of personal acquaintances. Erikson (1963) warns that “these extremes, particularly in times of ideological confusion and widespread marginality of identity, may include not only rebellious but also deviant, delinquent, and self-destructive tendencies” (p. 3). Three cases are identified between these two extremes. They are the preintimate case, the stereotyped case and the pseudointimate case. The preintimate case involves love but no lasting commitment. The stereotyped case is associated with shallow intimacy. The pseudointimate case involves a false notion of depth and affection, while in reality the intimacy is shallow. Intimacy cases are closely related to identity types. Individuals who are identity diffused are intimacy isolated, whereas those who are identity achieved are classified as intimate cases (Marcia, 1993, p. 128).

Finally, with all these external and internal shaping factors that determine the outcome of an identity crisis discussed above, the type of individual emerging from the crisis defines his or her role in society and determines the contributions he or she makes. It is therefore important to carefully examine and control the various factors outlined above that shape this crisis and its outcome, and to observe how the topic has been handled and presented by psychologists, social workers, thinkers and authors. The following chapters in this study examines how the subject of identity crisis is addressed and examined in selected poetic works by Alice Oswald, Carol Ann Duffy, and Louise Elizabeth Glück.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **IDENTITY CRISIS IN ALICE OSWALD'S *DART* (2002)**

“You can't step twice into the same river.”

Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535 BC - c. 475 BC), from Plato, *Cratylus*

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

Alice Oswald's book *Dart*, which was published in 2002 and won the T. S. Eliot Prize in the same year, is interpreted in this chapter in terms of the Eriksonian theory of identity crisis and its resolution. The entire volume is a single long poem written in the vein of Eliot's poetic style and structure following his technique of dispersed character sketches with a stream-of-consciousness transition from one scene to another. *Dart* has been classified as a nature poem, a pastoral poem, a georgic poem, an ecopoem, a concrete poem, a “community poem”, a “map poem” (Thacker, 2018, pp.236-238, 244, 249), and even as a “geographical poem” (Howarth, 2013, p. 190). Born in 1966, Alice Oswald earned international recognition for her volumes of verse. In 1996, she won the Forward Prize, in 2002, the T. S. Eliot Prize, and in 2017 the Griffin Poetry Prize. After her graduation from Oxford, she received training in gardening, and this qualified her to work at Wisley Garden, Clovelly Court Gardens, Chelsea Physic Garden, Cliveden and Lord Rothschild's estate (Marriage, 2005, p. 46). Oswald believes that poetry and gardening go hand in hand. She contends that gardening is “an ideal job for a poet because your head is left free” (Herbert, 2012). Her association of poetry with nature commenced during her childhood period and is evident in an anecdote she mentioned during an interview when she described how she used to hide her poetry notebook during her early age in a bush (Herbert, 2012). Oswald also stated in a report submitted to the Poetry Society that one of her objectives in composing the poem was “to reconnect the local Imagination to its environment” (Thacker, 2018, p. 239).

In this volume, Oswald draws upon her experience as a gardener working in Dartington Hall located in South Devon. The book celebrates the titular river Dart, which is the largest river in Devon, England, rising from Cranmere Pool on Dartmoor,

and passing through Staverton, Buckfast and Totnes, and finally flowing to the sea at Dartmouth. It is where Oswald dwelt, which accounts for the detailed information she portrays about the river in the volume. Before reading or interpreting her work, readers and critics alike should take Oswald's own views about her poetic output into consideration. One of the misinterpretations that Oswald was keen on debunking was reading her work as nature poetry. As her poems appeared in publications, readers and critics fell short of her expectations in terms of interpretation of her work. To place her poetry in the proper perspective, she had to make it clear to her audience when she wrote, "I'm not a nature poet, though I do write about the special nature of what happens to exist" (Oswald, 2003, p. 207). In an interview with Max Porter (2014), Oswald reiterates this by stating, "I have quite a problem with the nature poet label ... nature poetry is just another kind of metaphysical poetry and is exactly what I like. But I think the best nature poets are Homer, Ovid, Shakespeare, because they include the human and the non-human in the same picture".

As Michael Feber (2007) points out, writing a poem about a river is a common practice among poets. Rivers have inspired "hundreds of poems" (p. 171). Rivers as described in poetry reflect their symbolic attributes in religion, mythology and folklore. Crossing a river, swimming or traveling up or down a river indicates a change in an individual's physical or mental state. Feber also observes the close relationship between poets and rivers: "poets have found rivers companions, counterparts, exemplars, and teachers" (p. 171). Rivers in poetry often have psychoanalytic implications as "the Freudian theory of the unconscious is filled with hydraulic metaphors" (p. 171). Rivers are also assigned human attributes in poetry, even the ability to speak in a human language. More importantly is Feber's statement that "It is common to speak of the phases of a river from its source to its mouth as ages in a human life" (p. 171). They consequently symbolize the progress an individual undergoes (De Vries, 1974, p. 387). Examining the symbolism of a human journey along a river, Cooper (1978) states that the symbolism of the river depends on the direction of the journey. If it is upward towards the origin of the river, it would stand for a return to a source, a restoration of a pristine primordial innocent condition such as infancy, childhood or the prelapsarian state of man. If the journey is made down the river into the sea, it would represent flux, change, evolution and development. Cooper also observes that this symbolic



significance of the river could be interpreted at the macrocosmic level, as the flux of life or the universe, and at the microcosmic level, referring to the change taking place in human life (Cooper, 1978, p. 139). These features associated with poetic descriptions of rivers are all found in Oswald's poetry, as the following analysis in this chapter shows.

Charles Bennett (2004) pointed out the difficulty readers could face when reading *Dart*. The allusions, the Devon dialect used, the syntax, and the stream-of-consciousness technique employed all contribute to this difficulty. Bennett, however, states that what adds to this difficulty in understanding the poem is its intentional "absence of punctuation", an innovative attempt on Oswald's part in order to make the poem's structure reflect the uninterrupted smooth flow of the river, so that "the poem begins and ends as the river does" (p. 230). Thacker (2018) sees this feature in Oswald's poetry as one of her unique techniques. He observes that it is in *Dart* that "poetic identity, language and the river slip into each other" (p. 249). He also refers to Oswald's use of "technical vocabulary and data" in *Dart* as the reason for the difficulty of the poem (p. 255). Another reason for finding Oswald's style difficult to understand is perhaps its classical legacy. Jack Thacker (2018) examines Oswald's work from a horticultural and ecological perspective. He finds that her work falls within the Virgilian Georgic mode of writing. The study shows how the "harsh realities of labor" are crucial in defining the poet's "responses to economic, political, and environmental crises" (p. 3). Further justification for the difficult nature of the work lies in the tendency of women poets in the Western world in general to make their verse unique in order to establish their independent voice and poetic identity (Homans, 1980, p. 10). British women poets have always struggled to find their own voice in a community where "class was constructed as a masculine identity in both its origin and expression, even when not all the actors were male" (Steedman, 1994, p. 112). Due to a patriarchal social system, British woman authors and the texts they composed "had long been neglected or marginalized" (Behrendt, 2009, p. 11). With no actual and physical niche in the real world, women found in poetry "a powerful vehicle of identity formation and assertion" (Backscheider, 2005, p. 240). Even according to postmodern standards, there is a "rejection of the category 'woman'", and there is a general view that a woman writer "is never stable and has no identity" (Erkkila, 1992, p. 7).

*Dart* can be literally read as a text describing a simple journey from the source of the river to its mouth where it flows into the sea, with verbal images of the “enchanted world” along the way (Middleton, 2014, p. 22). At its symbolic, allegorical and figurative level, however, lies deeper meaning and psychological implications. As Marriage (2005) contends, Oswald’s poetry “does not fit comfortably into any school or movement” because her work is “individual and private in the extreme” (Marriage, 2005, p. 46). Her work in general, and *Dart* in particular, has been compared to T. S. Eliot’s poetic style as shown in *The Waste Land*. Like Eliot’s poetry, *Dart* has psychoanalytic implications and “brings together human and natural history into a synthesis containing workaday lives, the metaphysical, nature, language, and dreams” (Smith, 2019). David Wheatley (2002) drew parallels between Alice Oswald’s presentation of the river in *Dart* and the presentations the river as a symbol in the poetry of her predecessors. He stated that

Wordsworth saw in the river Duddon not flux but continuity, “what was, and is, and will abide”. Most of the time, Eliot writes in “The Dry Salvages”, the river is “unhonoured” and “unpropitiated”, without ever ceasing to be the “strong brown god” of myth, “sullen, untamed and intractable (Wheatley, 2002)

Peter Howarth (2005) describes *Dart* as “a complex modernist collage of voices and a Wordsworthian landscape narrative at the same time” (p. 1). Rowan Middleton (2014) examines the ecological and environmental implications of the book at both the local and the global levels and how the poem “transcends the physical through its engagement with the river’s spiritual and mythological aspects” (p. 4). Andrew Motion (2010) sees in the language of the poem “a way of linking the mythical or speculative past to the pragmatic present” (p. 50). This connection, Middleton observes, between the physical and the spiritual realms is achieved through Oswald’s use of fragmented structure following the principle of “bricolage” introduced by French anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (p. 6). It was also contended that the poem blends “the present and the past, the spiritual and the material, the scientific and the mythic” (Middleton, 2014, p. 24). Lucy Mercer (2016) states that Alice Oswald proposes “a new

philosophy of time” which is similar to the medieval metaphysics of viewing time as a form of speculation and as a “the continual changing process of becoming”. Peter Howarth (2013) finds in his study of the water imagery and symbolism in *Dart* that the river “is itself an overlap, run and mingle between two eras and cultures” (p. 196). In psychoanalysis, water in general stands for the collective unconscious and is associated with the mother archetype representing fertility, growth, development and creativity (Ackroyd, 1993, pp.303-304).

## 2.2. IDENTITY CRISIS IN *DART* (2002)

Oswald’s treatment of identity crisis in *Dart* is shaped by her interest in human nature on the one hand, and by her interest in physical nature on the other. This dual interest informed much of her poetic output. Marriage (2005) observes that the “dominant source of inspiration for her poetry ... is her passion for the countryside and the working people she meets” (p. 46). To prepare for the composition of her book-length poem *Dart*, she spent three years interviewing the people who worked beside the river and collecting information about the place in order to construct her poetic character sketches. To acknowledge their contribution, Oswald prefaces her poem with a list of their names. This accounts for the “diverse range of characters” found in the poem: fishermen, crabbers, oyster hunters, sewage workers, foresters, farmers, woodmen, stonewallers, dairy workers, policemen, bailiffs, carpet makers, tin-miners, milk bottlers, ferrymen, boat builders, canoeists and even poachers. Some sections in the poem derive from the speeches of these interviewees, but Oswald did not of course reproduce them verbatim (Middleton, 2014, pp.9, 13). The book reflects the daily lives and dialect of the local farmers, fishermen, laborers and families dwelling there. The identities of the people working close to the river are formed by the type of occupation and the work they perform. One of the types of identity according to Erikson, as outlined in Chapter One of this thesis, is professional identity. This could be discerned in *Dart*. For example, the stonewaller referred to in the poem introduces himself in terms of the work he performs. He says, “I’m a gatherer, an amateur, a scavenger, a comber” (Oswald, 2002, p. 33). Even when an individual does not have an occupation, Oswald assigns one for him or her, just like the “rememberer” who keeps remembering things about his past spent near the river, or like the “dreamer” (Oswald, 2002, pp.20, 30).

In addition to this sense of professional identity, there is the sense of feeling one with nature. The identities of these characters sketched in the work are also defined in terms of their interaction with nature. Jack Thacker (2018) remarks that *Dart* is a poetic illustration of the “sustained and varied account of the relationship between person and environment, and likewise environment and poet” (256). John Parham (2012) observes that the very life and existence of the inhabitants of the Dart are “constructed around their material relation to the river” (125). One of the characters in the poem, named Pol de Zinc, describing the lives of the inhabitants, says, “I see us like cormorants, living off the river” (Oswald, 2002, p. 14). The speaker in the poem, commenting on how the river provides the people living close to it with the nourishment they need, says, “This is what keeps you and me alive, this is the real work of the river / This is the thirst that draws the soul” (Oswald, 2002, p. 14). Oswald’s poetry, therefore, combines human nature with physical nature by showing how mental processes of the characters portrayed in her verse are symbolically reflected in the “earthiness” described in her work (Marriage, 2005, p. 46). Winterson (2002) observes that although Oswald is a “Nature poet”, the nature she describes in her poetry is not the nature “footpaths and theme parks, but the open space and untamed life that waits for us”. For this reason, Winterson continues, “She turns the countryside into an inner landscape”, making natural surroundings a projection of the human psyche.

Since Alice Oswald’s *Dart* is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, it is essential to outline the fluvial symbolism as used in religion. In Christian and Biblical discourse, rivers, and their association with water, feature as agents of purification, cleansing and healing. They also feature as symbols of life and rebirth (Barton and Muddiman, 2001, p. 562). Bathing in a river and crossing it in a religious context could be “regarded as tokens of eschatological salvation” and can lead to “deliverance or doom” (Vanhoozer, 2005, p. 686). Water is the symbol of the Mother archetype, a source of life and fertility, the “prima material”, and the act of bathing or washing in water, immersion in water and baptism stand for “washes away the old life and sanctifies the new” (Cooper, 1978, p. 188). Individuals who forsake their pagan identities in favor of a Christian identity should engage in “water baptism ... resulting in becoming part of the believing community” (Vanhoozer, 2005, p. 40). Vanhoozer states that “The act of baptismal immersion is the sign of Christ’s dying and rising and signifies the new life

and Christian identity of the baptized” (p. 137). In this sense, the vessel used to pour water over the baptized infant serves as a water source, or the source of a river (Jensen, 2011, p. 111). A common figure in Christian iconography and symbolism is the “appearance of a river personification” (Jensen, 2011, p. 117). Washing in water indicates “the process of cleansing or the state of purity” (Lawrence, 2006, p. 26). Jensen observes that

The rite of baptism was not a mental exercise that required intellectual assent to rational arguments about the nature of reality. Rather it was an enacted, bodily ritual that signaled an individual’s internal cleansing from sin, identity change, spiritual illumination, personal regeneration, and eternal salvation (Jensen, 2011, p. 4).

In her introduction to the volume, she states that the poetic character sketches she constructed in her poetry are based on real folks who are familiar with the river. The voices of these characters as presented in the volume, she says, are identified with the sound of the river and they “should be read as the river’s mutterings” (Oswald, 2002, p. 1). As she gets off the bus and walks in the streets, she wishes that someone could sing “as the invisible river sings” a song that could separate “the two worlds without any crossing” (Oswald, 2002, p. 10). In other words, she seeks to keep her two identities as an urban dweller and a nature lover apart without letting the one intervene into the affairs of the other. The journey from the city to the river involves a process of identity transformation. The traveler ceases to identify himself or herself with civilization and takes up the identity of the natural world, becoming a creature of nature: “We jump from a tree into a pool, we change ourselves into the fish dimension” (Oswald, 2002, p. 13). Oswald’s use of the fish metaphor is significant because it expresses the inseparable relationship between man and nature in general and man and the river in particular, since a fish dies immediately if it is taken out of the water.

Such psychological implications involving identity issues in her work are poetically rendered into descriptions of the physical natural environment and the interaction of the characters with it. The opening piece in the volume recounts a foot

journey made by an old man from a military camp located in Okehampton, a small town in the English country of Devon, to Dartmoor River. The identity crisis the old man is experiencing is manifested by the word “Who”, which is the first word in the piece and at the same time the opening word in the entire volume (Oswald, 2021, p. 2). The first line brings the old man’s identity into question: “Who’s this moving alive over the moor?”. The second line answers this question and identifies the character as “an old man seeking and finding a difficulty” (Oswald, 2021, p. 2). It is in fact his own identity that the old man is seeking, and his foot journey symbolizes his quest for an identity. His determination to leave Okehampton and its military camp – a symbol of urbanization and human conflict and head for the river – a symbol of nature – shows his decision to resort to nature as a solution for his identity crisis. He has finally made up his mind to identify himself with nature as symbolized by the river. The reader is told that the opening question in the poem was articulated by the river itself: “The Dart, lying low in darkness calls out Who is it?” (Oswald, 2002, p. 2). The old man’s audacity and strong determination to search for a more encompassing identity for himself to replace the narrow one he already has is reflected in the speaker’s concern about him in case rain, storm or thunder hits and he would find no place to find shelter, given the fact that he is old and weak and the only map he has is the wilderness that surrounds him. Despite this sharp contrast between the weakness of the aged man and the powerful forces of nature, there is hope in the “the sound of frogs singing in the new year” (Oswald, 2002, p. 2). The waning of the old year and the advent of the new year is a symbol of transformation and it suits the current topic of the shedding of the old man’s former identity and the establishment of a new one.

Oswald’s personification of the river Dartmoor is reinforced by the ensuing dialogue between the river and the old man. His identity is linked to the river’s identity with the question word “who”. The question about the old man discussed above is repeated in reference to the river, “Who’s this issuing from the earth?”, a reference to the underground source of the river (Oswald, 2002, p. 2). Like the river, the origin of mankind is earth (Barton, 2001, p. 43). Assigning human attributes to the river brings the identity issue into focus as the old man replies to the question posed by the river. He introduces himself to the river as a mountaineer who after fifty years decided to approach the river where he can “drink from streams”, for he has fed up with civilization, urban

dwelling and warfare “sitting in the tent door with no book, no saucepan, not so much as a stick to support the loneliness” (Oswald, 2002, p. 3). The journey he makes to the river is not described as an easy task. It is described as “horrible”, because he is in the middle of a “sphagnum kind of wilderness”, where he might easily become lost and is exposed to danger. The reader is told that the old man might slip any time while crossing the crags and edges that lie between Black Ridge and White Horse Hill and fall into the abyss of the moor “where echoes can’t get out.” In one simile, he compares his journey to the act of “walking on the bottom of a lake”, and this comparison also identifies him with the river” (Oswald, 2002, p. 5).

It is significant to note that these two images of falling into a deep valley and sinking into the river are followed by one-word lines in the poem describing the splitting of a lark’s song. The purpose of these lines is to illustrate in the style used in concrete poetry the act of descending into and merging with the river and at the same time denoting that this downward movement is associated with home, as symbolized by the lark’s song. The act of descent is therefore described optimistically as a hopeful end for the old man’s journey. The merger of his identity with the wider identity of the river as the outcome of his identity crisis is therefore portrayed as an achievement and a development in his personality.

The old man’s identification with the river is further elaborated in the remaining part of his character sketch when Oswald describes how he interacts with Dart by drinking from water as the difficulty of his journey makes his days and nights “longish” and “unbearable” particularly because he has no companion and no support, not even “a stick to support the loneliness” (Oswald, 2002, p. 6). This feeling of alienation surrounds him throughout his journey. Oswald describes it in the poem as “loneliness in all directions” and she lists the places he has passed in order to finally reach the river:

Broadmarsh, under Cut Hill,  
Sandyhole, Sittaford, Hartyland, Postbridge,  
Belever, Newtake, Dartmeet, the whole  
unfolding emptiness branching and reaching and bending over  
itself. (Oswald, 2002, p. 6).

The journey towards the river is made to seem very difficult in order to reveal at the figurative level that the transformation from a personal identity to a cultural and collective one is an act that requires endurance and perseverance.

The next character sketch Oswald provides in the poem is that of Jan Coo, whose name, she states, “means So-and-So of the Woods” (Oswald, 2002, p. 2). By associating the name of the character with the woods, the poet establishes onomastically Jan Coo’s identity as pertaining to nature in general. According to a Devonian legend, Jan Coo used to be a worker on a farm by the river Dart. One day he heard a voice calling out his name. He thought it was a man near the river, so he chased the voice to the river and went missing. The neighbors formed search teams and looked for him for many days, but they found no sign of him. What he heard, according to local accounts, was in fact the sound of the wind, not the voice of a man calling out his name (Thacker, 2018, p. 245). Like the old man in the previous section of the poem, Jan Coo has already identified himself with the river. Oswald, in creating the sketch of the young man, returns to the identity question word “who” used when introducing the old man. Jan Coo says, “I know who I am, I come from the little heap of stones up by Postbridge ... where first road crosses the Dart” (Oswald, 2002, p. 3). He says that he could be recognized by the wearing effect of the river water on his hands. Unlike the old man, however, his identity crisis is more acute and deeper due to the fact that he is young and therefore more likely to face a more severe crisis. Although he experiences moments when he considers his options to abandon the river – in other words, to relinquish his identity with nature – he is aware that he cannot detach himself from nature. After a long identity crisis trying to make up his mind, he says

I’m trying to talk myself round to leaving this place,  
but there’s roots growing round my mouth,  
my foot’s in a rusted tin. One night I will.

(Oswald, 2002, pp.3-4).

His decision to follow the voice from the river indicates his awareness of the strong bond he has with nature. Unfortunately, he perishes in his attempt to trace the voice and “Next



morning it came home to us he was drowned. / He should never have swum on his own” (Oswald, 2002, p. 4). Even after his death, he remained bound to the river and his natural environment:

Now he's the groom of the Dart  
I've seen him taking the shape of the sky, a bird,  
a blade, a fallen leaf, a stone  
May he lie long in the inexplicable knot of the river's body  
(Oswald, 2002, p. 4).

The marriage metaphor introduced in these lines describing Jan Coo as the groom and the river as his bride, thus again emphasizing the femininity of the river, further indicates the bond that exists between man and nature and stresses the sacred nature of this bond. In a very innovative and interesting image, Oswald describes how his identity has turned as transparent as the river water itself. She says that after he drowned he became “so thin you can see the light / through his skin”. This is a reference to his full integration with the river. As David Wheatley (2002) points out in his study on Oswald, the drowning motif in the poem is followed by a long pause indicated by the word “silence” itself and a blank page, serving literally as the silence that followed Jan Coo's death and indicating the transitional period required for the river to “wash itself of all deaths”. This pattern can signify a double crisis of identity involving both the characters and the river alike. Characters who drown in the river, such as the local canoeist, the bogeyman and Jan Coo, symbolically discard their former personal and narrow identities in favor of the new broader ones they acquire, which are collective identities, as their drowning integrates them into the river. Dart in the poem is portrayed as always enveloping and absorbing the identities of other creatures, whether they are humans, animals or plants, like the buttercups that sink into the water as “the river already counting them into her bag, taking her / Tythe, ‘Dart Dart wants a heart’” (Oswald, 2002, p. 17). Death by Dart water is presented as a blessing and the means to salvation, and the underwater realm is compared to heaven and associated with Christianity and Christ as the savior:

Now the blessing, the readiness of Christ  
be with all those who stare or fall into this river.

May the water buoy them up, may God grant them  
extraordinary lifejacket lightness. And this child watching two  
salmon glooming through Boathouse Pool  
in water as high as heaven, spooked with yew trees  
and spokes of wetrot branches – Christ be there  
watching him watching, walking on this river.

(Oswald, 2002, p. 17)

It is significant that Oswald associates issues of identity with these two figures at the outset of the poem. The difference in age between the old man and Jan Coo indicates that the crisis of identity is not limited to a particular period in an individual's life. Identity crisis could be faced by the young and old generations alike. Furthermore, its resolution, according to the poem, could be the acquisition of a more positive and encompassing cultural identity regardless of age and circumstances. This is Oswald's message in sketching these two characters in her work. In psychoanalysis, the act of drowning or sinking into water is a symbol of identification with the collective unconscious and the mother archetype, thus transforming one's individual and personal identity into a larger more comprehensive cultural and collective one (Ackroyd, 1993, p. 273). Simultaneously, as the river absorbs more and more individual identities, its own identity grows and becomes more powerful. The poem was composed within the classical tradition of the *genius loci*, or the spirit of the place, common in ancient Roman cult when a place was believed to have a life of its own that could affect and interact with human existence. (Wheatley, 2002).

The contrast between the fortunes of the first two character sketches in the volume underlies an important message about identity crisis types and resolution. The old man could be described as an identity-achieved individual who successfully resolved his identity crisis and established a positive identity by fulfilling his commitments. Jan Coo, on the other hand, is an identity-diffused individual whose attempt to resolve his identity crisis proved both abortive and fatal as he tried to break away from his former identity with Dart. Oswald's message in delineating and juxtaposing these two conflicting characters is twofold. The portrayal of the old man and Jan Coo and their destiny, on one hand, reiterate Oswald's faith in man's lifetime bond with nature. On

the other, the poet emphasizes the fact that changing an already established identity without a clear goal in mind is a risk not worth taking. Jan Coe neither states a logical reason nor provides a clear justification for relinquishing his identity. Furthermore, he has no clear picture of what his new alternative identity would be. His decision to seek a new identity is based on a feeling on his part that “he could hear voices woo” (Oswald, 2002, p. 4).

The naturalist is the next character sketch Oswald introduces in the poem. The significance of this character lies in the close bond that exists between a naturalist’s identity and the physical environment due to the very nature of this line of work. Furthermore, this character in the poem is described as wearing a camouflage to prevent animals she intends to film from noticing her presence. She says, “I can make myself invisible ... I wear soft colours” (Oswald, 2002, p. 7). Her camouflage symbolically indicates her oneness with nature. Her identity is merged with that of Dart as she hides and watches the frogs and the other creatures of the river “singing lovesongs” and mating. The motif of mating is linked to the earlier image of marriage and therefore reinforcing the idea of union between human identity and the identity of the river. Another reference to this motif is when the naturalist says that she has “seen tiny creatures flying, trapped, intermarrying, invisible” (Oswald, 2002, p. 8).

The next character introduced in the poem is figure who has paid fifty pounds to fish in the river provided that she observes fishing etiquette as stipulated by the law and the bailiff. This character sketch is semi-autobiographical and it reflects Oswald’s own fascination with Dartmoor and her passion for fishing. The poet’s close encounter and familiarity with the river and its surroundings account for the details she presents, particularly her delineation of the creatures’ struggle for survival such as her description of water organisms’ “mouthparts clinging to mosses” and how they “suck themselves to rocks” to hang on to their lives (Oswald, 2002, p. 5). Another detailed and imaginative description is the dramatic account provided by the eel watcher in the poem showing how a large heron devours an eel alive and how the latter “chewed its way back inside out through the heron’s stomach like when I creep through / bridges right in along a ledge to see where the dippers nest” (Oswald, 2002, p. 7).

As in the case of the old man and Jan Coo presented earlier in the volume, the issue of identity is brought into focus with the question “whose voice is this who’s talking in my larynx” (Oswald, 2002, p. 5). Despite these restrictions, she finds her own identity attached to the river:

Which is where the law comes in, the bailiff, as others see me,  
as I see myself when I wake, finding myself  
in this six-foot fourteen-stone of flesh with letters after my  
name,  
in boots, in a company vehicle,  
patrolling from the headwaters to the weir,  
with all my qualified faculties on these fish.

(Oswald, 2002, p. 5).

In the last line quoted in the extract above, the poet puns on the words “qualified faculties”, which are brought in the context of the speaker’s academic degree, “my diploma”, another autobiographical detail (Oswald, 2002, p. 5). This wordplay verbally brings the speaker and the organisms of the river together as one category of creatures dwelling in nature. Chromatically speaking, this identification with nature is expressed in her clothes as she states “I wear green” (Oswald, 2002, p. 6). She has immersed herself in wilderness and the realm of the river. Her minute details and descriptions of the river show her familiarity of the place from “the West Dart” to “the East Dart” (Oswald, 2002, p. 6).

Oswald’s poetic creativity is reflected in the way she metaphorically depicts the conflict of identities of the characters sketched in the text in terms of the surrounding environment. The “bridges”, “cars” and “tables” represent the world of the urban city with the “wilderness” on either side (Oswald, 2002, p. 5). This contrast between the two physical elements of the environment and untamed realm of nature stands for the two identity options that the old man, Jan Coo, and the other characters in the text have to take in order to resolve their identity crises. Furthermore, the clash of the two water bodies of the river flowing in opposite directions and their eventual merger and equilibrium signify this internal conflict:

Dartmeet – a mob of waters  
Where East Dart smashes into West Dart  
Two wills gnarling and recoiling  
And finally knuckling into balance (Oswald, 2002, p. 6)

The fisherman's stability is unlike the psychological fluctuations and indecision expressed by both the old man and Jan Coo. Both characters sketched in the text undergo or try to undergo an identity change to resolve their identity crisis. In the old man's case, the transformation is positive and successful, typical of an identity-achieved individual. In Jan Coo's case, the transformation was abortive and resulted in his death. In the fisherwoman's situation, however, no identity crisis is experienced because she has always felt one with nature. Even when external forces, such as social restrictions, etiquette, the law and the bailiff, attempt to sever her identity from nature, the fisherman resists them and manages to find a way to preserve his attachment to the river.

Questions of identity are likewise metaphorically ascribed to the river Dart itself in the text. Oswald assigns human attributes to the river by personifying it and by using it as a mouthpiece posing questions about the visitors who approach it. As a literary device, personification is a self-conscious attempt on a poet's part to assign human attributes to inanimate objects. However, Oswald's approach to personification is unique because she tends to think of it as a real feeling. In her article "A Leaf out of her Book", Janet Phillips (2018), referring to Oswald's unique manner of presenting figures of speech, observes that "her writing reminds you that what is often used as a metaphor or a stock image in poetry is also a real thing". When Fiona Cox (2013) in her interview with Oswald refers to the latter's "personification of the river" in *Dart*, Oswald replies,

I wouldn't even use the word 'personification'. I think it's natural if you want to look at something in a way that takes on board what it is rather than just projecting what you think it is. It's not that you personify it, it's that you come halfway to meet it, and the meeting ground might be a water nymph ... I think if

you spend a lot of time outside you just do encounter things in a way that's somewhere between the human and what they are. (Cox, 2013)

The motif of identity transformation experienced by the characters in the text is even carried over to the river itself. Dart too, states Oswald in the poem, once experienced such identity transformation according to local legend by converting from its initial arboreal state to its present fluvial state: "They say all rivers were once fallen trees" (Oswald, 2002, p. 8). Kate Mount (2021) observes that presenting natural objects as symbols of human beings is "characteristic of Alice Oswald, a poet remarkable for her personifications of Nature, giving its many voices full play." It is worth mentioning at this point that the name of the river derives from the Celtic language and Devonian dialect, in which it means "oak tree" (Wheatley, 2002). The title of the volume also implies progress, a forward movement and development, as Jack Thacker (2018) argues:

Oswald's title for *Dart* attests to the idea of the river as a happening rather than an object: the verb 'dart' can mean 'to spear' or 'transfix', 'to throw, cast, shoot', 'to send forth, or emit, suddenly and sharply; to shoot out; to cast (a glance) quickly and keenly', and 'to move like a dart; to spring or start with a sudden rapid motion' (p. 242)

The river is made to resemble an individual with an identity crisis that had been resolved at the outset of a mythological timeline when it was transformed from trees to water, like the King of the Oakwoods in local folklore who had to be sacrificed to a goddess (Wheatley, 2002). At the psychological level, it is likened to humans, for it also has an unconscious mind and the speaker in the text "saw the river's dream-self walk / Down to the ringmesh netting by the bridge" (Oswald, 2002, p. 17). Expressing her belief in the interconnection among all living things, Oswald once said in an interview, "I do somehow think of humans and animals and plants as interchangeable and sharing each other's consciousness" (Cox, 2013). This human-like characteristic of the river is in fact behind the whole conception of the poem, for, as Oswald stated, what inspired the poem was the "mutterings" of Dart in Devon (Mount, 2021). As the poet explained, the poem

expresses her impression of the river as a "frightening female presence ... she seemed female from the people I talked to" (Cleave, 2003). Views supporting this idea were expressed by Oswald in an interview when she stated that the works of the classical writers in general, and those of Homer in particular, have been "used as male dominated canons of western literature in the wrong way for so long" (Cox, 2013).

Moreover, everything that resides approximate to the river is incorporated, integrated and absorbed into the river's identity. The speaker states that she "saw all things catch and reticulate / Into this dreaming of the Dart" (Oswald, 2002, p. 17). The entire work has been described as a "highly original dream-like poem" (Smith, 2019). Oswald's observations on pollution and recycling resonate with this idea of integration, since even waste, as she states, eventually becomes part of the river: "a sploosh of sewage, twenty thousand cubic metres being pumped in, stirred / and settled out and wasted off, looped back, macerated, digested, / clarified and returned to the river" (Oswald, 2002, p. 18). Animate and inanimate entities, even humans, become part of the river, as the rain "washes them down to the valley bottoms and iron, lead, zinc, copper calcite / and gold, a few flakes of it / getting pounded between the pebbles in the river" (Oswald, 2002, p. 9). The lines following these describe a ghastly scene of a prisoner in a cell with water rising up to his neck equipped with only a hand-pump "to keep himself conscious" (Oswald, 2002, p. 18). This horror-packed image expresses the human subconscious immersion into the identity of the river. Death is described in the text as a means of unifying man and nature. The speaker's reply to the two identity questions "Who lives here? / Who dies here?" is "Only oysters and ... oyster catchers" (Oswald, 2002, p. 24). The animal world and the human world live and die together.

It is not until the end of the book that the identity crisis of the river itself undergoes a second resolution when it finally flows into the sea, thus moving from an individual fluvial identity into a collective marine one. As it relinquishes its former identity, the personified river describes its own identity transformation:

I swim up a dog-leg bend into the cliff,  
the tide slooshes me almost to the roof  
and float inwards into the trembling sphere

of one freshwater drip drip drip  
where my name disappears and the sea slides in to replace it.  
(Oswald, 2002, p. 29)

The book thus relates the three phases the river undergoes. At the beginning of the volume, the river is described as pure because its water comes straight from the source, untainted and clean. This stage corresponds to the innocent period of infancy and childhood. The second phase is when the river water is polluted by the industrial environment, the waste and the sewage discarded into it. This phase is akin to the encroachment of the social environment upon childhood resulting in one's loss of innocence and the impending world of experience. The third and final phase is when the river flows into the sea, literally indicating the end of the river and figuratively standing for the end of the individual's life. The universality of these phases of human life and the life of the river as well are indicated clearly by the poet when it is said that "a whole millennium going by in the form of a wave" (Oswald, 2002, p. 29)

Transformation in identity presented in the poem accounts for the several shape shifters described. Jan Coe, who drowned in the river, takes several postmortem shapes: "I've seen him taking the shape of the sky, a bird, a blade, a fallen leaf, a / stone – may he lie long in the inexplicable knot of the river's body" (Oswald, 2002, p. 7). Transformation is one of the recurring motifs in the poem (Middleton, 2014, p. 10). The poem ends with the identification of the river with Proteus, the god of rivers in classical mythology. Oswald utilized her major in classics which she obtained from New College, Oxford, to construct some of the allusions in *Dart*. According to Morford and Lenardon (2003), As the fluvial deity Proteus can "change shape" and is associated with how "identities ... could be merged" (p. 150). Oswald relates his character to the "many selves" of the water (Oswald, 2002, p. 32), indicating the various identities that could be possessed by the people associated with the river. According to Homer's *Odyssey*, Menelaus, Helen's husband, had to ambush Proteus in order to be able to make his voyage back from Troy. He was instructed by Proteus' daughter Eidothea how to capture him. Menelaus had to hold him down to prevent him from metamorphosing. However, the god did shape shift into a lion, a serpent, a leopard and a boar before he yielded. (Homer, 1945, p. 141). Proteus, who is portrayed in classical mythology as "an



old man” (Morford and Lenardon, 2003, p. 150) brings the poem full circle back to the character of the old man described at the beginning of *Dart*. The text begins and ends with the character of the old man. At the outset, the character is human, but at the end divine. The transformation from human to divine traits is significant in relation to the resolution of the identity crisis in the work. The former personal identity relinquished is associated with the human traits, whereas the new cultural and collective identity required is affiliated with divinity to indicate its superiority over the former.

The motif of metamorphosis in the poem is evident in the transformation of the characters’ identities from personal to cultural and collective ones, and this motif is reflected on the transformation of the river as illustrated above and the transformation of the inanimate materials in the river. In one scene from the poem, Oswald describes how the naturalist small gathers black stones from the river and “puts them in Hydrochloric acid, it makes his fingers yellow, but they came up shiny” (Oswald, 2002, p. 13). This transformation from lackluster and dim stones to bright shiny objects reiterates the theme of changing identities in the work.

Related to classical lore is the episode concerning Brutus and his followers formed of exiled Trojans who, according to legend, sailed from Rome to England, is a confirmation that the human journey made into the river fulfills the quester’s goals. A goddess provides Brutus with detailed instructions and steps as to what he would find when he arrives at the Dart. Brutus follows her instructions to the letter in order to quest for kingship. In the poem, Oswald mentions these steps in detail twice – first, as uttered by the goddess and secondly as implemented by Brutus and his disciples. They finally gain kingship, according to the poem, a reiteration of an enhancement in their sense of identity, shifting from “outcasts” to “kings” (Oswald, 2002, p. 22).

Connecting the river with the historical, cultural and mythological past in this manner yields it a symbolic attribute and makes it stand for culture. Consequently, the characters’ integration with the river, be it voluntary like Jan Coö or involuntary like accidental drowning as in the case of the trapped canoeist, is the process of relinquishing their former identities - or their self-concept, to use Erikson’s terminology - in favor of a cultural identity. An identity crisis, in other words, is a temporary period which is

bound to be resolved, relinquished, and replaced with a new one, which might be positive or negative.

The inevitability of this psychosocial development whereby the former identity is shed in favor of a new and better one is expressed through the enticing and wooing power of the river that attracts the inhabitants to it. The water nymph described in the poem as living in the Dart is associated with the Sirens, who featured in classical mythology as sweet-voiced female figures who lured sailors with their song (Room, 2003, p. 276). When she notices the woodman cutting down trees (referred to as “shadows”), she calls out to him temptingly:

woodman working on your own  
knocking the long shadows down  
and all day the river’s eyes  
peep and pry among the trees  
when the lithe Water turns  
do you speak this kind of sound:  
whirlpool whisking round?  
Listen, I can clap and slide  
my hollow hands along my side.  
imagine the bare feel of water,  
woodman, to the wrinkled timber (Oswald, 2002, p. 10)

The world of the nymph is described in sensual terms of pleasure and comfort with its association with water as a symbol of softness and flexibility. On the other hand, there is the contrasting world of the woodman which involves hard work and harshness with its association with wood as a symbol of hardness and rigidity. When the nymph boasts her ability saying, “I can sing a song of Hylas”, she is referring to the ancient Greek myth that tells the tale of Hylas, a handsome man who one day went to a spring close to his dwelling in order to fetch water and was suddenly dragged down into the water by the nymphs who were enchanted by his looks. Hylas afterwards remained with the nymphs where he lived happily (Morford and Lenardon, 2003, p. 532). The realm of the water nymphs is described in this tale as a paradise, and Dart is associated with this

notion. The inhabitants whose identities are merged with the river, Oswald implies through this reference, are transported to a blissful status. In expressing her enchantment with the woodman, the Dart nymph also associates herself with the figure of Salmacis from classical mythology. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Mercury and Venus's son Hermaphroditus fell in love with a water nymph called Salmacis. His prayers to the gods to let them live together and never part at all were granted when the gods decided to fuse their bodies together into one being (Morford and Lenardon, 2003, pp.270-271). The Dart nymph's desire to be fused with the woodman consequently represents the merger of the individual personal identities of the inhabitants of Devon with the identity of the river which stands for culture, nature and the collective unconscious.

The foregoing analysis of Alice Oswald's *Dart* shows the poet's belief in the amalgam of both culture and nature as the melting pot where the individual's self-concept, from an Eriksonian perspective, is discarded in favor of a positive, mature and collective identity by undergoing an identity crisis and its resolution. In *Dart*, nature is presented in the form of the river that Oswald dwelt by and knew so well, and culture is presented in the form of the legends, folklore, myths and beliefs associated with the community living near the river. The characters sketched in her work possess a universality that makes them stand for the individual emerging from a state of childhood and adolescence with a self-concept and an unresolved identity crisis to a state of adulthood when his or her former identity is relinquished and a new one acquired.

At Oswald's hand, the issue of identity crisis, its resolution and the acquisition of a genuine cultural collective identity have been incorporated into the poet's faith in nature. The subject has also attracted the poetic interest of Carol Ann Duffy, whose treatment of the topic lends it another dimension by incorporating it within her own social ideals as the next chapter demonstrates.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**IDENTITY CRISIS IN CAROL ANN DUFFY'S *THE WORLD'S***  
***WIFE* (1999)**

“The difficult play on difference and sameness is ... crucial in the discourse of identity.”

Lidia Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies*

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

British poet and playwright Carol Ann Duffy, born in 1955, addressed several social, political and religious issues in her works, including love, marriage, childhood, violence, gender and authority. Her experience as a dramatist contributed to her creation of character sketches in her poetry, especially in her collection of poems *The World's Wife* (1999). Unlike Alice Oswald, she is more interested in urban life than physical nature. Comparing the two poets together, Peter Forbes (2002) observes, “There are poets who write in Duffyesque but the ones she has supported are originals, none more so than Alice Oswald, whose poems offer a defiantly rural counterpart to Duffy’s city muse”.

*The World's Wife* (1999), which “caught the imagination of readers and made Carol Ann Duffy a genuine best seller” (O'Reilly, 2007), was inspired by various accounts from legend, myth, literature, art, history, folklore and religion. Each poem in the collection has a different source of inspiration and this makes the collection quite rich in meaning. The poems in the collection express their female protagonists’ views. Antony Rowland (2001) interprets the book from a gender perspective, stating that “*The World's Wife* marks a critical departure from the earlier poetry in that men and masculinity are attacked constantly by more abrasive female narrators” (p. 199). In this respect, Duffy composed a text where “overlooked women in history and mythology get the chance to tell their side of the story” (Lyall, 2009). This aspect in the poems is related to Duffy’s intention to experiment with new techniques in composing the work, as she made it clear in reference to the collection:

I wanted to use history and myth and popular culture and elements from cinema and literature, but also to anchor it in a deeply personal soil and make an entertainment .... It was fun to juggle around with and there were times when I sat laughing as I was writing. (Patterson, 1999)

It has been observed that “Duffy’s predilection for the subjects of and styles of myth and fable has been marked from her earliest published work” (Michelis & Rowland, 2016, p. 47). The result is “masterful subversions of myth and history” (Poetry Foundation, 2019) in which intentional reversals or distortions of original sources are presented to communicate Duffy’s views on various issues including identity. Her approach, her writing style and her technique have made her the first women poet to hold the position of Britain’s Poet Laureate in 2009, a position that had been held for three hundred and forty-one years by male poets only (Lyall, 2009). In her book *Carol Ann Duffy: Poet for Our Times*, Jane Dowson (2016) states that in *The World’s Wife* the traditional role of “the archetypal wife” as a suffering, loving and caring partner is reversed to reflect the poet’s attitude towards marriage and heterosexual relationships (p. 139).

Identity crisis is one of the issues that Carol Duffy tackles in *The World’s Wife* and it is also one of the issues she had to face in her own early life. When Duffy was at St. Joseph’s Convent School, where she stayed from 1967 to 1970, she felt uncomfortable with the atmosphere because “They did nothing but lists”, as she recollected (Forbes, 2002). The only relief for her, she stated, was a poet who once visited the school and recited Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, a poem that tells the supernatural tale of a mariner who has to suffer divine retribution for his sin of killing an innocent albatross. During the years 1970 to 1974, which she spent studying at Stafford Girls’ High School, she was inspired by her poetry teachers and the verse volumes she borrowed and read at the local library there, and it was then when she resolved her crisis and decided to establish her identity as a poet: “At 14 she decided she was going to be a poet and gambled everything on this” (Forbes, 2002). She struggled hard to achieve this identity. Even after she started publishing her poetry, her parents used to doubtfully ask her “Yes, but what’s your real job going to be?” (Forbes, 2002). However, she preserved this passion for poetry and finally

managed to earn the title of the first woman Poet Laureate in Britain. The fact that her teachers inspired her to carve her identity is reflected in a poem titled “Death of a Teacher”, which she wrote just one day after she heard the unfortunate news about the death of her school poetry teacher. In the poem, Duffy recollects how her teacher used to sit in the classroom “reading a poem by Yeats” as Duffy’s “heart stumbled and blushed / As it fell in love with the words” (Duffy, 2016).

Even during the seventies of the twentieth century after she felt self-assured about her identity as a poet, she still had to face a number of serious problems. When asked by Jeanette Winterson during an interview about the problems she confronted back then, she replied, “In the 1970’s, when I started on the circuit, I was called a poetess. Older male poets, the Larkin generation, were both incredibly patronising and incredibly randy” (Winterson, 2013). It was not until the twenty-first century that this prejudice came to an end, because this negative attitude, as she states, is “Completely over. There are a lot of women poets now, and their work is accepted and respected. Look at Alice Oswald, a major poet by any standards, and that is generally understood” (Winterson, 2013). Nevertheless, her success in this achievement came out when she won the National Poetry Competition held by the Poetry Society in 1983, which was followed by other prizes, honors and awards, such as the Dylan Thomas Prize in 1989, The Whitbread Prize for Poetry in 1993, and the T. S. Eliot Prize in 2005.

### 3.2. IDENTITY CRISIS IN *THE WORLD’S WIFE* (1999)

Identity crisis emerges as one of the themes of “Little Red-Cap”, the opening poem in the book, and this poem was inspired by the old popular fairy tale of “Little Red Riding Hood” about a young girl and a wolf as related by the Brothers Grimm. The protagonist in the original story is a little girl who is described as carrying a basket of food to her ill grandmother. To reach her grandmother’s house, she has to walk through the woods. A wolf beats her to her grandmother’s house, swallows the old woman and assumes her identity. When the girl arrives at the house and sees whom she believes to be her grandmother lying in bed, she begins to suspect the old woman’s identity. Noticing that the intelligent girl can see through its disguise, the wolf then attacks the little girl, devours her and then goes to sleep. Later in the story, a hunter saves the day

by slaying the wolf and letting the little girl and her grandmother out of the belly of the beast unharmed (Grimm, 2014, pp.85-88).

A psychoanalytic interpretation of the tale views the characters as symbols and the plot as a process of initiation from childhood to puberty. Prior to her encounter with the wolf, the little girl dwells in the realm of childhood innocence. By being devoured by the wolf, she relinquishes her former identity as a pure and innocent child and moves into the world of experience, which the wolf figuratively stands for. The disemboweling of the wolf at the hands of the hunter and the girl's re-emergence into the world harps upon the regeneration motif and stands for her rebirth as an experienced adult (Dundes, 1988, pp. 27-9).

In Carol Ann Duffy's poetic adaptation of the original prose tale, an alternative ending is provided in order to empower the protagonist as the active creator, instead of the earlier passive receiver, of her new identity. The girl, in other words, resolves her own identity crisis on her own instead of having it resolved for her by the hunter. The opening line of the poem describes the girl as being at her "childhood's end", thus almost ending her childhood period and approaching puberty (Duffy, 1999, p. 1). The journey through the woods is presented as a quest motif that symbolically reflects this psychological transition from childhood to adulthood or from innocence to experience. The forest setting, which is adapted from the original fairy tale, is consequently made to run parallel to this psychological transition as the girl, who is "sweet sixteen", now "came at last to the edge of the woods" (Duffy, 1999, p. 1).

The departure from the original account is the most significant section of the poem, for it constitutes Duffy's main contribution, and it occurs when the reader is told that the little girl intentionally lets the wolf lead her "deep into the woods ... to a dark tangled thorny place" (Duffy, 1999, p. 1). The situation in the original tale where the wolf tricks the girl is reversed in Duffy's version, for the girl, and not the wolf, is playing the part of the trickster. When she arrives at the wolf's lair, she awaits the right moment and finally slays him:

I took an axe to the wolf  
As he slept, one chop, scrotum to throat, and saw  
The glistening, virgin white of my grandmother's bones.  
I filled his old belly with stones. I stitched him up.  
Out of the forest I come with my flowers, singing, all alone.  
(Duffy, 1999, p. 1).

Her new strong identity now as a female who has independently and unassisted conquered the force that threatened to destroy her has been duly earned and established. The woods fit symbolically as the setting for the identity crisis she experienced, for it is a place where one could easily feel lost and confused. The little girl, the narrator says, has "lost both shoes" and her "stockings ripped to shreds" (Duffy, 1999, p. 1).

In contrast to the female protagonist in "Little Red-Cap" who successfully manages to resolve her identity crisis and establish a new and powerful identity, the protagonist in the poem entitled "Thetis" fails to achieve this goal despite her strong will and numerous attempts. The poem was inspired by the female figure of Thetis, a sea nymph portrayed in classical mythology. According to the original myth, when Zeus, the head of the Greek pantheon, learned that Thetis would bear a son who would become greater than his father, he conspired with his brother Poseidon, the god of the sea, to trick her into marrying a human. Peleus, the potential groom they found for her, was rejected by her but was advised to chain her to prevent her from metamorphosing. Despite her multiple metamorphoses, she failed to escape and eventually succumbed to Peleus (Morford, 2003, p. 90). Duffy utilizes this myth to explore gender issues and present them in the work. She points out through her poem the difficulty a postmodern female faces to establish her identity amidst a male-dominated community. The events in the poem are related from Thetis's point of view. She describes her countless attempts to shape shift in order to elude Peleus' advances and avoid the dismal destiny contrived for her by the male deities.

The state of identity crisis that Thetis is compelled to experience makes her strive for a resolution by testing several identity options. She initially assumes the identity of a bird, but she finds herself squeezed in her opponent's grips. Then she metamorphosed



into a fish, but she was caught with his hook. Afterwards, she assumed several identities of the animal kingdom – “raccoon, skunk, stoat, ... weasel, ferret, bat, mink, rat”. She even tried out inanimate matter: “I was wind, I was gas, / I was all hot air, trailed / clouds for hair” (Duffy, 1999, p. 7). All her endeavors, however, failed because she found herself alone struggling against a group of powerful gods who unanimously agreed to subdue her into unquestioning obedience. Fatigued and crestfallen, she eventually relents and yields to Peleus’ will, who impregnates her. She gives birth to Achilles, who, as the oracle prophesied, became more powerful than his father. Her several attempts to resolve her identity crisis were thus abortive, and her former identity was submerged as she disappointedly recoiled on herself and learned that it is useless for a woman to struggle in a man’s world: “I learned, / turned inside out – or that’s / how it felt when the child burst out” (Duffy, 1999, p. 7).

Female characters who, like Thetis, fail to resolve their identity crises successfully in *The World’s Wife* include Penelope and Mrs Sisyphus. In “Penelope”, Duffy provides her own version of Odysseus’s wife who had to endure his long absence from home. According to Homer’s epic *The Odyssey*, the protagonist Odysseus had to leave his wife Penelope and his son Telemachus in search of a life of glory and adventure. As a husband, a father, and the king of Ithaca, he relinquished his duties in favor of his personal desire. Penelope felt neglected and helpless because she was left alone with her son and the kingdom, especially after everyone took Odysseus for dead due to his long absence. She had to struggle with all the greedy suitors who proposed to her, conspired against her son and forced her to obey them. Penelope in Duffy’s poem expresses her diminishing and submerged identity after her husband left her. After waiting for Odysseus’s return for many months, she sank into despair. While waiting, she busies herself with “cloth and scissors, needle, thread, / thinking to amuse myself” (Duffy, 1999, p. 48). An image that expresses her inability to emerge from this crisis and establish an independent identity is the simile of the acorn unable to emerge from the soil:

My thimble like an acorn  
pushing up through umber soil.  
Beneath the shade

I wrapped a maiden in a deep embrace  
with heroism's boy  
and lost myself completely  
in a wild embroidery of love, lust, loss, lessons learnt.

(Duffy, 1999, p. 48)

These lines also reveal how her identity is overshadowed by others because of the male dominated community of Ithaca. She is dwelling “Beneath the shade” and is only able to engage in wishful thinking and imagination expressed in her embroidery of ideal love affairs. Despite the fact that she is a queen and is supposed to have authority and power, she ironically says, “kept my head down” and pursued her needlework, this time weaving “a river that would never reach the sea”, another image expressing her futile attempts at establishing an independent identity (Duffy, 1999, p. 48).

In “Mrs Sisyphus”, Duffy creates another female figure who, like Penelope and Thetis, are unable to resolve their identity crises. The poem is told from Sisyphus’s wife’s point of view. She complains that her husband spends all his time away from home “pushing the stone up the hill”, a useless task compared to his domestic duties as a husband and a family man. She is neglected by her husband and the entire community, and the only option she has is to “lie alone in the dark”. She expresses her sense of her shrinking identity when she says, “My voice reduced to a squawk, / my smile to a twisted smirk” (Duffy, 1999, p. 17).

In “Mrs. Faust”, Duffy shows how a woman’s identity can be deeply affected by that of her partner. The poem is inspired by the legendary figure of Johann Georg Faust, an alchemist of the German Renaissance period, who has informed the literary works of several authors including Christopher Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (1604) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust* (1808). Despite the variations in the several literary versions of the legend, the core narrative tells of the misfortunes and tragic death of a genius scientist who sells his soul to the devil in return for unlimited knowledge and the practice of magic (Tucker, 1969, p. 37). Adaptations of the legend focus on Faust as the central figure and make no mention of his spouse. Duffy in this poem creates the character of Faust’s wife and assigns to her

the role of the narrator of the verse narrative, reporting what befell her husband as a result of his pact with the devil. She starts the poem with “First things first – / I married Faust” (Duffy, 1999, p. 13) and goes on to describe how they met each other as students, fell in love and got married.

Continuing the story with what at first glance strikes the reader as an anachronism, the narrator states how her husband purchased fast cars, a yacht, and a luxury mansion in Wales. The transition from the legendary past to the realistic present rules out anachronism with Duffy’s treatment of the Faustian figure as a universal epitome of male chauvinism. Mrs. Faust makes it clear that she is not blind to her husband’s human follies and tragic error. She clearly affirms that he was “greedy” and “mad” and gave himself to carnal pleasures as he “went to whores” (Duffy, 1999, p. 13). As a result of his selfishness, unfaithfulness and coldness, a rift drove them apart and she felt emotionally detached. She says that he “grew to love the kudos, / not the wife” (Duffy, 1999, p. 13). One day he confesses to her how he was entertained by Helen of Troy the night before and how he “made a pact / with Mephistopheles” (Duffy, 1999, p. 14).

Faust’s decision and unrelenting determination to establish such a negative identity leaves his wife with no choice but to establish her own. The poem does not depict Faust facing his identity crisis and hesitantly struggling with his conscience to make up his mind. This crisis and inner conflict did not take place in his wife’s presence, and since she is the narrator of the events, she only relates the outcome of the inner conflict and what she knew too late. Her initial reaction was a mixture of disillusionment and hope. Her grief over the way he mistreated and neglected her resulted in “chronic irritation. / I went to yoga, t’ai chi, / Feng Shui, therapy, colonic irrigation” (Duffy, 1999, p. 13). However, when she finally realized that she was unable to dissuade her husband from the crooked path of evil, she immersed herself in distractions as a way to compromise her unhappy marriage and reconcile herself to reality. With Faust’s fate already sealed and beyond the hope of redemption, she gave up trying and had her way:

I went my own sweet way,  
saw Rome in a day,

spun gold from hay,  
had a facelift,  
had my breasts enlarged,  
my buttocks tightened;  
went to China, Thailand, Africa,  
returned, enlightened. (Duffy, 1999, p. 14).

This is obviously not the identity she had set out to establish for herself before or at the beginning of her marriage, and for this reason she states that she “grew to love the lifestyle, / not the life” (Duffy, 1999, p. 13). Once more, the poet portrays the female protagonist as a victim of a patriarchic imperative. Compensation, nevertheless, follows after Faust’s damnation as she inherits his wealth and is able to spend it in good faith:

C’est la vie.  
When I got ill,  
it hurt like hell.  
I bought a kidney  
with my credit card,  
then I got well. (Duffy, 1999, p. 15)

Duffy’s poetic creativity resides in feminizing the identity of King Kong in her next poem “Queen Kong”. The figure of King Kong originated in the film industry at the hands of American filmmaker Merian C. Cooper. After its invention, the character of King Kong, the fictional monster gorilla that could not find its place among humans, has been a source of inspiration for several literary texts and films. The story of King Kong is strongly related to identity crisis issues. Cynthia Erb (2009) points out that the character of King Kong stands for “a type of male adolescent impulse rooted in sexual naiveté and a sense of male identity not as yet fully formed, but developed in the presence of a woman” (p. 93).

In this respect, King Kong is trapped in the continuous process of identity crisis without being able to resolve it or have it resolved. At the same time, a female character is required for Kong to help him resolve this crisis successfully. King Kong may have

also been conceived as an expression of what “several men, who may have inhabited dominant notions of manhood and national identity available in the 1930s in quite different ways” (Erb, 2009, p. 117). In this sense, Kong’s tragic death at the end of the story indicates how the patriarchic system could be a victim of itself. A further interpretation of Kong’s character brings him within the scope of “racial identity”, discussed in the first chapter of this study, supporting the cause of the African Americans in the United States and documenting their misfortunes throughout history (Erb, 2009, p. 202).

King Kong’s identity has consequently been subject to criticism, and its eventual destruction has been blamed on Ann Darrow, the woman Kong is in love with in the story. Carl Denham, the leader of the crew that captured King Kong from Skull Island and took it to New York, made a final comment on the death of the beast at the end of the 1933 version of the movie stating that “It wasn’t the planes that got him [Kong]. ’Twas Beauty [that] killed the Beast” (Erb, 2009, p. 118). This is a reference to the tragic end in the story when King Kong climbs up to the top of the Empire State Building in New York City and is shot down to his death by war planes. This comment presents Ann Darrow as a femme fatale. Such an interpretation is questioned by critics like Virginie Despentes (2006), who in her book *King Kong Theory* contends that “It seems that male identity depends on keeping up this lie . . . femme fatale, bunny girl, nurse, Lolita” (p. 135).

Carol Duffy reverses gender identities in her poem by presenting the giant gorilla as a female called Queen Kong, who is depicted as being in love with a human male described by the female gorilla in the poem as “my little man” (Duffy, 1999, p. 18). As the narrator in the poem, Queen Kong says that she had first met her little man when he arrived at her island with a documentary crew to produce a film there. Though he screamed as she picked him up and placed him in her palm, he later calmed down when he realized that she meant no harm. What attracted him to her was her need for love and her sense of loneliness:

For me, it was absolutely love at first sight.  
I’d been so lonely. Long nights in the heat

Of my own pelt, rumbling an animal blues

(Duffy, 1999, p. 18)

With him, she found her new sense of identity, which she soon lost after he finished the film production and decided to pack his things and leave the island back to New York City. It was then that she felt “distraught”, “fevered” and “lovesick” (Duffy, 1999, p. 18). Determined to bring him back to the island, she went to New York and searched for him, peeping into apartment windows there, until she finally found him in a Manhattan skyscraper apartment. They were afterwards reunited and lived happily until he died. His death, however, did not disrupt her will to feel his presence and strong attachment, for after his death she “held him all night, shaking him / Like a doll” (Duffy, 1999, p. 19). She says, “I’m sure that, sometimes, in his silent death, / Against my massive, breathing lungs, he hears me” (Duffy, 1999, p. 19). Love is hence portrayed in this poem as the permanent anchor where a genuine identity is established after experiencing a crisis. Queen Kong is neither able to find her true identity on her island among her kind nor able to spend the rest of her life alienated from others. Finding her little man helped her find herself and for this reason she was willing “to follow him then to the ends of the earth” (Duffy, 1999, p. 18).

Love is also the theme of “Medusa”, in which Duffy provides a justification for the protagonist’s negative identity by resorting to male Chauvinism as the reason that led to this unpleasant outcome of Medusa’s crisis resolution. According to classical mythology, the Medusa is a winged female figure that has serpents on her head for hair, and she is one of the three sisters known as the Gorgons. She possesses the supernatural power of petrifying living organisms and objects – that is, of immediately turning anyone or anything she gazes on into stone (Room, 2003, p. 194). Although she is traditionally and commonly presented as a cruel, merciless and ugly woman, the call for women’s rights at the turn of the twentieth century attempted to view the bright side of her character. In her study of ancient Greek forms of religion, Jane Harrison (1908) stated that “the Gorgon was made out of the terror, not the terror out of the Gorgon” (Harrison, 1908, p. 191). A similar interpretation of Medusa’s character was clearly made by the French literary critic Hélène Cixous (1976) in her article “The Laugh of the Medusa”, in which she contended that the unpleasant and monstrous aspect in the character of the

Medusa is the result of masculine interpretations derived from the patriarchal system of Western culture. A glance at the Medusa, Cixous continues, reveals that “She's beautiful and she's laughing” (p. 885). Duffy wrote this poem from this point of view.

The poem is cast in the form of a monologue, as most of Duffy's poems are (Poetry Foundation, 2019), in which the Medusa is relating unfortunate events that took place in her past and that led to her present condition. She says that the “filthy snakes” that replaced the hairs on her head were the result of the “suspicion” and “doubt” she fostered and repressed within her as a wife after discovering that her husband was betraying her with other women (Duffy, 1999, p. 28). After this discovery, her identity was transformed from a loving and caring wife to a monstrous and hideous creature. Her sweet breath turned foul, her teeth turned into yellow fangs and her hair into serpents. In addition to this physical transformation, her character also changed. Her thoughts became venomous, her speech turned malignant, and the tears in her eyes were transformed into “bullet tears” (Duffy, 1999, p. 28). Although at the present she still cherishes feelings for her husband, she prefers to see him turn into a stone than see him betray her every day:

Are you terrified?  
Be terrified.  
It's you I love,  
perfect man, Greek God, my own;  
but I know you'll go, betray me, stray  
from home.  
So better by far for me if you were stone.

(Duffy, 1999, p. 28)

She then goes on to describe how she discovered that she was going through an identity crisis. She began to notice, as she states in the poem, that her petrifying gaze turned a bee into a pebble, a singing bird into a handful of gravel, a ginger cat into a brick, a pig into a boulder, and a dragon into a volcano. At the beginning, she was not aware of this identity transformation until she saw her reflection in the mirror: “I stared in the mirror. / Love gone bad / showed me a Gorgon” (Duffy, 1999, p. 28). At the end of the poem,

there is a confirmation that this transformation from a positive identity to a negative one was out of Medusa's hand. It was the natural and normal consequence of her husband's betrayal. The final lines in the poem reiterate her husband's lack of compassion, his extramarital love affairs and his neglect for her. The lines also emphasize the negative resolution of her identity crisis by contrasting her unpleasant present appearance with her former beauty:

And your girls, your girls.  
Wasn't I beautiful?  
Wasn't I fragrant and young?  
Look at me now. (Duffy, 1999, p. 28)

"Medusa" is Duffy's attempt at showing how in general an individual's identity could be distorted when honesty, true love, purity and loyalty are betrayed. More specifically, Duffy applies this belief to the case of Medusa and views the situation from a gender perspective to provide an example of how a patriarchal community can have a negative impact on the resolution of female identity leading to the acquisition of a negative identity for the women involved.

Like "Medusa", "Pygmalion's Bride" is also cast in the form of a monologue in which the protagonist Galatea describes her relationship with her husband Pygmalion. However, "Medusa", unlike "Pygmalion's Bride", shows how a woman's identity crisis is resolved negatively and her identity is submerged and distorted under a patriarchic system. It is in Duffy's "Pygmalion's Bride" that the poet describes how a woman can overcome this dilemma and achieve a positive identity despite her marginalization by male dominance and superiority, as the following analysis of the poem reveals.

The first mention of the Pygmalion figure was made in the book titled *Metamorphoses* composed by the first-century Latin poet Ovid, where the figure of Pygmalion is introduced as a famous Cyprian sculptor who fell in love with a statue of a woman he himself carved as his ideal wife and named Galatea. When Aphrodite, the classical goddess of love, noticed how true his love was for the statue, she decided to bring it to life. After Galatea's metamorphosis into a human being, she and Pygmalion



got married, had children and lived happily (Ovid, 1958, pp.277-279; Lenardon, 1985, pp.117-118). Since its introduction by Ovid, the myth of Pygmalion has, as Paula James (2011) stated, “inspired artists, authors and dramatists through the centuries” (p. 9). Ovid’s influence on Duffy has already been observed by Miller and Newlands (2014), who noticed that a number of the characters that appear in *The World’s Wife* are “unambiguously Ovidian” (p. 436).

“Pygmalion’s Bride” is a retelling of the original Ovidian Pygmalion story from Galatea’s point of view. At the beginning of the poem, Galatea describes herself as “Cold ... like snow, like ivory” (Duffy, 1999, p. 36). She displays a cold attitude and a lack of desire and passion towards Pygmalion’s advances. Although he caressed her passionately, cared for her, spoke to her with endearing terms, made love to her and brought her presents such as “pearls and necklaces and rings”, she “didn’t blink”, “was dumb”, “didn’t shrink”, and “played statue” (Duffy, 1999, p. 36). This coldness and absence of responsiveness on her part have a double meaning. On the one hand, she is cold and motionless because she is a statue. On the other hand, these personality traits refer to her lack of interest in Pygmalion and her emotional detachment and repulsion from him.

The reason for her coldness is soon made clear in the poem when Galatea describes Pygmalion’s character. His love for her, she says, is not true and he treats her merely as a sexual object. According to her account, the way he touches her indicates his lack of sensitivity and gentility, since he “thumbed” her and handled her with his “clammy hands”, and she observes that his “nails were claws” (Duffy, 1999, p. 36). When he expressed his love to her, he used “blunt endearments”, indicating that his words lacked delicacy. As time passed, his insensitivity, indelicacy, and absence of tenderness turned to cruelty and domestic violence. She says, “His words were terrible”, “His voice was gravel, hoarse” and he even began to “shout” at her (Duffy, 1999, p. 36). He only talked about meaningless things that did not interest her. She says, “He jawed [gossiped] all night”, and this made her feel bored because he was only interested in himself. The gifts he brought her were only meant to seduce her sexually and they were not given as tokens of sincere and true love. This is evident in his attitude towards these presents, because he sarcastically called them “girly things”. Her repulsion grew

stronger as he expressed signs of jealousy and doubt about her faithfulness. When he slept with her, he “looked for marks, / for purple hearts, / for inky stars, for smudgy clues” that would indicate that she had an affair with another man (Duffy, 1999, p. 36).

Up to this point, Galatea has neither power nor control over her unpleasant and unfortunate circumstances. She is forced to accept her state as a victim of the brutality, violence and ridicule displayed towards her by Pygmalion. Her cleverness and resourcefulness, however, enable her to devise a plan to escape from this oppression and coercion. Even after her metamorphosis into a human being, coldness was still her only weapon against Pygmalion’s cruelty, so she “played statue”, preserving her former state. Realizing that this method could not guarantee her escape, she turns to the opposite strategy to gain control over the situation. Consequently, she “changed tack, / grew warm, like candle wax ... begged for his child” (Duffy, 1999, p. 36).

Driven by this new tactic, she suddenly grew passionate, warm, caring and loving, but it was all make-believe, “all an act”, as she states. Before this change of tactics on her part, Pygmalion insisted to stay with her. She thought that her emotional and sexual coldness would drive him away from her, but after living with him and examining his personality closely, she later realized that she was mistaken. She came to the conclusion that his decision to keep her as his wife was her undemanding and submissive personality and her association of her identity with his own. Lack of response was in fact what he particularly liked in her character. When she changed her attitude and pretended that she loved him, she asked for a baby. This request not only indicated her dissociation of her identity from his and her assertion of a new independent identity, it also made Pygmalion reconsider their relationship. Having children entails a lot of responsibility and this means that he must develop a sense of family commitment. Unwilling to bear the responsibility of a family as a father and unable to have commitments, he withdraws from his relationship with her and abandons her. The closing lines in the poem describe the outcome of their affair after this change in her identity. She says that she has not “seen him since. / Simple as that” (Duffy, 1999, p. 36). She eventually managed to escape from him and live freely away from his cruelty and violence towards her.

By reversing the themes and character traits in the original tale, Duffy also reverses the identities associated with them. The theme of true love and sacrifice in Ovid's version, expressing a positive identity, is replaced with selfishness and sexual desire in Duffy's poem to reiterate Pygmalion's negative identity. Galatea's blind obedience and submission to her husband in the original tale is replaced with her cunning strategy in the poem to find a way out of the cruel and oppressive world she is forced to live in. Galatea was not able to achieve her independent identity in her community until she stopped playing her traditional role as a silent obedient woman and bravely asked for her right as a wife and mother. Only then she broke free from the male dominated world that subjugated her will, deprived her of her freedom, marginalized her social and domestic role, and curbed her independence. What saved her and let her succeed in asserting her strong and independent identity was her will as well as her intelligence and resourcefulness.

Another female figure that Duffy adapts from classical mythology to incorporate within her philosophy of identity transformation is Eurydice. According to Ovid (1958), Eurydice was the wife of Orpheus. After stepping upon a viper that poisoned her, she died and was admitted by the gods into the Underworld. Orpheus, who loved her truly, spent all his time mourning her death with his lyrical music and songs. The gods and goddesses were so moved by his sorrowful tunes that they decided to help him by telling him to travel to the Underworld to fetch her back alive to the world of the living so they could live together like before. After descending to the Underworld, Orpheus met and appealed to its king and queen, Hades and Persephone, to free his wife and let her go back with him. Both deities were so touched by his grief and sad beautiful music that they finally granted their consent to send her back with him to the realm of the living (Ovid, 1958, pp.269-273).

In the opening lines of Duffy's poetic version "Eurydice", the female protagonist of the myth is presented as the narrator of the poem and she is portrayed as addressing an audience of women describing to them her experience in the Underworld. She tells them that in Hades she felt herself as "a shadow of my former self" (Duffy, 1999, p. 41). This indicates that after her descent there were still traces of her former identity which she had when she lived in the living world with Orpheus. It also indicates that she barely

had any genuine identity of her own. Instead, all she possessed while dwelling with her husband was a self-concept. Contrary to the traditional interpretations of the myth, which generally view Eurydice as “no more than a name” (Liveley, 2017, p. 290), Eurydice at the hands of Duffy finds the Underworld an ideal place for her and for other women who faced a similar fate prior to their death and descent:

It suited me down to the ground.  
So imagine me there,  
unavailable,  
out of this world,  
then picture my face in that place  
of Eternal Repose,  
in the one place you'd think a girl would be safe  
from the kind of a man  
who follows her round (Duffy, 1999, p. 41)

It is clear from these lines that Eurydice was not happy with Orpheus, whom she sarcastically calls “Big O” – a reference to his selfish concern with his own inflated ego - and finds Hades the ideal resolution for her former identity crisis. She then lists Orpheus’ characteristics that annoyed and irritated her before her descent. He never left her alone and he was constantly seeking her attention, and he “hovers about” reading his poems to her. He also “sulked for a night and a day”, a reference to his childish behavior. Living with him made her feel she was his “prize” because she felt she was left without any sense of identity. He neglected her and spent his time with his lyre composing music and impressing animals that “flocked to his side when he sang” (Duffy, 1999, p. 41). She calls him a “boy”, indicating his immaturity and lack of experience.

It is in Hades that Eurydice finds her true and independent identity. For the first time in her life she says “I’d rather speak for myself” (Duffy, 1999, p. 41). Now that she found her own voice and the place where she should belong to, she does not wish to go back and she says “I’d rather be dead”. She warns her female audience not to trust the gods because they had distorted her story by presenting Orpheus as a hero who saved her from the world of the dead and brought her back to life. It is important to note that

she blames the gods, not the goddesses, for the distortion of her story and the unpleasant destiny that befell her. She assures her female listeners that “Gods are like publishers, / usually male, / and what you doubtless know of my tale / is the deal” (Duffy, 1999, pp.41-42). The same gods, she continues, ordered her to go back with Orpheus to the surface of the earth where she would return to her former identity or self-concept: “I must follow him back to our life – / Eurydice, Orpheus’ wife – / to be trapped in his images” (Duffy, 1999, p. 42). She defines her former self as “Orpheus’ wife”, thus linking her identity with his and indicating that she has none of her own. In the world of the living, she is identified with her husband as her own personality is ignored or marginalized.

Eurydice’s determination, however, to retain her new identity in Hades and her final decision not to restore her former self provided her with a plan to remain in the Underworld. According to the original tale, Orpheus was warned by the gods to lead his wife from the Underworld up to the world of the living while she should follow him close behind. He was told not to look back at his wife during their journey upwards, otherwise she would go back to Hades and he would lose her forever. However, Orpheus looked back and lost her forever, but his decision to glance back was engendered by his concern about her well-being because he did not want her to lose her way or trip and fall (Ovid, 1958, p. 271). Duffy twisted the ending of the original tale to communicate her own message about Eurydice’s intention to stay in Hades. With this condition in mind, Eurydice decided to trick her husband into looking back at her. She did this by praising his poetry. She knew that his poetry and music are the only things he would care about. She proved herself to be right and wise, because as soon as she mentioned his poetry, he forgot the condition ordained by the gods upon which his wife’s life depended and he turned back. He therefore lost her forever and she went back to Hades and enjoyed her new identity there as an independent woman free from male supremacy and from patriarchy:

Girls, forget what you’ve read.  
It happened like this –  
I did everything in my power  
to make him look back.

.....  
Orpheus, your poem's a masterpiece.  
I'd love to hear it again . . .  
He was smiling modestly  
when he turned,  
when he turned and he looked at me.  
What else?  
I noticed he hadn't shaved.  
I waved once and was gone (Duffy, 1999, p. 42).

Her statement that her husband did not shave is both humorous and sarcastic, and is intentionally made not to fit the serious situation she is describing. Duffy uses several such cynical and satirical statements about the male characters in *The World's Wife* in order to reflect their lack of responsibility and negligence of their duties as husbands. Despite the fact that Eurydice employs false flattery to persuade Orpheus to look back at her, and despite the interpretation of her method as "mischievous" (Lyall, 2009), the point that Duffy wants to stress is that women cannot attain and preserve their true and independent identity as long as they are victimized by a patriarchic society.

In "Eurydice" Duffy presents two worlds and contrasts them with each other. There is on the one hand the human world of the living where men exercise control over women and deprive them of freedom. It is a world where women are oppressed, with their identities either crushed or submerged, and where gender equality is absent. On the other hand, there is the Underworld which is described as the safe place for women who could resolve their identity crisis by gaining freedom, independence, and self-confidence.

From the analysis above, it is evident that Duffy's attitude towards the resolution of the identity crisis experienced by her creatively sketched characters in *The World's Wife* is rooted in culture in all its forms, whether it is mythology, literature, religion, art, folklore, or history. A successful resolution for the crisis, she contends in this work, is the result of external and internal factors. It could be the outcome of an individual's strong will and determination, the availability of favorable circumstances, or a

combination of both factors. In this sense, Carol Duffy's approach to identity crisis and its resolution is similar to Alice Oswald's approach in that both poets view the crisis and its resolution as an inevitable physical experience in which the individual confronting it should be directly involved in it in order for him or her to acquire a new identity. Louise Glück, as the next chapter will show, adopts a completely different approach to the subject, for she manages to portray identity crisis beyond its mere physical layer.



**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**IDENTITY CRISIS IN LOUISE ELISABETH GLÜCK'S *THE***  
***SEVEN AGES* (2001)**

“Without remembering, there is no identity. In amnesia, one loses oneself. In memory, one finds an identity.”

Kevin Vanhoozer (2005)

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The subject of identity crisis and its resolution is among the several topics found in the works of American poet Louise Elisabeth Glück, born in 1943, who won several literary prizes and awards and held the position of Poet Laureate of the United States from 2003 to 2004. She is one of the prominent modern female voices in American poetry and her work addresses several psychological issues (Doreski, 1995, p. 150).

Glück's treatment of identity problems is deeply rooted in the circumstances of her life. She did not seem to have serious issues during her early childhood. In her essay “The Education of the Poet”, from her book *Proofs and Theories: Essays on Poetry* (1994), she stated, “my family was most remarkable. Both my parents admired intellectual accomplishment; my mother, in particular, revered creative gifts. At a time when women were not, commonly, especially well educated, my mother fought to go to college” (p. 5). Glück and her sister had indulgent parents who provided everything their children wished for. The poet recalls,

My sister and I were encouraged in every gift. If we hummed we got music lessons. If we skipped, dance. And so on. My mother read to us, then taught us to read very early. Before I was three, I was well grounded in the Greek myths, and the figures of those stories, together with certain images from the illustrations, became fundamental referents. My father told stories. (Glück, 1994, p. 7)



The first serious problems she confronted took place during her late adolescence and early adulthood, starting with the development of an eating disorder known as anorexia nervosa, which included among its symptoms loss of both appetite and weight, and this compelled her to ask for treatment. She remembered, “one day, I told my mother I thought perhaps I should see a psychoanalyst” (Glück, 1994, p. 11), so she went through seven years of psychoanalytic treatment and her studies at school were suspended so she could be ready for her rehabilitation program (Morris, 2006, p. 24). She struggled to preserve her life. Remembering those times of trouble, she once wrote, “I realized that I had no control over this behavior at all .... I understood that at some point I was going to die. What I knew more vividly, more viscerally, was that I didn’t want to die” (Morris, 2006, p. 26). These piling agonies and traumas in her life made her adopt that attitude that the past, be it an individual’s past as the period of childhood and adolescence or the historical past, is the time of joy and glory, in contrast to the present which for her represents “an allegory of waste” (Azcuay, 2011, p. 11). She cherishes the past to such an extent that she keeps imagining and “reimagining” it (Bloom, 2011, p. 80).

Glück, however, was able to turn misfortune into hope, because she learned a great deal from her own case of psychoanalysis. She learned from it skepticism, self-examination, and the power of speech:

Analysis taught me to think. Taught me to use my tendency to object to articulated ideas on my own ideas, taught me to use doubt, to examine my own speech for its evasions and excisions. It gave me an intellectual task capable of transforming paralysis – which is the extreme form of self-doubt – into insight. I was learning to use native detachment to make contact with myself, which is the point, I suppose, of dream analysis. (Glück, 1994, p. 12)

It might seem paradoxical to think of “detachment” as a form of “contact”, but this paradox is crucial in understanding how Glück utilizes it to shape her own approach to

identity crisis and her method of avoiding its negative resolution. Lee Upton (2005) likewise observes that a “certain detachment toward her materials and toward the reader are part of the very fabric of Glück’s verse” (p. 85). This detachment is what characterizes Glück’s approach to the subject of identity crisis, as the analysis of her collection *The Seven Ages* in this chapter will show.

More problems followed as Glück married and divorced twice (Morris, 2006, p. 29). In an interview with Grace Cavalieri (2006), she referred to the “horrors” of divorce and how much it affected her life as well as her career as a writer. After she started publishing her poetry, she suffered from writer’s block which was not cured until she began to teach poetry at Goddard College in Vermont helping her students overcome their writing problems. Remembering this incident in her life, she stated, “The minute I started teaching, I started writing. It was a miracle” (Moyer, 2016). These psychological upheavals in her late teenage and adult life made her cling to her childhood which she considered as the most pleasant stage of her own life and of human existence in general, and this stage inspired much of her poetry. Most of her poems, as Daniel Morris (2006) pointed out, present “a nostalgic projection of the human speaker’s desire to possess a transcendent perspective on her own loss of innocence” (p. 77). It has also been noted that “Every poem is the passion of Louise Glück, starring the grief and suffering of Louise Glück” (Robbins, 2020). This nostalgia coincides with a sense of alienation from, and a rejection of, the present human condition:

What is most powerful in Glück’s work, however, is not simply the struggle, nor the transformation of the personal into the mythic, but the responses of each speaker, echoed forcefully in the form and texture of each poem. In the face of every wound, Glück and her speakers respond with a stony silence, a sense of brooding isolation that acts as both a weapon and a barrier. (Cucinella, 2002, p. 150)

This topic of identity is addressed in her verse through her focus on memory, nostalgia and autobiographical depictions of her childhood. She once stated in an interview with Grace Cavalieri (2006), “I draw on the materials my life has given me”.

Cyril Mun (2008) observed that Glück's verse could be described as an "autobiographical journey of spiritual and existential self-discovery" and that her poetry utilizes the "Modernist strategy of speaking through the masks of mythical figures to elevate the merely personal and autobiographical, and she also combines it with suggestive references to a brand of popular, present-day reality" (p. 50). In her collection *The Seven Ages* (2001), for example, Glück "looks back on her childhood, particularly memories concerning her sister, and also turns her lyric gaze to nature, in order to confront her mortality" (Mun, 2008, p. 19).

Closely related to the autobiographical nature of her poetry is the critical claim that "Louise Glück is surely a Confessional poet in some basic sense" (Baker, 2018). Confessional Poetry is characterized by its focus on the poet's own personal circumstances and experiences (Abrams and Harpham, 2012, p. 62). Within the discourse of Confessional Poetry, it is common to view "confession as part of a broader discourse of gender and sexuality, and indeed identity" (Gill, 2006, p. 6). From this autobiographical perspective, the speaker in her poems can be taken to be the poet herself. Commenting on William Wordsworth's theory of poetry, Glück once wrote that

The idea of "a man talking to men," the premise of honesty, depends on a delineated speaker. And it is precisely on this point that confusion arises, since the success of such a poetry creates in its readers a firm belief in the reality of that speaker, which is expressed as the identification of the speaker with the poet. This belief is what the poet means to engender. (Glück, 1994, p. 43)

Wordsworth's belief in childhood and the innocence associated with childhood (Williams, 1996, p. 134) also suits Glück's themes of nostalgia and the loss of innocence which are incorporated into the topic of identity crisis presented in *The Seven Ages*.

#### 4.2. IDENTITY CRISIS IN *THE SEVEN AGES* (2001)

The title of Glück's poetry collection *The Seven Ages* is closely related to the topic of identity crisis and it derives from a soliloquy given in the second act of William Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*, a play which has mistaken identities as one its

main themes (Chandra, 2015). In the seventh scene of the second act, one of the characters called Jaques expresses a pessimistic view of life by comparing the real world to a stage in a theater. The soliloquy begins with the following lines:

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 227)

Jaques then describes man at these seven ages as being an “infant”, a “schoolboy”, a “lover”, a “soldier”, a “justice”, a “pantaloon”, and finally a “second childishness” (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 227). The idea of a second childhood is similar to the psychological term “second adolescence” discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. In his book *Shakespeare: The Seven Ages of Human Experience*, David Bevington (2005) states that Shakespeare’s idea of the seven ages of man was not new. It was in fact inherited from previous writers and deeply rooted in medieval philosophy (p. 6). The title of Glück’s collection thus emphasizes “the notion of rebirth that has been central to Glück’s poetic journey” (Mun, 2008, p. 70), and the theme of rebirth is closely related to the resolution of the crisis of identity. By selecting this title for her book, Glück reveals her approach to the psychological stages of human development and the transformation of identity that an individual passes through from infancy, through childhood and adulthood to old age.

The opening poem in the collection is called after the title of the book, “The Seven Ages”. It sets the tone and theme of the book by bringing several ideas and issues into focus. It is Glück’s poetic adaptation of the account of Creation as related in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. According to Genesis, Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise because of their sin of disobedience. Their fall from grace and expulsion from heaven indicate their “loss of innocence” (Fruchtenbaum, 2008, p. 97). They therefore underwent a physical and moral transformation in their identity:

Their physical condition, it is plain, was greatly changed. They had heretofore enjoyed a painless, careless existence, with an unending vista of happiness. They now entered upon a scene of toil and suffering, with death and its terrors at no great distance in prospect. They had also undergone a moral change. This has been described as a corruption, disorganization, of their nature. (Mitchell, 1897, pp.924-925)

This transformation was consequently not welcome by Adam and Eve because they lost their former grace, joy, comfort and purity and were introduced to a world of pain, harshness, grief, and corruption.

The poem is divided into two parts. In the first part, the speaker has a dream which she calls “my first dream” (Glück, 2001, p. 343). It is a vision of a world of paradoxes where the “bitter”, the “sweet” and the “forbidden” coexist. The speaker then has another dream which she calls her “second” dream:

In my second I descended  
I was human, I couldn't just see a thing  
beast that I am  
I had to touch, to contain it  
I hid in the groves,  
I worked in the fields until the fields were bare —  
time that will never come again —  
the dry wheat bound, caskets of figs and olives  
I even loved a few times in my disgusting human way  
and like everyone I called that accomplishment  
erotic freedom, absurd as it seems. (Glück, 2001, p. 343)

Words like “descended”, “hid” and “figs” are echoes of the story of Genesis where Adam and Eve after eating the forbidden fruit began to feel ashamed of their nudity and used fig leaves to hide their bodies. Other words used in this extract to describe the world on earth as it appears in the speaker's second dream include “bare”, “dry”,

“disgusting” and “absurd”. Such words indicate Glück’s tone in the poem. The poet clearly contrasts the second dream with the first one to show that the descent was not in favor of the speaker. The only “accomplishment” felt by the speaker after the descent was “erotic freedom”, which Glück takes to be both “absurd” and “disgusting”. Another important point made in the poem about this descent is the speaker’s choice to leave the first realm. The speaker says, “I had to beg to descend”. This shows that the transformation was not imposed upon the speaker. It also seems that there is a system that governs consequences of the speaker’s behavior and actions. The lines “I took, I was taken” and “I dreamed / I was betrayed” show that for every action there is a reaction. In the first world, the speaker had the chance to take and to dream, and for this reason there is loss and betrayal in the second world. It is important to note that the experience described in this poem involves mankind and not just one individual or the speaker alone. The first-person pronoun indicates a collective experience. As Mun (2008) states, the “I” in the poem is “a more universal and allegorical ‘I’ that the poet has introduced in order to discuss the price of our existence” (p. 71).

This poem is placed at the beginning of the collection to set the tone and theme for the rest of the volume. It defines Glück’s attitude towards identity transformation. The change from the speaker’s former identity to the new one is not presented as a development or progress. What makes this change tragic is “time that will never come again”, meaning that there is no chance to restore the first world. Therefore, at the psychoanalytic level, Glück’s poem describes the resolution of the identity crisis as a “preemptive” (Glück, 2001, p. 343) that an individual experiences, and the outcome of this resolution is unpleasant or at least not as pleasant as the earlier self-concept that has been relinquished.

“The Sensual World” could be considered an elaboration of the second dream concisely mentioned in “The Seven Ages”. The speaker in the poem is standing on one side of a “monstrous river”, calling to the individual or group of individuals standing on the other side in order to warn them of a future misfortune: “to caution you, to prepare you. / Earth will seduce you, slowly, imperceptibly, / subtly, not to say with connivance” (Glück, 2001, p. 345). The “you” addressed in the poem, like the personal pronoun “I” in “The Seven Ages”, could also be universal including the reader as well. The poem is

autobiographical, and in the lines that follow the speaker describes one occasion in her past when her grandmother was entertaining the speaker's cousins inside the kitchen with plum and apricot juice. These fruits, as well as the act of tasting and drinking their juice, stand for the sensual world referred to in the title. More symbols of sensuality are presented in the poem, such as the summer setting with its "aroma of summer fruit" with "the sensual life" associated with it (Glück, 2001, p. 345).

The speaker in the poem recollects how she experienced all these sensual joys to the full. Then, she says, things suddenly began to change when night fell and summer came "to an end". It is at this point that she leaves the flashback and moves to the present where she is standing on the bank of the river. She then explains the motive for her warning: "I caution you as I was never cautioned". She wants her audience to learn a lesson from her own past. Her lesson is that satisfaction and gratification will never be attained: "You will never let go, you will never be satiated. / You will be damaged and scarred, you will continue to hunger. / Your body will age, you will continue to need" (Glück, 2001, p. 345). Need is presented as a continuous physical and mental state of adulthood which is never followed by satisfaction.

As in "The Seven Ages", the identity established by the speaker in "The Sensual World" is negative and not in her favor. She identified herself with the world of the senses, experienced "deep immersion", and felt "delight, then solace", but she later realized that "the senses wouldn't protect me" (Glück, 2001, p. 345). The caution the speaker is giving to her audience is therefore a warning not to relinquish one's self-concept and pursue a negative identity by leading a life of sensual pleasures and succumbing to the temptations of the earth.

Glück expresses a sense of disillusionment at the resolution of identity crisis in "Fable", where childhood is contrasted with adulthood. The title "Fable" stresses the notion that the period of childhood has an imaginary and dreamy nature similar to the world of a fable where events and characters are not real. It is significant to note that a tone of detachment and fantasy dominates throughout the entire volume. As Lee Upton (2005) observes, "In *The Seven Ages* the word dream or a variant occurs nearly two dozen times and the word distance occurs at least ten times" (p. 92). The speaker states

how during childhood she and other children cherished a “set of wishes” and how these wishes changed as they grew up, passed through adolescence and moved to adulthood. The identity they found in these wishes was lost, and a negative identity was obtained as a result of “disasters and catastrophes” and the “Waves of despair, waves of hopeless longing and heartache” (Glück, 2001, p. 347). This full transformation of identity is reflected in the frequent repetition of the adjective “different” in the poem, which recurs five times in the text. After reaching adulthood, all the former wishes have been replaced with a single wish, “the wish to go back” (Glück, 2001, p. 347). The poem thus expresses a desire to return to the “Edenic realm which the poet imagined as the first home of the spirit before descending to earth” (Mun, 2008, p. 72). The speaker as an adult has nostalgic “dreams of childhood”, but is at the same time certain that restoring childhood is impossible: “the wish / held us and tormented us / though we knew in our own bodies / it was never granted” (Glück, 2001, p. 347). The sole solace in this situation is death, which is presented as a relief and is metaphorically described as “the night” when “the wish released us” and everything turns “utterly silent”. It is important that the poem ends at the word “silent” to signify that death puts an end to all the speaker’s dreams and wishes as well as her life.

The reason for this tone of resistance against the transition from the self-concept enjoyed during childhood to the identity crisis phase and its resolution during adolescence and youth as shown in poems such as “The Seven Ages”, “The Sensual World” and “Fable” is made clear in “Youth”. Glück depicts a scene from the past with two sisters sitting on a sofa reading English novels with schoolbooks about Euclid and Pythagoras lying around them. The contrast between what they are reading and what they are not reading is given emphasis when the poet says that the two girls “had looked into / The origin of thought and preferred novels” (Glück, 2001, p. 350). While Euclid and Pythagoras belong to the realm of science, the English novels the two sisters are reading pertain to the realm of fiction and imagination, as is the case in the previous poem “Fable”. This indicates that the two young ladies have chosen to ignore reality and live in a world of fantasy and dreams. The speaker then expresses her nostalgic memories about the past:



The pages of the novels turning;  
the two dogs snoring quietly.  
And from the kitchen,  
sounds of our mother,  
smell of rosemary, of lamb roasting. (Glück, 2001, p. 350)

The crisis of identity comes into focus when Glück refers to the period the two sisters were living in as a “world in process / of shifting, of being made or dissolved” (Glück, 2001, p. 350). In other words, their world was about to transform and the outcome would be either “made” (they would establish a positive identity) or “dissolved” (they would obtain a negative identity). The result for the two sisters, as Glück points out in the next lines in the poem, is negative. Their lives afterwards were “felt but not understood”. All the things they later said “were like lines in a play, / spoken with conviction but not from choice”. The speaker compares herself and her sister to characters in drama and this simile links this poem with the title of the collection and Jacques’ soliloquy about the seven ages of man in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* discussed at the beginning of the present chapter. The principle the two sisters were forced to live by is described as “terrifying” and they did not dare “even to ask questions” (Glück, 2001, p. 350). Glück laments this deprivation of will power because it prevents individuals from resolving their identity crisis properly in order to establish the positive identity desired.

Glück blends the crisis of identity with a host of other issues such as nostalgia, childhood, loneliness, the fear of the future, and disillusionment in “Birthday”. The speaker at the beginning of the poem recalls how things had been fifty years earlier. At that time in the past, she says, she was experiencing a deep sense of fear of the coming future. Her eyes, she states, were “staring into the future with the combined / terror and hopelessness of a soul expecting annihilation” (Glück, 2001, p. 355). During those years, she was “very young” and had a pessimistic view of her own future, “staring blindly ahead ... into utter darkness” (Glück, 2001, p. 355). A sense of resistance against abandoning her self-concept dominated her as she confronted “the attempt of the mind / to prevent change” (Glück, 2001, p. 355). Simultaneously, she had the desire for change in order to stop feeling “deeply alone” and “despondent”. This inner conflict between the resistance against change and the desire for it at the same time is a typical symptom

of identity crisis. It is made even clearer that the girl is confronting this crisis when it is stated that she is neither young enough to be described as a child nor old enough to be called an adult: “She does not meet the definition of child, / a person with everything to look forward to” (Glück, 2001, p. 355). As the years passed, the speaker had to face the future she had already expected, “a future / completely dominated by the tragic”. She also realized that there was “no use for the immense will / but to fend it [the tragic] off” (Glück, 2001, p. 355). In other words, an individual has no choice but to leave his or her self-concept behind and establish a new identity or adopt one.

The birthday occasion that the poem is about fits into this issue of identity transformation, because a birthday in general stands for a time of change. Normally, it is a happy occasion, but for the speaker in the poem it is a dismal experience: “I sat in the dark, in the living room. / The birthday was over” (Glück, 2001, p. 355). For her, a birthday is the “unmasking of the ordinary to reveal the tragic”. At the end of the poem, there is an allusion to William Wordsworth’s poem “My Heart Leaps Up”. Wordsworth in his poem expresses his full sense of happiness at nature. He says that his heart experienced joy at the sight of a rainbow when he was a child. He also states that he has the same feeling now that he is a man, and he hopes that he would continue to feel the same way when he grows old. There is no sense of loss or grief in Wordsworth’s poem (Wu, 2012, p. 539). On the other hand, Glück in “Birthday” defines joy as a brief fleeting moment that is followed by pain:

I remember how, in almost the same instant,  
my heart would leap up exultant and collapse  
in desolate anguish. The leaping up – the half I didn’t count –  
that was happiness; that is what the word meant.

(Glück, 2001, p. 355)

A typical Glück poem, Robert Boyers (2012) observes, is written under “the conviction that nothing can be done to alter (or not for long) the fact of pain or dissolution”.

While “Birthday” focuses on the contrast between the joy preceding the resolution of the crisis and the pain that follows it, “The Destination” is more concerned

with the effects of these two conflicting emotions as part of an individual's past and present experiences. The poem figuratively describes a journey into identity. The speaker presents the days of the past as a journey that led to her present self. She says that she

had traveled, separately,  
some great distance; as though there had been,  
through all the years of wandering,  
a destination, after all.  
Not a place, but a body, a voice. (Glück, 2001, p. 360)

The destination referred to in the title of the poem is her new body and her new voice – that is, her new identity. At the beginning of this transformation from her former self to her new identity she thought it was “a great marvel”, but she then realized that she wanted to restore the past so that “a few hours could take up a lifetime”. Disappointed that the past cannot be “entered again”, she decides to isolate herself from her present and cherish the memories of the past in her mind: “I could live almost completely in imagination” (Glück, 2001, p. 360).

Echoes of “The Seven Ages” could be found in “Summer at the Beach”, where the speaker's unwillingness to abandon her self-concept of the childhood period and face an identity crisis is likewise expressed in terms of the shame of being exposed and the desire to cover her body. Glück describes another autobiographical incident when she and her sister were sitting in the sand at the beach in summer. She used the sand to cover exposed parts of her body that she did not like. This recalls the allusion in “The Seven Ages” to the Genesis account of how Adam and Eve tried to cover their bodies after their sin of disobedience as a result of their feelings of shame and guilt. This act of concealing the body and feeling ashamed preceded their fall from grace. Similarly, the speaker in “Summer at the Beach” experiences the same emotions before her growth into adulthood and acquisition of a new identity. She resists this transformation and wishes to remain a child, expressing dislike of adulthood, when she says, “They [adults] all had terrible bodies: lax, oily, completely / committed to being male and female” (Glück, 2001, p. 365).

Glück hails the sense of security associated with the period prior to identity crisis in “Rain in Summer”, where she portrays her parents during her childhood years as a “circle” with herself and her sister inside (Glück, 2001, p. 366). In addition to being a symbol of wholeness, perfection, maternity and paradise, a circle is a symbol of “the Self” (Cooper, 1978, p. 36). In Jungian psychology, the circle is associated with the shape of the mandala which is an archetypal symbol of motherhood and protection as well as “an expression of the self” (Papadopoulos, 2006, p. 155). Outside the circle, Glück continues, there were “storms”, “rain” and “dark leaves”. Inside the circle she felt “as secure as the house. / It made sense to be housebound” (Glück, 2001, p. 366). This sense of security was accompanied by the development of her mental capacities and artistic taste: “Piano lessons. Poems, drawings ... And the mind / developing within fixed conditions” (Glück, 2001, p. 366). However, she felt that this development was not sufficient to prepare her for the crisis ahead. The poet mildly criticizes these “fixed” conditions because of her inability to establish a new identity or even introduce slight changes in her life at that time: “we couldn’t change who we were. / We couldn’t change even the smallest facts”. In this respect, she felt she was overprotected and therefore not ready for the later crisis in life: “We embodied / those ideas of my mother’s / not appropriate to adult life” (Glück, 2001, p. 366). This lack of preparedness, therefore, is another reason for Glück’s objection to abandoning the self-concept and confronting an identity crisis. As she says in the poem, “Neither of us [the speaker and her sister] could see, yet, / the cost of any of this” (Glück, 2001, p. 366).

The post-crisis period of adulthood is figuratively presented as a glass that contains nothing positive in the poem “The Empty Glass”. The speaker remembers how as a child she “asked for much” but as an adult “received next to nothing” (Glück, 2001, p. 369). What she passed through was therefore not a development but a deterioration: “Inside the glass, the abstract / tide of fortune turned / from high to low overnight.” During her childhood, she felt “like a great queen or saint”, but now as an adult she feels “Whirling in the dark universe, / alone, afraid, unable to influence fate.” Although she has already relinquished her former self, she is still unable to resolve her crisis and establish a new identity:

What do we have really?  
Sad tricks with ladders and shoes,  
tricks with salt, impurely motivated recurring  
attempts to build character. (Glück, 2001, p. 369)

Glück describes the failure that these attempts to establish an identity lead to by alluding to Agamemnon, Menelaus's brother, who commanded the Greek army in its mission to bring back Helen of Troy. After his return, Agamemnon, according to Homer's *Odyssey* (1945) was murdered by his wife's lover. While Agamemnon was entertaining false notions of victory, the "great forces" of fate, as Glück states in the poem, were therefore conspiring to end his life. The poet depicts fate as the sea: at the shore it is clear, but beyond the shore it is unpredictable. Had he been wise, he would not have ventured into the unknown:

Agamemnon, there on the beach,  
the Greek ships at the ready, the sea  
invisible beyond the serene harbor, the future  
lethal, unstable: he was a fool, thinking  
it could be controlled. He should have said  
I have nothing, I am at your mercy. (Glück, 2001, p. 369)

The lesson that Agamemnon should have learned in "The Empty Glass" is reflected in the two poems which follow it: "Quince Tree" and "The Traveler". Both poems present the motif of the childhood self-concept as superior to adult identity. Glück starts "Quince Tree" by enumerating the privileges of the period prior to identity crisis. She states that during that period she "lived in a world with seasons" and that she had "access to variety" (Glück, 2001, p. 370). Her description of the state of self-concept is very similar to that provided by Erikson. It is, she states, a condition of simple awareness of oneself and the surrounding environment:

It would be wrong to believe  
Our lives were narrow, or empty.  
We had great wealth.

We had, in fact, everything we could see

(Glück, 2001, p. 370)

It is the stage in human life, she continues, characterized by “grandeur and splendor.” This condition is delineated in the poem as a quince tree standing between “the front lawn and back lawn”, and this particular location provides the tree, as well as her childhood, with “weight and meaning”. The poem closes with the rhetorical question, “You, in your innocence, what do you know of this world?” It is important to note that quince traditionally “shares much of the symbolism of apple ... and is often mentioned in combination with apple” to denote “the tree of Good and Evil”, “temptation”, “disappointment” and “scornful beauty” (De Vries, 1974, p. 378). At this point, the next poem, “The Traveler”, begins to provide the answer to this rhetorical question by making it clear that abandoning one’s self-concept in favor of the opportunity to establish an identity entails a great amount of grief, loss, pain and disillusion. “The Traveler” could be considered as a sequel to “Quince Tree”, since the speaker in the latter poem describes a past experience when she had the desire to climb to the top of a tree to pick a fruit she wished to have. However, she was at the same time aware that she was “being tested” (Glück, 2001, p. 371). She then reconsidered her situation and logically concluded that picking the fruit would bring about three probable outcomes, all of which are negative. Consequently, she decided

not to climb that high, not to force  
the fruit down. One of three results must follow:  
the fruit isn’t what you imagined,  
or it is but fails to satiate.  
Or it is damaged in falling  
and as a shattered thing torments you forever.

(Glück, 2001, p. 371)

The speaker’s decision not to climb the tree is based on common sense and it reverses the story of Genesis. As the speaker waits at the tree, a traveler passes by and stops to talk to her. He tells her that he once found himself in the same situation and he “chose to live in hypothesis”, meaning that he resolved not to take the action of picking the fruit.

Instead, he “treated all experience as a spiritual or intellectual trial / in which to exhibit or prove my superiority / to my predecessors” (Glück, 2001, p. 371). Rather than actually becoming part of the physical experience itself, getting involved in it and facing its negative consequences, he used his imagination to experience it hypothetically. Experiencing an event hypothetically and realistically without having to undergo it as a physical incident has already been pointed out by critics. It has been observed that Glück’s “poems can ... be viewed as speech-acts” and that a “poem, for her, can transform ideas into facts” (Moyer, 2016).

In this respect, “The Traveler” is Glück’s solution to the problem of confronting the negative consequences that follow the resolution of an identity crisis. On the one hand, actual physical involvement leads to disappointment, grief and pain, as the foregoing analysis of her poems has shown. On the other hand, it is not possible to resist human growth and development and remain within the self-concept phase of childhood. The wisest and safest solution would therefore be to convert the experience of identity crisis and its resolution into a spiritual and intellectual experience as the Traveler advised the young lady in the poem. In this manner, it would be possible to grow out of one’s self-concept and at the same time develop one’s personality without suffering the unfortunate outcome of the crisis resolution. This view of experience as an internal and intrinsic phenomenon is in line with Freud’s concept of reality. In his study “Freud’s Theory of Reality: A Critical Account”, Edward Casey (1972) explains how the external reality principle according to Freud is based on the individual’s perception:

Since the externally real is seen as the primary source of being and meaning, our perceptual apparatus is geared to focus on it. The perceptions which result from this act of attention become in turn the unique origin of mental representations .... Thus knowledge for Freud comes to be built on a series of progressive internalizations. Its two main elements, things-presentations and word-presentations, are conceived as species of cathected memory-traces, thus as tributary from external perception. (p. 682)

Richard Moss (2007) expressed a view related to distancing oneself from the actual physical experience of the crisis similar to Glück's solution when he stated that

an identity is a constellation of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviors that is so consistent and predictable that we assume this to be who we are. Through this identity, we engage the world, and we interpret and react to what life presents to us. Instead of awareness and presence being the essence of who we are, we lose ourselves into creations of our own minds. We become a slave to our beliefs, our feelings, and our roles, lacking the conscious distance necessary to question their veracity and legitimacy or to consider their consequences. (p. 90)

The closing poem in the collection could be read as Glück's final reiteration on the topic of identity crisis. In the poem, entitled "Fable", the speaker looks at the world she is about to enter. She then turns to her male companion and asks him where she is. He replies that she is in Nirvana. In Indian philosophy, Nirvana features as the perfect state of joy, serenity, calmness and freedom from worldly pain and suffering. It involves a transformation in identity through the "elimination of egoism" (Humphreys, 2005, p. 153). The speaker's comment, which serves as the final line in both the poem and the collection, is: "But the light will give us no peace" (Glück, 2001, p. 389). She means that the world which lies ahead of her and which she is about to enter would not give her the solace and peace of mind she has been looking for. There is also the same note of resistance to change and the reluctance to abandon the present. She prefers to preserve her current identity than to relinquish it and seek a new one. Neither philosophy and religion or her companion succeed in convincing her that what lies ahead has any positive value.

This close reading of *The Seven Ages* reveals Glück's approach to the crisis of identity and its resolution. According to her, loss, grief, pain and disillusionment are the inevitable outcome of the crisis. She also laments the fact that any restoration of the period before the crisis is not possible. Those who went through it try to retain their lost privileges through imagination and memory. However, Glück adopts the method of



detachment and indirect hypothetical experience to resolve this issue. An individual should develop “the capacity to accept, and even enjoy, a world without certainty” (Mun, 2008, p. 48). This is Glück’s third alternative which reduces the sense of loss that would result from the other two options of either physically experiencing the crisis and establishing a negative identity or facing a mental breakdown as a result of locking oneself into the childhood period. By indirectly experiencing the identity crisis as a hypothetical event, one could avoid or at least reduce these negative results. As Joanne Feit Diehl observed, *The Seven Ages* resembles “a new, unexpected cave or eyrie on some cliff wall from which the poet can overlook the spectacle of human life” (p. 24). To a certain extent, Glück seems to have followed in her life this principle of experiencing events without being directly involved, even in her own career as a poet. As Daniel Morris (2006) contends, “She resists canonization as a hyphenated poet (that is, as a ... “feminist” poet, or a “nature” poet), preferring instead to retain an aura of iconoclasm, or in-betweenness” (p. 31). Glück’s in-betweenness is what compelled critics like Daniel Morris to find Glück’s poetry to possess a “remote perspective” (Morris, 2006, p. 30). Robert Boyers (2012) similarly observed that “Louise Glück’s poems aim to get to the bottom of her experience without making an idol of reality or brute suffering”. *The Seven Ages* starts with a pessimistic tone based on the idea that the outcome of an identity crisis is doomed to fail, but it ends on an optimistic tone based on the notion that the crisis could be resolved without having to face its negative consequences.

## CONCLUSION

Identity crisis is a crucial stage in the development of human beings, because its resolution and outcome define the type of personality an individual would have, and thus determine that individual's role in the community and his or her contribution to the human race. Acquiring a negative identity has a destructive impact on oneself and on others. It is therefore important to closely examine the factors that lead to the crisis, shape its resolution and outcome, and monitor the process of identity formation in individuals in order to make sure that the identity that would emerge from the crisis is sound and positive.

According to Erik Erikson, identity crisis is a stage within the psychosocial development of human life that an individual confronts and eventually resolves. This stage might be faced early or later in life, depending on a complex web of several internal and external factors and the interaction among them. The resolution of this crisis results in the transformation from the individual's earlier immature self-concept to a full identity. The identity acquired after the resolution of this crisis falls within different categories and could be negative or positive in terms of its effect on the individual and its impact on the social environment.

The subject of identity crisis and its resolution is one of the topics tackled by the three poets examined in this study. Each poet addressed this topic in a specific manner using her own style and technique and approached it from a different perspective. In her book-length poem *Dart* (2002), Alice Oswald invests upon her experience in gardening, her Oxford major in the classics and her acquaintance with the river Dart from its source in Dartmoor to Dartmouth in Devon, to construct a poetic riverscape that contains various aspects of contemporary physical nature and rural life. The work yields itself to various interpretations. At its literal level, it could be read as a simple account of the river from its source to its mouth where it flows into the sea. It could also be seen as a documentary account of the life and work of the inhabitants dwelling close to the river. The text has also been analyzed from ecological and psychological perspectives. It is packed with archetypal, cultural, historical, religious, social, anthropological and environmental aspects, implications and allusions.

Following the poetic tradition of verse about rivers, she incorporates the psychological condition of identity crisis into her portrayal of the river Dart, its water, its living organisms, its natural surroundings, and the inhabitants living close to it. The people whose lives are closely related to, and dependent upon, the river are described as individuals whose identities are defined and formed by their natural surroundings in general and by the river in particular. They are described as embarking on a symbolic journey or voyage, either in the river or towards the river, that begins with the relinquishment of their former self-concepts and inferior identities and ends with the acquisition of a new, wider and mature identity. As depicted by Oswald, Dart stands for the psychosocial development associated with identity crisis. Not only is the river personified, it is also presented as the human unconscious that acts upon its physical and human environment and is in turn acted upon, which leads to its evolution and maturity. These ideas are presented also through the rich and complex structure, style, literary devices and use of psychological elements such as the stream-of-consciousness technique, employed in the book.

By constructing various characters with different and even opposing fates in her poem, Oswald reiterates her belief in identity as part and parcel of the river. In this sense, even when Oswald is at times labeled as a nature poet, a title she disclaims, it still has a deeply rooted relation to identity. The river helps the inhabitants resolve their identity crises through various means. Some of them end up gaining their professional identities through a form of occupation attached to the river and its environment. Others see the river as a mirror that enables them to perceive themselves in a clearer and more mature manner. Even those who drown in the river become part of it and their identities are absorbed into the river, thus acquiring in their posthumous state a wider sense of identity. Though the latter case might defy logical reasoning, it falls within Oswald's belief in the supernatural. The journey motif Oswald employs in *Dart* is also used to delineate the process of resolution of the characters' different identity crises. The city with its urban setting and lifestyle is associated with the immature self-concept or identity. The river is, on the other hand, linked to a wider and mature sense of identity. Consequently, the departure from the city followed by the journey through the countryside and the final arrival at the river represent the transformation from the traveler's self-concept to a genuine identity. In all these cases, individuals resolve their

crises by moving from a narrow limited sense of personal identity to a wider cultural and collective identity which is an inseparable part of physical and human nature and heritage symbolized by Dart.

Resorting to local legend and classical mythology, Oswald personifies the river and assigns to it female human attributes to show how symbolically the river itself underwent and successfully resolved its own identity crisis in the ancient past. The source of the river at Dartmoor with its limited volume of water and pure clear quality corresponds to the pristine innocence of the self-concept at the microcosmic level and to the prelapsarian state of mankind and the universe at the macrocosmic level. On the other hand, the end of the river where it flows into the sea at Dartmouth also has these two layers of meaning. It represents the transformation of the former self-concept into a mature identity and at the same time it demonstrates how mankind could be constantly evolving into a wider collective and cultural identity.

Carol Ann Duffy views the identity crisis and its causes and resolution from a different perspective. Her concern with and treatment of the subject of identity crisis is related to her own experience, since it is one of the issues she had to face during her school years and later in her life when she resolved to carve her career as a poet. In her collection *The World's Wife* (1999), she adapts characters from folklore, legend, history and mythology and invests them with new traits, and she changes their motives or the course of events associated with them to show how they have resolved their identity crises. Duffy's main message in this collection is her belief in the inner ability of woman to detach herself from her patriarchal environment, save her submerged identity and become empowered to achieve a strong independent personality. Her poems are mostly presented from the female protagonist's point of view as either monologues or dialogues. Her typical innovative characterization technique in this volume is to borrow a male figure from literature, legend or history and let his spouse express her views on his personality and their marriage and relationship. Another technique she uses in creating her poetic character sketches is reversing themes and roles in the original narratives she adapts. Duffy at times shifts the setting in the story from the past to the present to indicate that establishing an independent identity for women has continued to be an issue in the contemporary era.

The protagonists in Duffy's poetry either succeed or fail in resolving their identity crises. Those who follow their strong will and determination or are aided by fortune succeed in resolving the crisis. In "Little Red-Cap", for instance, the protagonist, instead of being presented as a passive victim of her victimizer, which is the case in the original tale, takes the initiative to save herself and assert her identity. Others, like Queen Kong, find their true identity in the power of love, which they cherish to the end. Likewise, Galatea succeeds in breaking free from the shackles of oppression by identifying her victimizer's weak spot and using it to transcend her self-concept and liberate herself and eventually establish her own identity. Galatea resorts to justifiable mischief in her attempt to gain a new sense of identity because she is left with no other alternative. Another character that follows Galatea's footsteps is Eurydice, who, after realizing that, contrary to common belief, the Underworld is a much better and safer place for her, decides to trick her spouse Orpheus into violating the condition set by the gods so that she could make him lose her forever to Hades where she finally establishes and enjoys her independent identity. Mrs. Faust, adopting a new strategy, lies in wait for the appropriate opportunity to arise so she can achieve her goals in life and assert her identity.

The characters who fail to transcend their self-concepts and establish an identity in Duffy's poetry are often portrayed as too downtrodden, trampled upon or trapped in their world. Thetis, for example, could not challenge the will of the gods, so she consequently succumbs to their wish and marries the man she has never loved or cared about. Duffy goes further in her examination of identity crisis by illustrating how the achievement of identity does not necessarily indicate a positive outcome. The Medusa, for example, manages to assert her powerful identity by turning into a female monster with a petrifying gaze, even though her accomplishment has proven to be destructive and negative.

As is the case with Oswald and Duffy, Louise Glück's concern with the subject of identity crisis is inspired by her own life. Her happy childhood years which were followed by harsh and severe circumstances that led to her suspension from school and the long psychiatric therapy she had to take shaped her views on the topic she presented

in her poetry. Unlike Alice Oswald and Carol Duffy, however, Glück adopts a different approach to the subject of identity crisis. Oswald believed that one's personal identity should eventually be incorporated into a larger collective and cultural one symbolized by the river as part of nature. Duffy saw the successful and positive resolution of the crisis to lie in one's own inner will and determination. Despite this difference between Oswald and Duffy, both poets believed that a positive, healthy and superior new identity could be established after the resolution of the crisis. Glück, on the other hand, expressed the view that any identity which could emerge after the resolution of the crisis is bound to be negative, because external forces always conspire to render the resolution a failure. Thus, the only possible outcome of the crisis would be grief, pain, loss and disillusion. For this reason, according to Glück, the self-image and self-concept possessed prior to the crisis is superior to any other form of identity attained afterwards. This is the view the poet expresses in her book *The Seven Ages* (2001). Starting the book with the poem "The Seven Ages" to relate the story of the original purity of the human soul and its loss to a world of pain and corruption in the poems that follow, and closing the collection with the poem "Fable" with its emphasis on the need for a Nirvana state is reminiscent of Oswald's tracing of Dart from its pure state at the source in Dartmoor through the various stages where the water becomes polluted, and finally its flow into the sea and acquisition of a larger identity.

The reasons that Glück provides for cherishing the self-concept of childhood and resisting the identity crisis and its resolution include human ignorance, the lack of insight, and the absence of favorable circumstances, as shown in "The Seven Ages" and "Summer at the Beach". Failure may also be ascribed to the inevitability of change and aging as indicated in "Youth" and "Birthday" or the unpredictable forces of fate that conspire against human will power and determination, as clearly demonstrated in "Fable", "The Sensual World" and "The Empty Glass". The lack of preparation for an individual to confront the impending identity crisis could also be the reason for this failure, as the poet shows in "Rain in Summer".

Glück's creativity in her treatment of identity crisis and its resolution lies in her belief that the entire experience of the crisis could be undergone without the individual's physical involvement and without having to confront the negative consequences

associated with the crisis. This can be achieved by handling the crisis as a spiritual and intellectual experience observed from a mentally detached perspective and by hypothetically visualizing it and making use of one's predecessors' experience or others' trials and errors. A hypothetical experience would eliminate any unpleasant outcomes and would leave no scars or lasting traces in the individual's psyche. This innovative approach to identity crisis is seen in poems like "Quince Tree" and "The Traveler". Her solution to the problems of the crisis and its outcome are in line with Erikson's theory of the cultural, collective and universal identity, which he also refers to as existential identity that transcends space and time and merges past, present and future to incorporate all the experience of the human race into a coherent whole.

Finally, these different approaches to and interpretations of identity crisis, its causes, resolution and the resulting identity that follows its resolution, at the hand of these three postmodern poets, support the psychosocial development theory and provide a set of options to deal with the crisis. The various character sketches and situations portrayed in Oswald's *Dart*, Duffy's *The World's Wife* and Glück's *The Seven Ages* display different possibilities that an individual may encounter in reality regarding identity crisis. By closely examining these different and conflicting options, one may be able to deal with identity crisis more effectively, manipulate or modify the factors that shape it, predict its outcome, and even control what type of identity an individual would have after the crisis is resolved. This would lead to a growth in the number of positive and sound identities in communities, an elimination of negative identities and ultimately to an enhancement in personality, human development, the human condition, and progress.

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## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

Najmah Hazim HASAN was born in 1983. She finished Al-Marifa High School for Girls in 2004 and graduated from Koya University in Iraq in 2008 receiving her Bachelor's degree in Translation. She worked as an English teacher at Girdapan High School from 2008 to 2013 and at Yerivan High School from 2013 to 2014 in Iraq, giving courses in English for intermediate students. She spent the following four years teaching English at Arya High School (2014 to 2017) and at Mamosta Tara High School (2017-2018). She also spent one year teaching English at Mardin High School (2014-2015) and during the same year too she volunteered to work as a teacher of English at the UNICEF branch in Iraq where she gave courses in general English to school students for free as part of the United Nations Aids Program (UNAP) for the Iraqi children. To pursue her studies, she joined the postgraduate program at the English Department, Faculty of Arts, at Karabük University in Turkey in 2019 and earned her Master's Degree in English Language and Literature in 2021. She speaks four languages and her fields of interest include language teaching, literature, education and psychology, particularly child psychology.