

IDENTITY AND THE QUEST FOR SELF IN *THE OTHER GIRL*

BY ANNIE ERNAUX

(ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1. The construction of identity through family memory and comparisons.....	8
1.1. Family Memory and the Impact of Absence: Ginette's Memory (the Absentee from the Family)9	
1.2. Comparison and identity construction: Idealization of the sister and feeling of inadequacy	11
2. The quest for oneself and the reappropriation of personal history	14
2.1. The Triggers of the Self-Inquiry: A Process of Identity Exploration	15
2.2. The Reappropriation of Personal History: Building a New Identity	17
Conclusion.....	20
References	23

Introduction

Over the centuries, human life has been influenced by historical, political, social and cultural events. The twentieth century, a period marked by key events, namely the First and Second World Wars, decolonization, the Cold War, and the conquest of space, is based on a central objective: the struggle for identity.

Identity is an individual phenomenon, unique to each person. Each individual has an identity consciousness that distinguishes him or her from all others. Each one builds expresses his or her identity in a personal way. Truth be told human beings do not live in isolation.

The life cycle in our world has sometimes experienced disruptions associated with identity ruptures.

For example, the period of the two World Wars, which they marked by conflicts related to the search for identity, where individuals sought to understand and define themselves. Moreover, Hitler's actions can be interpreted through the question of identity.

Indeed, there are several ways to define identity. According to Louis-Jacques Doré (2004, p.2), through his training in anthropology, identity is defined as "the way in which human beings establish their personal relationship with the environment".

He has made further progress by offering a complete understanding of this subject: "Identity is above all relational, it is subject to change when circumstances modify the relationship to the world. This means that it is not given once and for all; it is rather constructed. (Doré, 2004, p. 2).

Consequently, underlying the question of identity is the question of self-knowledge. "The organization and content of self-knowledge are specific to individuals: this individual variation has its origin in social and lived experiences as unique to each individual, in individual perceptions, and in the actions and behaviors of each individual" (Markus, 1983).

In addition, self-discovery is an essential element of man that helps him to understand himself better. It questions the "who I am". The notion of identity, in general, and its impact in the writing of history as well as in various other fields is considerable.

Contemporary literature tries to reflect the trends experienced by society. Over time, she found meaning in the need to write about oneself where she explored the phenomenon of identity that relates social life through an autobiographical writing technology. The autobiography is a personal account that recounts the life of the author. This form of writing allows the author to express themselves and share their own real-life experiences with the world. Indeed, autobiography not only shapes past history, but it also offers an in-depth perspective on the identity of the author and the characters it includes.

In order to better understand "The autobiography or the narrative of the self is not the return of the real past, it is the representation of this real past that allows us to reidentify ourselves and to seek the social place that suits us." (Cyrulni, 2003).

For example, *The Other Girl*, one of the autobiographical works of French contemporary literature origin, is a text which, although short, is of remarkable emotional and intellectual density. This story explicitly addresses the issue of "identity and reconstructing the self" in a real way. In this story, the author confronts a family past laden with pain and unspoken words. She returns to a brutal revelation made by her mother when she was ten years old: the existence of an older daughter/sister, absent, deceased:

I don't know how I was alerted, maybe my mother's voice lower all of a sudden. I started listening to him, as if I wasn't breathing. [...] She says that they had a different daughter from me and that she died of diphtheria at the age of six, before the war, in Lillebonne. [...] She says: she died like a little saint. [...]

At the end, she says of you: she was nicer than that one. That one is me. (p. 16)

This text reveals a profound and lasting impact on the young girl, Annie Ernaux, triggering an incessant reflection on her own value and identity. She embarks on an introspective journey to understand the impact of this revelation on her own life.

Annie Ernaux is a French author born in 1940 and recognized for her unique approach to autobiography and self-writing. Throughout her career, she has explored the most intimate aspects of her life and memory, using her personal experiences to interrogate social structures

and family dynamics. Her works, often referred to as auto-socio-biographical, combine an in-depth examination of her personal history with a critical analysis of the socio-cultural contexts that influenced her.

Annie Ernaux's quest for identity in *The Other Girl* is marked by profound questions about her place in the family, her value as an individual, and the way in which the memory of her deceased sister has shaped her own perceptions and experiences:

I had lived in illusion. I wasn't unique.

There was another one that came out of nowhere.

All the love I thought I was receiving was therefore false. (p. 22)

This introspective process leads her to explore complex feelings of guilt, injustice and legitimacy. This introspection also leads her to look at the quest for herself. She realized for the first time that she was not the only child, the eldest of her parents as she had previously believed. She lived in an illusion, in the shadows, and this revelation brought her to light, although it deeply upset her.

Indeed, this story by Annie Ernaux offers us a clear perspective on the identity crises and social relations that can influence our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

What justifies our choice of corpus in addition to the originality of the text is the way in which it deals with the issue of diversity. It deals with topics that can be approached from different disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, philosophy which offers the opportunity to explore these multiple dimensions and integrate different academic approaches.

The objective of our research is to reveal the consequences of the late discovery of the author's family secret as well as its emotional and psychological impacts on her self-perspective and family relationships. How her identity was transformed through the story. We will also seek to highlight how "Identity and the quest for the self" have been connected.

Our work is entitled "Identity and the quest for oneself in *Annie Ernaux's The Other Girl*".

"Identity and the quest for oneself", the general theme of our work, is well evoked in a practical way in the novel *The Other Girl*.

The discovery of the family secret offers Annie Ernaux a new insight into her own life and experiences: the secret of an absent sister.

How does the discovery of a family secret, namely the existence of an absent sister, in *The Other Girl* allow Annie Ernaux to navigate and redefine her personal and family identity? In what way does this quest for the self, shed light on the complexity of family relationships and the reconstruction of the past?

In response to this problem, we propose the following hypotheses

The revelation of the existence of an absent sister forces the author to confront unexplored aspects of her past and to reconsider her own experiences and perceptions of self. Her own role and the fact that she was not an only child as expected.

The author's quest for self, triggered by the discovery of the family secret, exposes tensions, unspoken words and underlying family dynamics. How this discovery changes the relationships within Annie Ernaux's family.

As for the methodology, we have adopted the analytical method. To analyze our corpus in detail, we rely on the following approaches:

The interdisciplinary approach: this approach combines literature, psychology, sociology and cultural studies to enrich the analysis of *The Other Girl*. By integrating varied perspectives, it would be possible to develop a more complete and nuanced understanding of the themes explored by Annie Ernaux.

The psychoanalytic approach: this approach could deepen the exploration of the mechanisms of repression and selective memory present in the novel. This perspective would allow us to better understand family dynamics and the psychological impacts of secrets and the unsaid.

As a whole, our work will be divided into two parts, each part will be divided into two sections:

The first part details the subject of the construction of identity through family memory and comparisons, as well as the second part emphasizes the quest for the self and the reappropriation of personal history.

1. The construction of identity through family memory and comparisons

Family memory plays a central role in our lives and influences the construction of identity.

In *The Other Girl*, Annie Ernaux explores how her identity was built largely under the influence of family memory and constant comparisons with her deceased sister, Ginette. This process is complex and deeply rooted in family dynamics, trauma, and the quest for recognition. Annie Ernaux's identity construction is based on several psychological and sociocultural dynamics, which resonate with theories of memory, social comparison, and identity:

According to the civil status you are my sister.

You have the same surname as mine, my "maiden" name, Duchesne. [...] (p. 12)

But you're not my sister, you never have been. We didn't play, eat, sleep together. I never touched you, kissed you. I don't know the color of your eyes. I've never seen you. You're speechless, just a flat image on a few black and white photos. [...] (p. 12)

This text highlights the direct impact of family memory on Annie Ernaux's psychology. This revelation profoundly changed his perception of his relationship with an absent, deceased sister. The tone of this narrative clearly reflects trauma.

The trauma linked to the late discovery of Ginette's existence, and especially of her death, is a central element in the formation of Annie Ernaux's identity. This latent trauma influences the way Annie Ernaux perceives her place within the family. Judith Herman in her work *Trauma and Recovery* (1992, p. 40) examines the psychological effects of trauma and loss on identity "unresolved traumatic events tend to crystallize identities around loss, thus limiting the ability to rebuild oneself outside this framework of suffering."

Also, the disappointment felt by Annie Ernaux when she discovered this secret led to the use of excessive and harsh language throughout this story without consideration for her sister's feelings or the fact that she died. The natural convention would have it that death should be respected in order to preserve the peace, but his constant criticism of his sister is of course marked by a feeling of betrayal on the part of his parents:

You are the very impossibility of guilt and punishment.

You have none of the traits of a real child. In the manner of the saints, you have had no childhood. I never imagined you real. (p. 52)

1.1. Family Memory and the Impact of Absence: Memory of Ginette (the absentee of the family)

Although she died before the author was born, Ginette remains an essential character throughout this novel which retraces the story of the author's life. The memory of Ginette, Annie Ernaux's deceased sister, is built through family stories and the memories of their parents. She is presented as an ideal and perfect child. This construction of memory profoundly affects the identity of the author, who must define herself in opposition to this idealized figure. Paul Ricoeur's work on memory shows how memories, even indirect ones, can influence an individual's identity: "Family memory, as a shared construction, tends to create idealized images that can obscure the identity of the living" (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 90).

I can't reproduce his story, only its content and the sentences that have crossed all the years until today... [...] (p. 15)

In the end she says of you she was "nicer" than that one. That one is me. [...] (p. 16)

As a result, the discovery of her absent sister pushed Annie Ernaux to question her parents' true intentions and to plunge into an internal conflict. She wonders why her parents hid the existence of an older sister and never even mentioned her name.

Although family memory may seem like a closed matter, it is also influenced by a variety of external factors. The way in which family memory is expressed is often shaped by culture and social conventions. Even after discovering the existence of her unknown sister, Annie Ernaux did not ask her parents about her and the reasons for their silence:

In the fifties, according to an implicit rule, it was forbidden to question parents, adults in general, about what they did not want us to know but what we knew. On the Sunday in the summer of my tenth birthday, I received the story and the law of silence. If they didn't want me

to know about your existence, then I shouldn't have asked for anything. Conform to their desire of my ignorance of you. It seems to me that transgressing the law... (p. 46-47)

I never heard them say your name. I learned it from my cousin C. He seemed old, almost ridiculous to me as a teenager. I rarely say this. As if it were forbidden to me. Ginette. (p. 44)

The discovery of the existence of another family member turned Annie Ernaux's psychology upside down and plunged her into deep confusion. This revelation permanently altered the family memory. The family register has changed: from now on, the family consists of four members instead of three, namely the mother, the father, Annie, and Ginette. Although Ginette is absent, her presence nevertheless remains permanent in the life of her parents and in the life of Annie Ernaux:

I don't remember you. You had already been dead for two and a half years when I was born. You are a child of heaven, the little invisible girl who was never spoken of.

The absentee from all conversations. The secret. (p. 12-13)

The acquaintance of another older sister, even if deceased, was permanently anchored in Annie Ernaux's memory. It cannot erase it. Moreover, "Memory cannot be separated from the question of identity, because what we remember partly determines who we are" (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 94). From then on, she was no longer an only child. Her parents had given birth to two daughters, not just one, and she had to accept it, because it was the reality. Ignorance does not erase the truth.

I move away from it year after year, but it's an illusion. There are words that have never changed. (p. 19)

When I think about it, how is it that, aware of my presence because she points to me, she points to me, she let herself go and talk about you? The psychoanalytic explanation – by a trick of her unconscious, my mother would have found a way to reveal to me the secret of your existence and I would have been the real recipient of the story – is, as usual, seductive. (p. 26)

Maybe his mother had planned to tell him the truth in an indirect way. Maybe it was a difficult conversation, and she didn't know when was the right time, place, or opportunity to tell him this secret... Maybe.

1.2. Comparison and identity construction: Idealization of the sister and feeling of inadequacy

Ironically, in the real world, we are constantly confronted with the ideal standards imposed on us. In addition, these standards are often inaccessible. In *The Other Girl*, the author emphasizes how she had to face this quest for idealism. Since the story is set in the fifties, a time when it was necessary to conform to social conventions, it placed particular emphasis on mores and values. In addition, "Social comparisons are essential to the construction of self-esteem, but they can also lead to feelings of inferiority or superiority" (Festinger, 1954, p. 118). In the case of Annie Ernaux, she felt threatened by the perfect image of a sister she had never known, but just a simple image frozen in a photo:

She says: she dies like a little saint. [...] In the end. She says of you she was nicer than that one, that's me. (p. 16)

Kind. It seems to me that I already knew that this word could not be applied to me according to the adjectives I received daily from parents, according to my behavior: intrepid, dirty coquette, greedy, miss, I know everything, unpleasant, you have the devil in your body. (p. 19)

This text clearly describes the ideal image of Ginette projected by her mother. That of a saintly, kind girl. This comparison negatively influences Annie Ernaux's self-esteem, who feels unable to compete with this perfect image.

In *The Other Girl*, Annie Ernaux constantly compares herself to the idealized image of her sister Ginette. This comparison goes beyond the visible aspects and also affects the implicit expectations of her parents, especially her mother, who seem to prefer this missing sister, perfect and unattainable. This perpetual comparison affects his self-esteem and feeds a quest for identity marked by the feeling of inadequacy:

However, the facts belie the myth: she wrapped me up in winter with excess, at the slightest cold she sent my father to look for the doctor, she took me to see specialists in Rouen, paid for expensive dental care for their purse, bought calf's liver and red meat just for me, but her remark "you cost us an arm and a leg" sounded like a reproach of my fragility. I felt guilty for coughing, for "always having something." My survival was costing them dearly. (p. 39)

Of course, these comparisons influence the way Annie Ernaux perceives herself in relation to Ginette, but they have also pushed her to reflect more and more on her existence and meaning. Annie Ernaux seeks to validate herself as a distinct individual, outside the shadow of her missing sister. This quest for recognition in Annie Ernaux can be seen as an attempt to fill the void left by the constant comparisons with Ginette and to find her own way:

But their reproaches slipped over me in the certainty of being loved, which was proved by their constant concern for my little person and their gifts. An only child, spoiled because she was unique, always at the top of my class without effort, I felt, in short, the right to be what I was. (p. 19-20)

"The quest for social and family validation is a powerful driving force in the development of identity, particularly in the presence of idealized figures" (Maslow, 1943, p. 375). Maslow's work on identity emphasizes that the need for recognition and esteem is fundamental to self-fulfillment. According to Maslow, to fully realize the self, it is imperative to start by recognizing and validating oneself.

Among all the things that upset Annie Ernaux's emotions, what really led her on the path of self-discovery and questioning her true identity was her mother's sentence, a comparison that marked her entire life. This idealization was an essential element. Idealization is a pervasive social attempt that affects individuals' self-esteem. Our society is guilty of promoting the concept of idealism over the centuries, causing a profound impact on people's psychology and self-perception. The mental health of our society is a victim of this idealization, and as *The Other Girl* shows, it seems that Annie Ernaux has never forgiven her parents, especially her mother, for projecting this ideal standard onto her. Why should she be compared to an ideal embodied by an unknown woman? She was the living one, yet she saw herself constantly

measured against a dead person. She didn't find any meaning in validating herself in relation to a stranger.

2. The quest for oneself and the reappropriation of personal history

The quest for self is an introspective process by which an individual seeks to understand and affirm his or her identity. A fundamental aspect of this quest is the reappropriation of personal history, which allows the individual to revisit, re-evaluate and sometimes rewrite the narratives that have shaped his or her identity. This process allows the individual to come to terms with his or her past, to emancipate himself or herself from external influences, and to redefine himself or herself according to his or her own values and aspirations.

In addition, the process of reclaiming can be difficult, as it requires confronting painful or traumatic memories as well as long-neglected narratives. However, these challenges are essential to achieving true self-understanding.

In fact, the quest for oneself and the reappropriation of personal history are two intimately linked processes that play a central role in the construction of identity. In addition, "Life stories are the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and they play a central role in the construction of our identity. But these narratives are not always fully conscious or critically examined" (McAdams, 1993, p. 50).

From a young age Annie Ernaux discovered the secret of a sister who died before she was born and the fact that she was her parents' favorite. This motivated him to assert his identity. No doubt there was a curiosity driven by jealousy perhaps that pushed her to look for the reason for her existence and redefine herself. A thirst to validate oneself as a distinct individual, outside the shadow of one's missing sister: self-discovery and the reconstruction of personal identity:

Reality does not penetrate the beliefs of childhood. It was with this miracle that I existed in 1950. That maybe I continue to exist. And only what counts what the first account, that of my announced death and resurrection, has done to the second, that of your death and my unworthiness. How they connected. What active truths they have constructed. Because I had to deal with this mysterious incoherence: you, the good girl, the little saint, you were not saved, I the devil was alive. More than alive, miraculous. You must die at six years old for me to come into the world and be saved. (p. 34)

Reconciling with the past is a crucial step towards a more complete self-acceptance. Therefore, "Revisiting painful or misunderstood experiences is essential to free oneself from destructive patterns. This reconciliation allows these experiences to be reintegrated into a more positive and constructive narrative" (McAdams, 1993, p. 92).

I was aware of my advantages as an only child, as a child after the death of another, the object of an anxious, pampered solicitude. He wanted me to be happy at first, she, a good person, the sum of their desires made me, within the family and in our working-class neighborhood, an envied existence of a privileged woman who is never sent to bread, who replies "I don't serve" to customers on the pretext that she is continuing her studies. You were their sorrow, I knew that I was their hope, their complication, their events from the first communion to the baccalaureate, their success. I was their future. (p. 59-60)

2.1 The Triggers of the Self-Inquiry: A Process of Identity Exploration

Rapid social changes force individuals to constantly re-evaluate their identity, leading to a continuous quest for self-definition and redefinition.

The search for self is a dynamic and complex process as well as essential in the construction of identity. It is often initiated by specific events, transitions, or crises that force the individual to think deeply about who they are and who they wish to become. These triggers, often rooted in personal or social upheavals, serve as catalysts for introspection and self-redefinition, can be external, such as major life events, or internal, resulting from existential crises or personal reflection.

In addition, major life events are among the most common triggers for self-seeking. A significant change, such as a loss (such as the death of a loved one) can cause a profound questioning of personal identity.

Our corpus, *The Other Girl*, reveals a family secret of Annie Ernaux. This discovery triggered an introspection that led her to question and redefine herself. The comparison with his unknown sister allowed him to transform his reality by adopting a new outlook after an awakening:

You were forever six years old and I was advancing more and more in the world, with – I will find the definition of it at twenty in a poem by Eluard – my "hard desire to last". Nothing but death had happened to you. (p. 58-59)

This text emphasizes that Annie Ernaux's deceased sister lived only six years, while she, on the other hand, is destined to live well beyond that age. This represents a kind of miracle.

I would sometimes calculate how old you would have been – approximately, because I did not know the exact year of your birth for a long time – with your eight or ten years older than me.

I did not regret a sister like them who would have dominated me with the superiority of her age, her breasts, her knowledge and her rights. With you I wouldn't have shared anything. The idea of a younger sister, or even a baby, pleased me more, like a living doll. (p. 60)

"Telling one's own story is an act of autonomy, where the individual appropriates the narrative of his or her life by integrating external influences while reformulating them according to his or her own understanding" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 60).

Throughout her life, she saw herself as the center of attraction and attention of her parents, believing herself to be the first and the last, the only daughter, the treasure of the family. However, she is suddenly confronted with a new reality: the discovery of an older sister, unknown but loved, a trigger that will precipitate the reconstruction of her identity. Naturally, this new reality is not well received and perceived as a betrayal. As a result, her position within the family is reversed: from the first, she becomes the second, a reality she hates. From now on, she must "make room for another". She must share her parents' love and care with someone else—a person who is invisible, but whose presence remains permanent in her parents' lives:

I don't know how I felt, but I wasn't sad. [...]

After a long search, the word that comes to me as the most accurate, irrefutable, is "dupe". I was duped in the popular sense, mortified. I had lived in illusion. I wasn't unique. [...] (p. 22)

Between them and me, now there is you, invisible, adored. I'm pushed aside, pushed to make room for you. Pushed back into the shadows as you soar high in the eternal light. (p. 21)

The phrase **you are hovering high in the eternal light** refers to the idealization of her absent sister by her parents, presenting her as a little saint and her last sentence before dying:

She relates the words you said to her before you died: I am going to see the Blessed Virgin and the good Jesus. (p. 16)

In fact, in *The Other Girl*, the main trigger for Annie Ernaux was not necessarily the reality of a deceased sister, but rather the secrecy surrounding her existence. What deeply upset her was the ignorance of this family connection and the fact that she was not aware of her role in the family. This unspoken act as a catalyst, pushing her to reclaim her story. Upon learning this information, she felt deeply disappointed, almost duped.

2.2. The Reappropriation of Personal History: The Construction of a New Identity

Through reappropriation, the individual is able to build a new identity that is both true to their past and open to future possibilities. Paul Ricoeur, in *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000), explains that "The new identity is anchored in a reconciled and reappropriated memory, thus offering a solid basis for projecting oneself into the future" (p. 205).

Indeed, the reappropriation of personal history is an act of autonomy.

"In a modern society characterized by a plurality of choices, the reappropriation of one's history allows the individual to reinvent himself and to project himself into the future with more confidence" (Giddens, 1991, p. 154). By rewriting his or her history, the individual regains control of his or her narrative, emancipating himself or herself from the definitions imposed by others.

Moreover, Giddens has made it clear in his work that the process of reclaiming personal history can be arduous, as it involves confronting painful aspects of the past.

"The reappropriation of one's personal history is often confronted with internal resistance, but

it is essential for an authentic identity construction" (Giddens, 1991, p. 158). These challenges are a necessary step to achieve a true understanding of oneself.

The nightmare of an older, unknown sister has accompanied her over the years and pushed her to reflect on her reality. She realizes that, despite her sister's physical absence, she never had a monopoly on her parents' love or the privilege of experiencing new experiences with them first. Her identity must now coexist with that of an unknown sister, who stands between her and her parents:

Sixty years later, I can't stop stumbling over this word. To try to unravel the meanings in relation to you, to them, when the meaning was immediately dazzling, that it changed my place in a second. Between them and me, now there is you, invisible, adored. I'm pushed aside, pushed to make room for you. Pushed back into the shadows as you soar high in the eternal light. Compared, I the incomparable, the only child. Reality is a matter of words, a system of exclusions. More/Less. Or/And. Before/After. To be or not to be. Life or death. (p. 21)

Indeed, the painful aspects of Annie Ernaux's past are marked by a family secret and an idealization of an unknown sister whom she had to reconcile in order to reinvent her story. Before she could step out of her sister's shadow, she first had to accept this reality, which became a catalyst for reclaiming her own narrative:

"I'm not nice like her, I'm excluded. So, I will not be in love, but in solitude and intelligence. (p. 71-72)

Little by little, Annie Ernaux sought to reclaim her personal history, independently of the shadow of her sister Ginette. She gradually became aware that she did not share the same reality as her deceased sister:

*To keep you as I received you when I was ten years old.
Dead and pure. A myth. (p. 52)*

Obviously, we see that the myth here is represented by her late sister Ginette, while the reality is embodied by Annie Ernaux herself.

But you and I were destined to remain unique.

Their desire to have only one child, displayed in their words "we couldn't do for two what we do for one",

implied your life or mine, not both. (p. 61)

This text highlights a reality specific to the time: that of the number of children a family could have, and how this reality influenced their history.

To better understand: *It took me almost thirty years and the writing of "The Place" for me to bring together these two facts, which remained in my mind apart from each other – your death and the economic necessity of having only one child – and for the reality to shine: I came into the world because you died and I replaced you. (p. 61)*

**La place*, one of Annie Ernaux's autobiography works.

As the story progresses, Annie Ernaux has evolved her thinking:

I didn't want them to talk to me about you. I was perhaps hoping that under the cover of this silence they would end up forgetting you. I see the verification of this hypothesis in the memory of a deep and inexplicable disturbance felt every time as an adult, I had to admit this evidence: you were indestructible in them. (p. 49)

Conclusion

As a conclusion, the in-depth account of the novel *The Other Girl* allowed us to dive into a universe of family secrets rich in reflections on "identity and the quest for the self" which makes it an appropriate corpus of our study. Through the analysis of the themes and characters, we were able to highlight the different dimensions of the work as well as the messages it conveys.

Given its diversity, it is a work that deserves to be studied and analyzed through different disciplines and academic approaches. It offers a deep and nuanced perspective on the reality of the unspoken (a social-cultural-psychological affair) and comparisons between people as well as the permanence of the self. With the help of this study, we have been able to appreciate the richness and complexity of the work, as well as its importance in the field of contemporary literature, specifically autobiography.

In our work, we were able to observe that the author Annie Ernaux was confronted with a family secret from an unknown older sister. This revelation, or even reality, plunged him into an abyss of perplexity about his real identity.

As far as our work is concerned with the problem: the discovery of a deceased sister has upset Annie Ernaux's emotions and her perception of herself. There is the reality of a sister who is physically absent but more than perfect and ideal than herself: a standard that is unattainable by her. In her desire to unravel its meaning, she provokes a long inner dialogue between the present self "having a sister" and the former "only daughter" self perpetually questioned. This led to a thirst to reclaim her story in order to step out of the shadow of her absent sister. The process of reclaiming personal history implies that she must confront painful aspects of her past before she reaches a true understanding of herself:

Shame to feel the belief resurrect in me, you had to die, to be sacrificed for me to come into the world.

Two daughters. One dead and the other almost dead. As long as she lived, she who was life in all its exuberance seemed to me to be the bearer of death. (Page 37)

The quest for oneself allows us to explore all facets of our identity. Our identity is constantly evolving, built over time through complex interactions between external (our society) and internal (our innate nature) factors. Therefore, identity is shaped by external influences, while the self is an internal affair. Before unveiling our inner dimension, it is crucial to understand our outer dimension. The quest for the self becomes unattainable if we abandon the concept of identity. The quest for oneself is an inner journey; it is necessary to turn inward to better understand oneself, in order to redefine oneself, and to better reappropriate our history, as illustrated in the novel *The Other Girl*.

Indeed, throughout the story, Annie Ernaux constantly blames her parents, and in particular her mother, for their silence regarding the unknown sister. However, in my opinion, this criticism is not entirely fair, as both parents would have been involved in this cover-up. It seems that the author has placed an excessive and unfair burden on her mother, which reflects the patriarchal dynamics of society:

She has done it so many times without hiding, in my presence, more often than my father – it is women who keep the register of childhoods – always with joy, because he invariably arouses incredulous amazement and wonder in those who hear him. (p. 29)

Contrary to his explanations, his father also deserves the same reproaches, because it is up to the two of them to share this information. In addition, it seems that Annie Ernaux exaggerated her parents' behavior. Yes, they lied. Yes, they should never have hidden the existence of a crucial family member. However, over time, she began to understand why they did so, but she still continues to blame them:

It seems to me that silence has suited them and me. He protected me. He spared me the weight of veneration that surrounded some of the deceased children of the family with an unconscious cruelty for the living that revolted me when I witnessed it. (p. 48)

Similarly, Annie Ernaux treated her unknown sister unfavorably through her descriptions and perceptions, despite the fact that Ginette had died. In reality, Ginette was never in contact with Annie, and she never harmed Ernaux, nor was she responsible for his ignorance

of her existence or the idealization of her image. So, where does this contempt for Ginette come from? It seems that Annie Ernaux could be described as unsympathetic in this context, and this raises the question of the legitimacy of her criticisms of others.

Of course, imagine a ten-year-old girl, charged with the responsibility of receiving, without support, this unexpected revelation of such a family secret. Consider the psychological, social and cultural impacts this could have on a child of this age. Naturally, little Annie reacted and thought inappropriately, feeling alone in the face of this overwhelming reality.

Marianne Hirsch develops the concept of "post memory" which describes how children in a generation marked by traumatic events inherit memories that are not directly experienced but transmitted by the stories and silence of their parents. Hirsch (1999, p. 160) explains that "the weight of family secrets and unspoken words creates a form of imposed memory that frames the quest for identity of subsequent generations."

In short, our work has opened up new perspectives for reflection and developed our capacity for critical analysis as well as the author to reappropriate her story in the quest for self:

*The other girl is me, the
one who ran away from them, somewhere else. (p. 77)*

References

1. Research Corpus :

ERNAUX A. (2011) *L'Autre Fille*, NiL éditions, Paris.

11. Theoretical works

Cyrulnik, B. (2003). *The whisper of ghosts*. Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob.

Festinger, L. (1954). *A Theory of Social Comparison Processes*. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117-140.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp. 154-158.

Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery*. Basic Books, p. 40.

Hirsch, M. (1999). *The Familial Gaze*. Dartmouth College Press, p. 160.

McAdams, D. P. dan p (1993). *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. New York: William Morrow, pp. 50-92.

Markus, H. (1983). Self-knowledge: An expanded view. *Journal of Personality*, 51(3), 543 – 565.

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), p. 375.

Ricoeur, P. (1983). *Time and story*. Paris: Seuil, p. 60

Ricoeur, P. (2000). *Memory, history, oblivion*. Paris: Seuil, pp. 90-205.

111. Journal Articles

Dorais, L. J. (2004). The construction of identity. *Discourses and Identity Constructions*, p. 2.

Orofiamma, R. (2008). The figures of the subject in the life story. *In Sociology and Training*, 145(1), pp. 68-81. <https://www.cairn.info/revue>

