Usage of Photo, "Photo-Journal" in Annie Ernaux's Book (The Years)

1 Leila Gholami, 2 Anahita Sadat Ghaemmaghami,
1Author, 2 Corresponding Author,
1Department of French language and literature, 2Department of French language and literature,
Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University Tehran/Tehran, Iran
Email - 1Leila.gholamii@gmail.com, 2Anahita.ghaemmaghami@gmail.com

Abstract: Autobiographical novel of Annie Ernaux's “The Years” which published in 2008, eclipses the photographs, because they only appear in the form of ekphrasis and, as a result, they partially lose their referential dimension. On the other hand, in the “photo-journal”, the photographic images and fragments of the newspapers that convey them, seem to retain as a certain independence. The purpose of this article is to study, how Annie Ernaux uses private photographs and autobiographical writing to explore the concept of fragmented and fluctuating identity. Some traits can be shared by many individuals, because the subject of writing is conditioned not only by personal experience, but also to a very large extent by its social status and status. Annie Ernaux presents an interesting analytical corpus in which the two authors approach the complex problem of identity in an innovative and profound way, while touching on the essential questions on the feeling of belonging, the trauma and the death. In this novel we closely have a look at the character or narrator and we notice, from the beginning of the novel which it is an instance of diffuse narration and it is difficult and even impossible to grasp from which clearly comes the difficulty of seeing the main character in the first pages of the novel. This disappearance of the character sometimes makes the reader perplexed.

Key Words: Annie Ernaux, Photo-journal, The Years, Autobiography, Sociology.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Although, each personal story is unique, nevertheless, the variety forms can be seen quite as a great advantage and never ceases to surprise readers and critics. Autobiographical writing is a profession for self, identity, memories and meaning, and also it is a pursuit form for both structurally and narratively. Searching, therefore, for our own voice, not only allows us to tell a personal truth, but also to renew the autobiographical genre. In detail, it deals with the role which private photographic images play in the remembrance, memorial and representation of the life and also the author’s identity. Thus, "the theory of photography becomes an important and indispensable tool for an analysis of privileged texts, because it has a relationship between text and image which is the most important point of narratives" (Vieillard-Baron, Jean-Louis, 1999, p.132).

Another autobiographical novel of Annie Ernaux's “The Years” which published in 2008, eclipses the photographs, because they only appear in the form of ekphrasis and, as a result, they partially lose their referential dimension. On the other hand, in the "photo-journal", the photographic images and fragments of the newspapers that convey them, seem to retain as a certain independence.

In this novel we closely have a look at the character or narrator and we notice, from the beginning of the novel which it is an instance of diffuse narration and it is difficult and even impossible to grasp from which clearly comes the difficulty of seeing the main character in the first pages of the novel. This disappearance of the character sometimes makes the reader perplexed. He, apparently, is shelled with unrelated facts and ideas (Halbwachs, 1998, p.146).

This is the reason, why the incipit of this novel does not tell us about the principal or secondary characters, about the places where the plot of the novel and about the time of the story. But the incipit arouses the curiosity of the reader, because we are in the presence of a strange beginning of the novel. There are no tracks which would give us an idea of what will happen. Moreover, Vincent Jouve states, the incipit performs various functions in the poetics of the novel:

"The incipit fulfills three functions: it informs, interests and proposes a compact of reading. To inform, for the incipit, consists in answering the three questions that any reader asks himself, when he approaches a history: who? Or? when? In other words, the beginning of the novel, in its presentation of the plot, informs the reader about the main characters, the place and time of the action. Interest to arouse the curiosity of the reader” (Jouve, 2015, pp.19-20).

2. Different Images:

The Years is a delicate exercise: this book does not really have one story indeed, but rather stories. The Years go through sixty years of the author’s life and more than sixty years of a French life, but also sixty years of French
politics, sixty years of music, sixty years of cinema, sixty years of women's liberation movement and sixty years of advertising slogans (Halbwachs, 1998, p.37). These years are punctuated by the author's memories and activated by photographs that represent it either. The book begins with his childhood, which is part of the particular context of the post war period and ends in the late 2000. Within these two chronological references, the author tells a story of life, his own life, but always at a distance, without employing the first person of the singular autobiographical. This life is quite ordinary: there is a girl from a rather modest background, which will all the same higher education and will rise socially. However, the rest of her career remains fairly classic. She becomes a teacher of letters, gets married, becomes mother and finally she divorces. A trajectory, therefore, quite commonplace. And finally, this will be the purpose of Annie Ernaux: through this book she will show the many similarities of an intimate life to another (Halbwachs, 1998, p.40).

It is a story which is not just about a person, but about a woman, Annie Ernaux, situated in a historical, social, political context. The author never says "I" (except at the end) but "she", "we", in a collective account of an era of profound metamorphosis for her, it is on the contrary to seize this duration which constitutes its passage on earth at a given time, this time which has crossed it, this world that it has recorded only by living.

The Years has multiple themes which tackled through the passage of time, a time that connects to the immediate post war period, to the eve of Nicolas Sarkozy's presidential election. Between the two, 12 images (we will not see) but who will be the markers of a time - Annie Ernaux baby, Annie Ernaux in "mature woman" through the studious girl, the student, the wife, the mother, the teacher, the lover and - although not speaking of his own books - "the writer". This is perhaps the mystery of the book, it is all about distanced by this "on" indefinite, and at the same time it is deeply question of writing and life in script. In the use of photography, private photographs, whose classification from an aesthetic point of view is difficult, are accompanied by the story that aims to preserve from oblivion the intense moments of a physical and emotional experience that lived very attentive and conscious in the face of death.

In The Years, the descriptions of the family’s photos are inserted in the socio historical narrative and help to tell, not only an individual experience, but also that shared with a certain community. Finally, the "photo-journal" is the space of a game that is made between the memories captured, so to speak, objective, which is to say by the family photographs, and the notes drawn from the diaries, very personal reflections of the author.

3. Personal and Impersonal Autobiography:

Annie Ernaux, memory and photography as well as the writing of oneself are essential components in the quest for identity which is aimed by these two autobiographers. The faculty of memory plays an important role in forming a personal identity. Each of us has childhood memories; memories of crucial events, moments of pleasure or distress, with nostalgia or reluctance, we collect them and save them all in our memory either. Sometimes we prefer to get rid of some particularly painful memories, which can lead to a more or less conscious and more or less effective repression of these hurtful experiences (Halbwachs, 1998, p.4). Indeed, the mechanism of memory is mobilized not only for the faithful preservation of a significant past, but it also underlies our present and future experiences. If our mistakes help us to learn, it is because of the past memories and also trials and consequences that we have suffered, help us to make better choices in the future.

By tracing the evolution from the post war period to the present day, Annie Ernaux stages her personal construction alongside historical, social and cultural events. In The Years, she leaves behind her own memories and is more interested in the collective memory. As a result, it changes the traditional view of autobiography practiced so far. As defined by Philipe Lejeune, author of The autobiography in France and the autobiographical pact, autobiography consists of a "retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence, when he puts the main emphasis on his life, especially on the history of his personality " (Heymans, 1990, p.66). However, the place given to collective history in The Years is much more important than the concerning of the author's intimate life.

The autobiographical goes beyond the individual to be part of a much larger movement which is the construction of all feminine identity at that time. The integration of popular and political discourses as well as television, film, musical, literary and advertising references organizes a collective space between the author and readers. These different discourses or voices link and create a sort of variety of societies. The notion of autobiography is unclear: personal strict experience is denied and the individual is referred to a common mass of similar experiences and shared ideas (Heymans, 1990, p.73).

In order to reinforce the impersonal character of her memories, Annie Ernaux refuses the use of the "I" first person of the singular which attached to the autobiography by tradition. Evoked in the indefinite third person, "one", the events do not seem to directly concern the author. She tells her own experience through a collective voice. Everyone can substitute for the author by changing the names and find their own story. Annie Ernaux also uses the "s/he" in the few pages that directly concern her, the description of the photographs.

The incorporation of photographs is done throughout the book which opens with the description of three pictures of the author, then infant and ends with a photo of the author at sixty-six. In all sixteen, different photos are described. They introduce the different phases of life of the author and the different periods of history. The description of the
photographs reinforces the objective nature of the story. Indeed, each photo is presented with this same careful attention to detail. The description covers both the author's own body and the surrounding environment or the technical characteristics of the photograph. This process detaches Annie Ernaux from her own story. By dismissing his personal memories and focusing on the reality of the photo, the author sees himself from the outside and describes himself as an unknown. The successive description of the images also symbolizes the passage of the years and limits the text of chronological landmarks. The images present the author as a newborn, then at age eight, fifteen, seventeen, nineteen, twenty-three, twenty-seven, thirty-two, forty, forty-five, years, fifty-two years, fifty-nine years and finally sixty-six years. The photos are more and more distant with age, in parallel with the decrease of the upsetting experiences in the identity construction of the author (Halbwachs, 1998, p.5).

4. Whiteness Indicating a Change of Subject

The work on temporality and polyphony in The Years, translates into an actual graphic writing. The text has a punctuation quite free or nonexistent on some pages. Often the sentences have no capital or end point which spontaneously gives the text an appearance of a taken list or notes. Popular expressions, commonplaces and advertising slogans are transcribed in quotation marks or in italics just like the titles of films, songs or novels. The author also inserts many white spaces in the text, indicating a change of subject or advancement in the existed time. Larger spaces are reserved for jumping from one period to another, always announced by the description of a new photo. The bottom and the shape of the work are in total adequation.

In the last pages of the book, Annie Ernaux explains that this is a "romantic autobiography" inspired by notes, diary and photographs that mark out her life. Starting from her personal relics that are photographs, Annie Ernaux extends the personal memory to the collective memory, to the spirit of an era.

5. The Voice Participating in the Narrative Polyphonic Choir of the Novel:

Other autobiographical novel by Annie Ernaux's which published in 2008, The Years, by looking at closely to the character/ narrator, we notice from the beginning of the novel that it is an instance of diffuse narrative and also why it is difficult and even impossible to grasp, from which comes the difficulty of seeing clearly the main character in the first pages of the novel. Sometimes, this disappearance of the character makes the reader perplexed. He is shelled with apparently unrelated facts and ideas.

In The Years, the narrator addresses a multitude of topics, she deals with several problems that could be gathered in common categories: trends for civilization, dynamic and sociological trends:

“We, who had the memory of a dry face under a kepi, little mustache of pre-war, on posters of the city in ruins, who had not heard the call of June 18, were bewildered and disappointed by those drooping cheeks and bushy brows of fat notary, that voice paralyzed by an old tremor. The character from Colombey grotesquely measured the time elapsed from childhood to today” (Ernaux, 2008, p.73).

To cut a long story short, in this work, the narrative voice is collective: the narrator uses "we" and "you". But what causes the curiosity of the reader is the use of the third person of the singular "she" and the abandonment of the autobiographical "I". And so the author gets experience in a variety of socio historical contexts. On the other hand, in La Place, the author does not present herself as the main character of the work, but in several passages her father dominates the story. She is also the character of the diegesis, which is the fictional universe in which the characters evolve, and she tells a story has lived, which is also a hero.

In The Years, we heard different voices such as the social voice, the voice of women, the voice of religion, the literary and cultural voice. All these voices focus on the different classes of society. Vincent Jouve points out that the writer makes the voice of society and of the time heard, “in text, there is always, a voice of an era, that of a social group, with its values, its culture, its vision of the world and its contradictions” (Ernaux, 2008, p.106).

The sociological dimension of Annie Ernaux's The Years plays a role in linguistic plurality since her mission is to share the experiences, speech and judgments of those around her. In addition, the reader is faced with a polyphonic writing whose voices are orchestrated by the author. She gives voice to the smallest voices she evokes as a witness and gives them the floor to superimpose them to one another and give us a plural testimony starting from her own experience. To relate the voices of others, she sometimes uses direct forms. To give the word to others is natural to her.

We see a narrator of different ages who speaks in the first person of her own experience in The Place and the third person in The Years. It should be emphasized that in these two books she opens several perspectives from several points of view. The author reflects the consciousness of others whose voices participate in the novel's narrative polyphonic choir. This means that Annie Ernaux's autobiographical novel is clearly distinct from the diary, which is a text presenting the voice of the author's own conscience and his reflections, his feelings, through his polyphonic narrative. We hear the voices mingling with each other in harmony.

After the study of novelistic polyphony, irony must be examined as a type of polyphonic discourse. Irony refers to the reversal of established opinions and it is opposite of what one wants to express. We can say that phenomena rely
on the notion of literal meaning. Whether it is metaphor, hyperbole, understatement or irony, in any case an enunciation it must be interpreted as conveying a different meaning than the one it literally delivers.

In other words, irony creates a meaning excluding the linear one. Comparable things could be the expression that enclosed in quotation marks or italics, which are both inscribed in the thread of the utterance and rejected for one reason or another.

In The Years, irony is present in the comments on famous men. Vincent Jouve also explains the irony with regard to polyphony:
"from a polyphonic point of view, irony appears as a combination of voices, although confused in the same utterance, refer to different speakers, one that supports the explicit content (the enunciator E), the other denying it (the speaker L)" (Jouve, 2015, p.85).

In The Years the narrator makes ironic interpretations from time to time on the new habits of young people: "Speaking little of their future. They opened the fridge and cupboards as they pleased to eat Danette, Bolino and Nutella at any time, slept with their girlfriend at home. They did not have time to do everything, sports, painting, film club and school trips. They did not want us anything. The journalists called them the bof-generation" (Ernaux, 2008, p.157).

6. Irony social way of life

We see that irony invites the reader to be active while reading and thinking. This example shows social changes affect young people's daily lives, their ways of learning and their ways of using their attention skills. They do not spend time with their families. They are passionate about their friends. Their way of life and their decisions are under the effect of social change. Moreover, their eating habits. They are not used to eating a well meal. All these behavioral changes among young people deserve the irony, bof-generation which represented by journalists. This ironic point of view of the narrator makes her story more appealing. In short, the narrative voice is collective: the narrator uses "we" and "you". But what causes the curiosity of the reader is the use of the third person of the singular "she/he" and the abandonment of the autobiographical "I". The author gets experience in a variety of socio historical contexts. On the other hand, in La Place, the author does not present herself as the main character of the work, but in several passages her father dominates the story. She is also the character of the diegesis, which is the fictional universe in which the characters evolve, and she tells a story he has lived, which she is also a heroine.

Annie Ernaux, has the typology of impersonal autobiography story which published in 2008, The Years, she carries the project since the 80s. Paradoxical formula close to the oxymoron that invites to analyze the form chosen to implement this paradox, this story has the peculiarity of not having recourse to the "I". In The Place, the first person, the author uses the third person with the pronouns "she", "they" or the first person plural "us". This enunciative choice raises a rich questioning about the writer's approach to writing in book. Indeed, it will always be interesting to pay the utmost attention to enunciative systems and to the choice of people who are far from basing free games, correspond, for the intimate, to a certain way of seeing each other. Starobinski pointed out by style the particular and individual way in which a writer satisfies the general conditions of autobiography:

"The style here is the index of the relation between the writer and his own past, at the same time that he reveals the project, oriented towards the future, in a specific way to reveal oneself to others" (Starobinski, 1970, p.85).

This is completely true for Annie Ernaux, whose enunciative choices inform not only how to see each other, but also her writing project. She explains her goals at length and at the end of the story. We can see what will not be the story - an autobiography - and the close conjunction she wants to restore between her own memory and collective memory. As for each of her writings, Annie Ernaux has long sought the appropriate form and the enunciation seems the key to this form found, different from her previous writings, which goes even further in the concern to exceed the individual scope of the story of her life. The particular enunciative device, associated with the commentary of photos. The photos described in The Years are now visible in a recent book Write Life, which includes several works of the author, preceded by a hundred pages where juxtaposed photos and extracts of his diary, as objects, events, songs, helps to make the collective memory of these "The Years". Replaced in the continuity of the work, it seems the culmination of a coherent approach that leads from self socio biography to this which called impersonal autobiography. However, the individual seems to resist. And it is partly the earlier work, because it has created an autobiographical space, that makes this individual perceptible. Thus the "I" is constantly outcropping and also allows to restore the "depth of time" (Ernaux, 2008, p.223).

Several pronouns are used here: "we", "us", "she", "they". However, if the pronoun "I" is not used, it cannot be said that the first person is completely absent. Indeed, the indefinite personal pronoun and personal pronoun of the first person plural, sometimes confused in their uses, contain as a first person grammatically the "I" besides, as Emile Benveniste explains, predominates: ""us", it is always "I" that predominates since there is "us" only from "I"" (Benveniste, 1966, p.233).
The pronoun "we", therefore, can designate a group to which the narrator belongs to the children opposed to adults: "The feast days after the war, in the endless slowness of meals, came out of nothingness and took shape the time already begun, the one that parents sometimes seemed to fix when they forgot to answer us" (Ernaux, Les Années, 2008, p.22). "Us" in the story will evoke adolescents, young people or more precisely women: "We who had aborted in kitchens, divorced, who had believed that our efforts to liberate us would serve others, we were taken from great fatigue"(Ibid., p.173). The use of the "you" partially overlaps that of the "we"; so she can refer to the narrator: "We started to go to school" (Ibid., p.27). Or even more convincingly when it leads to an agreement by female syllepse, "While waiting to be big enough to put Rouge Kiss and Bourjois perfume with j for joy, we collected plastic animals" (Ibid., p.13). It also refers to parents and their social class, "one watched and envied among his neighbors the possession of these signs of progress, marking a social superiority" (ibid., p.42). It is also used to refer to shared opinions, "the right came back ... we loved Mitterrand again" (Ibid., p.160). These jobs of "we" and "us" are often reinforced by the use of the mode of the infinitive which erases the expression of the person, as in the description of this repertoire of habits, "to eat a fruit making noise ... wipe your lips with a piece of bread, saucer the plate so carefully that it could be stored without washing, tap the spoon in the bottom of the bowl, stretch to the end of dinner" (Ibid., p.31). Hence, the pronouns "we" and "us" combine individual experience and collective experience.

7. CONCLUSION:

The purpose of this article is to study, how Annie Ernaux uses private photographs and autobiographical writing to explore the concept of fragmented and fluctuating identity. Some traits can be shared by many individuals, because the subject of writing is conditioned not only by personal experience, but also to a very large extent by its social status and status. Annie Ernaux presents an interesting analytical corpus in which the two authors approach the complex problem of identity in an innovative and profound way, while touching on the essential questions on the feeling of belonging, the trauma and the death.

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