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# Annie Ernaux Reveals Struggle of Life Through Auto Fiction

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Dr. Govind Digambar Kokane

## Abstract

*Annie Ernaux has published three autobiographical novels. She examines a life marked by strong differences. She has explored not only her own life experience but also of her generation. She has presented the main themes, the body and sexuality, intimate relationships, social inequality, and the experience of changing class through education, time and memory, and the overarching question of how to write about these life experiences. She has described the themes which reflect the social, political and the cultural context. She has written autobiographical texts, such as, A Man's Place, A Woman's Story and Shame explore her own life and that of her parents. French author; Annie Ernaux has been awarded the highly acclaimed Nobel Prize in literature 2022. She writes with courage and the acuteness. She describes the roots, estrangement and the collective chains of personal memory. She analyses shame, humiliation, jealousy or inability to see who you are. She is a great French author who has universal appeal.*

**Key Words:** Context, explore, collective restraints, , jealousy, humiliation

## Introduction

Annie Ernaux received the Nobel Prize for literature in 2022. She has described the roots, estrangements and collective restraints of personal memory. She has written about themes of body, sexuality, intimate relationships; social inequality and the experience of changing class through education; time and memory; and life experiences. She has published three

autobiographical novels, *Cleaned Out*, *What They Say Goes* and *The Frozen Woman*. Her first book, *Cleaned Out* was published in 1974. She explores not only her own life but also that of her generation, her parents, women, and the anonymous others encountered in public space. Her works reflect the social, political and the cultural context in which they were written. She has invented new

form of narration, autosociographical texts.

The collective autobiography, *The Years*, describes the social and cultural history. *A Frozen Woman* is a painful story of a woman's aspirations collapsed by reality. The narrator is a woman who is torn between the demands of her body and the mind. She understands the difference between what she knows and what she is told, between being a wife / mother and the individual. The narrator is the daughter of a lower middle class couple who run a combination of grocery and a shop. The narrator experiences the pressure of wanting to be wanted, and compares herself to the image of feminine perfection. She experiences the fantasy of the romantic model of a man who will respect her and treat her as an equal.

*A Man's Place* is a great book written by Annie Ernaux. She has described her own struggle to find a place in the world. She has written this book in the simple style. The works represent the class of their family. Her voice is clear and pleasant to hear. Her parent's expressions are stated in italics to describe their way of speaking and the style of their class. She scrutinizes the manners of her father which came unnaturally to him. It reveals the shame haunted her father throughout his life. She has written about family relationships with both emotion and analysis. Ernaux and her

father are influenced by the place from which they have come. It describes Annie's complex relationships with her father.

## Material and Methods

Primary and secondary sources related to the subject had been used for the literary exploration of the subject. The background information had been collected and analysed. The analytical and descriptive methods were used for the research.

*A Woman's Story* is a critically acclaimed book about the memoir of her mother. The woman of the title is her mother. Her mother was born in a small town in Normandy. Her only ambition was to run a grocery shop. Finally, she succumbs to Alzheimer's disease. Her daughter is aware of the immense difficulties her mother surmounted to give her daughter a better future.

"It was only when my mother .....became the history that I started to feel less alone and out of place in a world ruled by words and ideas, the world where she had wanted me to live. " May

*A Girl's Story* gives us an account of the incident when she found herself overpowered by another's will and desire. In the summer of 1958, eighteen year old Ernaux submits her will to a man's and then he moves on, leaving her without a "master" bereft. Now, after fifty years, she realizes her mistake. It is about the

girl, her desire and madness, her idiocy and pride, her hunger and her blood that ceased to flow. It is the story of the summer of 1958; she worked as a camp instructor in Normandy. She recounts the first night she encounters with a man. While writing a girl's story, she has written graphically about the collective existence of the society.

*Cleaned Out* is a tough story of young girl's coming of age. The narrator is a twenty year old college student, Prix Renaudot. Denise is the only child of small shopkeeper. Ernaux's books are short and sharp. She has written it in the direct and declarative style. Her book, *La Place of A Man's Place* was a breakthrough in her literary career. *A Man's Place* and *A Woman's Story* have become contemporary classics in France. Her writing in *Simple Passion* alternates between objectivity and total immersion. It blurs the line between fiction and autobiography. The real life events have been presented through the novel.

*I Remain in Darkness* is one of the most poignant, vigorous books written by Annie Ernaux. It is the description of the end of her mother's life, those painful last years, when the author saw this once so powerful mother of hers failing into the darkness called dementia. In *A Woman's Story*, we meet a woman at the height of her "power." She is eccentric, expressive, demanding and

loving woman. It is quite shocking to see her physical and mental decay in *I Remain in Darkness*. In the novel, *Happening*, written in 2000, she has described the consequences of illegal abortion. It describes the troubles of a young student while seeking out an illegal abortion. The novel was adapted into the film of the same name. She has presented the meanings of her experience. In 1963, Annie Ernaux, at the age of 23, and unattached, she realizes that she is pregnant. Shame arises in her like a plague. She understands that her pregnancy will make her and her family as social failures. She knows she cannot keep that child. She has written this story after forty years. She has never overcome this trauma. In those times, abortion was illegal in France. She tried in vain to self-administer the abortion with a knitting needle. She was frightened and anxious. She finally located an abortionist, and ends in a hospital ward where she nearly dies. She has written about her painful experiences in the realistic manner. She has written with clarity and precision.

*La Place* is about a daughter's relationship with her father. In a fragmented and retrospective manner, the narrator describes her feelings of separation and betrayal that arise when education and marriage place her in a social class with different value system, language, taste and behaviour. She has explored the ways

in which individual experiences are related with group and class attitudes. She has also focuses on the important attributes of the French society. It is full of irony and surprises. She explores how much her father and perhaps Ernaux herself are influenced by place, and the roots of social class they come from. She has depicted the class struggle within French society. She describes desire of her father to transcend his own roots and to impress people of higher class with his decorum and manners. He always feels inferior. He overcompensates it with a outward persona. She has taken personal and historical factors into account while narrating the events which happened in her life. She is an astute observer of memory, history, class and society.

The novelist, Annie Ernaux told in her interview to The Guardian that it is the responsibility of the author to tell truth to the society though creative works. She has always sought truth through her characters, settings and the plots of the novels. She has told the truth about her mother, father and herself with the flashback technique. We come across her insights in different stages of life. It is difficult to give account of ourselves in the past, because now we are different from our own version in the past. We evolve with regard to thoughts, emotions and experiences. A Man's Place is the story of Ernaux's father, a simple man with simple pleasures.

Her father did not really embrace of enjoy his life till later years of his life. He was influenced by his own meager, working class origins. He did not value education because he himself was illiterate. Despite this background of working class, he worked hard to provide for his family. Her mother also worked hard for the development and protection of family. Her father was first a farm worker and eventually he becomes a grocery and café proprietor. Her parents encouraged her to take education, which was otherwise unheard of in the area. Ernaux completed her education through a state scholarship she had received. The books is provides a description of rural France. The writing style of Ernaux is simple. Her socio-autobiographical texts inspire us to reflect on our attitudes to society, parents, and ourselves. Her texts have universal appeal because they combine the personal and social elements which are universal. Personal and social life is intertwined.

### Conclusion

Annie Ernaux has written mostly autobiographical having close links with sociology. Her autobiographical narratives focus on her relationship with her father, mother and her experiences of being grown up in a small town in France. She combines historic and individual experiences. She gives us the moving account of her parent's progression, her teenage

years, her marriage, her passionate affair with an European man. She has provided an amazing account of the French society after World War II. Her writing is the story of a woman and of the evolving society she lived in. She has written about women liberation. *A Man's Place* has become a classic of French literature. She has presented the portrait of her father in this book. She has presented memory of her father against the backdrop of his pressing life conditions. The act of writing has become an act of liberty for her, but also an act of betrayal. She describes intimately and concretely about her father about only she could have known. She writes about his hard labour as a rural and then as an industrial worker, his habits, joys and manners of speech. With the double vision she has described the shame, humiliation that he suffers because of his class, lack of education and the lack of self esteem. She writes both to restore dignity of her father and also the injustice behind his harsh life conditions. The novel has been written in plain style. It is written as an act of solidarity with her father.

Annie Ernaux has examined human life marked with strong disparities about gender, language, and class. For her writing is a political act. She has presented objectively the inequalities in society. Therefore she said she uses language like "knife" to tear apart the veils of imagination. She

was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in the year 2022, for the courage and clinical perception with which she explains the roots, estrangements, and the collective restraints of personal memory.

Annie Ernaux is considered France's one of the most important writers. In 2022, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. She has expressed her past for decades. *The Years* was published in 2008. It is considered her defining novel. She has presented insights of society through this novel. She has described the personal and the public life. She gives an account of her working class upbringing, *Memoirs of women* are domestic. She has written both personally and collectively. She has narrated her own story on the backdrop of the story of her generation. It is not only personal memory but it is also the collective memory of her generation. It is a new type of autobiography. It is personal and it is collective at the same time.

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