



THE NOBEL TO ANNIE ERNAUX: WHINING IS MY PROFESSION

Posted on November 1, 2022 by François Bousquet



Jean Baudrillard said of democracy that it is the menopause of Western societies. I don't know why, but this remark makes me think of the books of Annie Ernaux, the new darling of the Left, who was awarded the Nobel Prize at the age of 82, for a work as thick as a feminist leaflet. In the past, the Nobel Prize has often rewarded third-rate writers, starting with Sully Prudhomme, a poet of the unctuous kind, the first Nobel Prize winner in literature, who inaugurated the long list of French authors who have won the prize, all of them male. One woman was missing from the list: the tricolored suffragette. First name: Annie; last name: Ernaux.

The Swedish committee's trademark is to be in perfect trigonometric alignment with the spirit of the times, like a barometer that measures the atmospheric pressure with a Nordic and Lutheran rigor. This year, the atmosphere is boring, feminist and stubborn—the spit-and-image of Annie Ernaux, a pretty woman by the way, very well preserved in spite of the withering of time, except for the disdainful lips that have long collected the poisonous fruit of a bitterness that no longer has any place.

A Purging and a Punishment

Annie Ernaux deserves our recognition. She is the most powerful sedative and laxative in contemporary literature. To read her is to experience a journey to the end of boredom to [Cergy-Pontoise](#), the new city of the Pompidolian era, where she settled eons ago as a watchdog of progressivism. The rhythm of her prose reminds the oldest among us of the throbbing sway of the suburban railroads of yesteryear, which made the traveler seasick and predisposed him to drowsiness.

Experience it for yourself. Start reading one of her books in the underbelly of Paris, as the devil himself, [Richard Millet](#), calls it, for example on the platform of the [RER A](#) at [Châtelet-Les Halles](#), and finish it at the [Cergy train station](#), in the prematurely aged university [Luna Park](#) that Annie makes it a point of honor to never leave. You will come out of the experience exhausted. If Cergy-Pontoise is a sleepy town, Annie Ernaux is its pharmaceutical version, its sleeping pill, more literal than literary, it goes without saying.

Cergy-Pontoise is for her the center of the world. For the past 40 years, she has walked the alleys, the pedestrian streets, the groves between two bodies of water, the shops, including the [Auchan](#) hypermarket, which she describes with the enthusiasm of a novice bailiff and the diligence of an Auchan department manager updating his inventory. Annie has always made lists. Lists are her thing.

She even made one in 2012 to send Richard Millet to the gallows, who had just published his [Éloge littéraire d'Anders Breivik](#) with Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, preceded by his magnificent *Langue fantôme*. As in the good old days of the Soviet Writers' Union, she launched a petition in *Le Monde* against this "fascist pamphlet." 128 watchdogs rushed to sign it, poodles and chihuahuas of the worst kind that came to the roaring lion. [Liste Otto](#) in 1940, Ernaux list in 2012. From one occupation to another.

Cosette is not Colette

In the land of Stieg Larsson and his antifa saga *Millennium*, the Nobel Prize could only go to Annie Ernaux. But if she had to be awarded a prize based on her literary qualities alone, it would be the prize of the Normandy knitters' union or that of the nightcap makers of [Yvetot](#), in the Seine-Maritime region, where she was born 82 years ago, at her family's grocery store, where her novel of her origins begins—black, cruel, terribly unjust. Since then, she has alternated between the misfortunes of [Calimero](#) and the misfortunes of [Cosette](#). Now Cosette is elevated by critics to the rank of [Colette](#), while she is content to write feminist bluets with her hairbrush, tracing sullen lives threatened by depression and resentment.

It's like reading one of those letters from a listener that [Menie Grégoire](#) read on [RTL](#) in the 1970s. You remember—the cultic "Allô, Menie! The radio letter from the heart. It had everything—men who don't understand anything about women, sentimental dreams, unjust fate. Menie Grégoire and Annie Ernaux—the voice-over of sentimental bovarysm in the age of the feminist crowd. An exhaustive exegesis of commonplaces, but not in the sense that Léon Bloy meant it, as a monument of stupidity. No! In Annie Ernaux's case, it is a monument of neo-Sulpine devotion and leftist self-righteousness. Because between Menie Grégoire and her, Pierre Bourdieu's sociology has crept in—scholarly miserabilism, coupled with a spirit of sociological cumbersomeness. Annie Ernaux is Menie Grégoire's letter from the heart in the format of a sociology course at the faculty of [Jussieu](#). No literature here. The Nobel Prize winner of 2022 claims a flat, stodgy, atonic writing, which only transcribes the banality of a feminist's daily life, without ever transfiguring it, as the moving Virginia Woolf was able to do.

Embracing Miserabilism

Marriage or abortion, this is how she summed up the dilemma of young girls at the threshold of the 1960s. She experienced both, without sparing us anything of her martyrdom. Her CV is a way of the cross, whose stations she groans out as she goes along. There was once the figure of the Christian

Mater dolorosa; today, it is the #MeToo dolorosa and its hypertrophied tear glands. Women's lives are a valley of tears. Annie wipes them away.

Victimology is a profession. So is crying. It is even one of the oldest professions in the world, if we are to believe the discoveries of archaeologists who have brought to light weeping women on Egyptian bas-reliefs. The goddess Isis herself is sometimes represented as a weeper. Wealthy families paid female mourners to feign grief, both among the Pharaohs and in Mesopotamia. In Rome, there was a choir of mourners with a leader who sang the laments while beating her chest. The mourning was all the more theatrical, sonorous and demonstrative. The last mourners logically disappeared when the feminists appeared in the 1960s. Annie is their heir. Her literature, which is presented in the manner of an electoral pamphlet, is not committed, but is a member—of [LFI](#), to be precise.

When Lady Bosses read *Télérama*

Her books are like the empirical proof of the incapacity of sociological concepts to be transformed into literature. Annie may put them to music, but they remain hopelessly monotonous. If Pierre Bourdieu provided her with the instructions for her worldview, it is Didier Eribon, another sociologist, who provided her with her identity papers by making her a "class defector." A class defector is someone who is a bit of a slob who manages to become very chic. A nouveau riche, like Annie Ernaux. She, who belongs to the champagne Left, constantly reminds us that, in her unhappy childhood, she only ate bits of cod, the fish of the poor. Every class defector is condemned to counterfeit his original culture and to specialize in sociological navel-gazing.

A remark to finish. Bourdieusian sociology is the continuation of the work of the lady bosses of yesteryear, who were the first social workers. Annie Ernaux is a lady patroness. She wants to restore the daily life of the people, even though she has lost track of it for a good half-century. She never finds the right distance. Her indignation is that of a reader of [Télérama](#) strolling through a [Grévin museum](#) of the working world where no piece is original. Why are there dominated people? Why are there right-wing bastards? Why did the working classes prefer Marine Le Pen to [Jean-Luc Mélenchon](#)? One shudders in front of such unfathomable questionings that make Plato's, Pascal's and Leibniz's interrogations seem old-fashioned? Why is there something rather than nothing, eh? Why is there nothing rather than Annie Ernaux, eh? Why is there Annie Ernaux rather than literature, eh? Dizzying, isn't it!

François Bousquet is the editor-in-chief of the revue Éléments and also the director of the Nouvelle Librairie. This article appears through the kind courtesy of [revue Éléments](#).
