



Exteriors

By Annie Ernaux

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Taking the form of random journal entries over seven years, Exteriors captures the feeling of contemporary living on the outskirts of Paris. Poignantly lyrical, chaotic, and strangely alive.

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Exteriors By Annie Ernaux Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Ernaux's best subject is Ernaux. Her autobiographical novels like *Cleaned Out*, *A Woman's Story*, *A Man's Place* and *Simple Passion* succeeded brilliantly because Ernaux is mordantly critical of every character—especially her own. As the title suggests, this isn't a meditation on Ernaux's inner workings but rather a writer's notebook of observations from which Ernaux herself is largely absent. Most of the pieces arise from rail trips between Paris and her home in Cergy-Pontoise, "a new town 40 kilometers outside of Paris." Ernaux's keenest insights are into the uncomfortable relationships between those who live on society's fringes and those more securely in its center. She describes a man leaning against a wall in a subway corridor: "He was not asking for money. Drawing level with him, one noticed that his fly was open, revealing his balls. An unbearable sight—a shattering form of dignity." She recalls pedestrians who carefully avoid a section of pavement inscribed by an absent petitioner: "To buy food. I have no family." Contrasted with this is the tortured relationship between people and materialism. "I realize," she says, "that I am forever combing reality for signs of literature." But these are just signs. Assembled in this loose and largely unremarkable series of vignettes, they are not yet literature.

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Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

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About the Author

Born in 1940, ANNIE ERNAUX grew up in Normandy, studied at Rouen University, and began teaching high school. From 1977 to 2000, she was a professor at the Centre National d'Enseignement par Correspondance. Her books, in particular *A Man's Place* and *A Woman's Story*, have become contemporary classics in France. She won the prestigious Prix Renaudot for *A Man's Place* when it was first published in French in 1984. The English edition was a *New York Times* Notable Book and a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. The English edition of *A Woman's Story* was a *New York Times* Notable Book.

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