

Stylistic Subversion: *Écriture Plate*, *Écriture Courante*, and *Parler Femme* in Annie Ernaux and Marguerite Duras

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Abstract: Luce Irigaray proposes *parler femme* as a feminine symbolic order that resists patriarchal linguistic structures, which have historically silenced or distorted women's experiences. She advocates for a language "by women, of women, and for women," rooted in female subjectivity and multiplicity. Annie Ernaux (1940 -) and Marguerite Duras (1914 - 1996) reject the linear, authoritative, and logical narrative forms attributed to masculine discourse and embrace fragmentation, silence, emotional ambiguity, and bodily memory to express feminine perspectives. The discussion will also incorporate Ernaux's *écriture plate*, which rejects ornamental prose and adopts a sparse, clinical tone. This stylistic choice resists emotional excesses and emphasizes the rawness of female experiences like abortion, illness, aging, class shame, and illicit affairs. In *A Woman's Story* and *The Years*, Ernaux refuses to romanticize or dramatize her experiences. Her minimalist style blurs the line between personal and collective history, often adopting the third person narrative of "his," "her," "them," and "theirs," to portray a universal experience. Duras's *écriture courante* reflects fragmented, elliptical prose which destabilizes linear narrative and coherent identity. Her style dissolves boundaries between narrator and subject, past and present, mirroring Irigaray's notion of feminine language as fluid, decentred, and plural. Duras in *The Lover* (1985) and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* dismantle coherent narrative structures by privileging absence, gaps, longing, and silence, the elements that Irigaray identifies as key to *parler femme*. Both writers celebrate ambiguity, repetition, and openness. This paper will explore *parler femme* as a form of feminist resistance and probes how these authors challenge and disrupt the symbolic order of patriarchal language..

Keywords: *parler femme*, *écriture*, multiplicity, minimalism, unembellished prose..

Introduction: Feminine Language and the Critique of Patriarchal Discourse

Luce Irigaray challenged the conventional and patriarchal modes of writing about sexuality, shame, and desire by fundamentally altering language, gender, and Western philosophy. In *This Sex Which Is Not*

have denied women's authority and subjectivity. "Phallus," according to Lacan is "privileged signifier" (Lacan, 1977, p. 285), as it endows men with power and autonomy. Women identify themselves as less superior from men's mirror image because of the absence of that same phallus which relegates their position to secondary. Irigaray confronts Freud's theory of "penis envy" (Freud, 1933, pp. 112-115), where Freud is unable to define female sexuality outside of male-centric norms. She criticized Freud's male-centered analysis and bias, which fails to acknowledge female identity as independent whole and defines women in relational terms or as secondary to men. She also criticizes Descartes's concept of rational "I," the Cartesian dualism of mind over body, which erases the lived, embodied experiences of women. His cogito of "I think, therefore I am" (Descartes, 1998, p. 18), reflects the dominant masculine notion of valuing rational thought over physical experience.

Irigaray's critique extends beyond psychoanalysis to encompass the entire Western philosophical tradition. Her engagement with Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "Other" in *The Second Sex* (1953) provides crucial context for understanding *parler femme*. De Beauvoir argues that "He is the Subject; He is the Absolute—she is the Other" (p. 03). This formulation establishes that woman has been defined not by what she *is*, but by what she *is not*—namely, not man. De Beauvoir's existentialist framework posits that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 301), emphasizing the constructed nature of gender identity. While de Beauvoir's analysis focuses on social and existential dimensions of women's oppression, Irigaray takes this critique further by examining how language itself constitutes this othering process. The symbolic order, dominated by masculine logic and phallogocentric discourse, allows no space for authentic feminine expression. Woman's speech, when it occurs within this system, can only ever be a pale imitation or distorted echo of masculine discourse.

Roland Barthes's concept of *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) offers another critical lens for understanding the radical nature of feminine writing practices. Barthes argues for a neutral, transparent writing that frees language from social codes and ideological constraints (p. 77). This zero-degree writing represents "a transparent form of speech" that resists the weight of literary tradition and social convention (p. 65). Ernaux's *criture plate* can be understood as a feminist adaptation of Barthes's project, a stripping away of literary ornamentation to reveal the raw material of lived experience. However, where Barthes's zero-degree writing aims at neutrality, Ernaux's flat writing is distinctly gendered and class-conscious, making visible the social structures that shape women's lives. Her refusal of metaphor and embellishment is not merely stylistic. It is profoundly political, a rejection of bourgeois literary forms that have historically excluded working-class women's voices.

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and symbolic violence provide essential frameworks for understanding how class and gender intersect in Ernaux and Duras's works. Bourdieu defines *habitus* as "a socially constituted system of dispositions that orient 'thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions'" (1977, p. 55). This concept captures how social structures become internalized as bodily dispositions and unconscious patterns of behavior. Symbolic violence, in Bourdieu's formulation, refers to the imposition of dominant cultural norms in ways that appear natural and inevitable. This masks their arbitrariness. Working-class individuals internalize middle-class values as superior, experiencing shame and alienation from their own backgrounds. This is central to Ernaux's autobiographical writings. Her examination of class mobility, particularly in works like *A Man's Place* (1986) and *Shame* (2002), reveals how symbolic violence operates through language, manners, taste, and bodily comportment.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, she emulates the language of Freud, Lacan, Hegel, Plato and Nietzsche to expose their artificial and constructed nature of tropes, stereotypes, and their patriarchal roots. In *Timaeus* (1929), Plato describes the "womb" of a woman as "hysteria," a symbol of irrationality and chaos. He further describes the womb as a "living creature within another living creature" (p. 118), and claims that it can cause illness when it is not properly regulated. The womb is projected as restless and disruptive, almost like a wild animal that must be tamed. Plato links female physiology to irrational behavior, suggesting that women's bodies are inherently unstable unless controlled by reproduction. Irigaray argues that Plato's description turns the womb into a philosophical scapegoat, a symbol of everything that threatens the orderly, rational, male-defined cosmos.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1961), Nietzsche writes of woman as a metaphor for nature, seduction, or danger. He declares: "You are going to women? Do not forget the whip!" (p. 87), representing women as objects of male mastery, not as autonomous beings. Irigaray confronts by reimagining the feminine as fluid, elemental, and irreducible to male desire. In *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Irigaray, 1991), she writes, "You have never known the sea. You have only crossed her. You have never swum in her waters. You have never let yourself be penetrated by her movements" (p. 13). Here, Irigaray uses the metaphor of the sea to represent feminine depth and embodiment, contrasting it with Nietzsche's tendency to treat nature, and by extension, woman, as something to be conquered or transcended. Irigaray criticizes Nietzsche for romanticizing and objectifying the feminine, while failing to engage with real sexual difference. His philosophy, though radical, still operates within a phallogocentric framework where woman is a mirror, a muse, or a metaphor – but never a speaking subject. Irigaray's response is not just a rejection, but a re-writing, she offers a new language that honors feminine embodiment, relationality, and multiplicity, challenging Nietzsche's legacy from within and beyond his own poetic style.

Irigaray criticized authors like James Joyce and Oscar Wilde for reducing women to mere objects. In Wilde's play *A Woman of No Importance* (2000), Lord Illingworth famously declares, "The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden. It ends with Revelations" (p. 43). This assertion, rich in biblical and cultural symbolism, reflects a traditional Western narrative arc, where woman is origin (Eve in the garden) and the site of downfall or chaos (Revelation). Irigaray might interpret this as emblematic of how Western literature often casts women as symbolic terrain, as the beginning and end of male stories, but never as autonomous subjects within them. In her view, women in Western culture are defined by others, especially men, a lack of a stable, self-defined identity. Wilde's women, such as Mrs. Arbuthnot, are judged, discarded, or idealized based on male desires and social norms. In *The Sphinx Without a Secret* (1887), Wilde writes, "Women are meant to be loved, not to be understood" (p. 75). He thus denies women intellectual depth, casting them as mysterious objects of male affection rather than subjects with agency. Wilde presents women as enigmatic and emotionally captivating, yet intellectually inaccessible. He hence romanticizes the idea of feminine mystery. Thus, women are not to be engaged with as rational, knowable individuals, but as objects of affection and fascination.

Irigaray critiques, "Woman is traditionally seen as a lack, a gap, a hole, a place for man to fill" (p. 26). She challenges the dominant male-centered frameworks that define women not by what they are, but by what they are not, arguing that woman has been symbolically positioned as absence, a passive space, a void, something incomplete that only gains meaning through male presence or desire. She is exposing how women have been treated as objects of exchange, mirrors for male identity, or receptacles for male meaning. Her use of words like "gap" and "hole" is deliberately provocative. If woman is a "hole," then she is not a speaker, not a thinker, not a creator, she is a space to be filled, not a subject who acts. Irigaray's response is to call for a new language and symbolic order, one that reflects female multiplicity, fluidity, and embodiment. She argues that women must be allowed to speak from their own experience, not through the structures built by men (p. 27).

Mimesis, Repetition, and the Subversion of Patriarchal Language

Irigaray urges women to deploy "mimesis" and "repetition" to subvert the narrative (pp. 11-30). She implores women to turn this weapon of oppression into instrument of critique. To resist patriarchal system, women need to imitate them strategically, using irony, metaphor, exaggeration, and parody. Through repetition, she blocks the procedure of meaning making, refusing linearity and coherence, and creating semantic slippage that allows feminine subjectivity to emerge in the gaps. Unlike traditional Western writing, which values linear progression, clarity, and closure, Irigaray uses repetition to reflect fluid, cyclical, embodied, and relational modes of expression, qualities she associates with the feminine: "To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it" (p. 76).

The strategy of mimesis that Irigaray proposes is not simple imitation but rather a form of critical performance. By "playing with mimesis" (p. 76) women engage in what might be called strategic essentialism, temporarily adopting the very stereotypes imposed upon them but doing so with ironic excess that reveals their constructed nature. Irigaray focuses specifically on how women can use mimicry to expose and dismantle phallogocentric discourse from within. The act of mimesis becomes a form of feminist guerrilla

warfare, operating within the master's house while undermining its foundations. Through repetition, women can jam the theoretical machinery of patriarchy, creating glitches and gaps in meaning that open space for alternative forms of subjectivity. Unlike classical meaning of *mimesis*, she redefines it as a feminist strategy, where women imitate the way, they are represented or portrayed in male-dominated discourse, by doing so, they can expose and disrupt those representations. It is not passive copying, rather it is critical mimicry. She advocates that when a woman, "plays with mimesis," she is engaging with the very language and ideas that have historically exploited her, but she does so consciously, creatively and, in a feminine way. She does not accept those representations as truth. She mimics them in exaggerated or ironic ways to reveal their limitations and contradictions. This tactic helps women reclaim control over their representation, showing that they are not just passive objects of male discourse but active participants who can reshape meaning.

Repetition, as a stylistic and conceptual strategy, functions differently in feminine writing than in traditional masculine discourse. In linear, teleological narratives, repetition typically serves to emphasize a point or create rhetorical force. In *parler femme*, however, repetition enacts a different temporal and spatial logic—one that is cyclical, spiraling, and open-ended. This mode of repetition mirrors women's bodily experiences: menstruation, pregnancy, lactation, and other cyclical processes that resist the forward march of masculine time. Kristeva's concept of "Women's Time" (1981) explores this alternative temporality, suggesting that women inhabit both cyclical time (repetition, eternal recurrence) and monumental time (timelessness, eternity), in contrast to the linear, historical time of masculine culture (pp. 13-35). Ernaux's and Duras's use of repetition can be understood within this framework, their texts circle back on themselves, returning obsessively to the same scenes, memories, and traumas, refusing the closure and resolution demanded by conventional narrative structure.

Irigaray's metaphor of "two lips" (p. 73) is a reimagining of female sexuality that challenges the dominant, male-centered views found in Western psychoanalysis and philosophy. She writes, "She touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation... her pleasure is not separable from her body" (p. 25). She is offering a radically different understanding of feminine desire, one that is self-referential, non-hierarchical, and embodied. The metaphor of "two lips" refers to the labia, but Irigaray uses it symbolically to represent a feminine mode of being and relating. Unlike the phallic model of sexuality, which is based on penetration, linearity, and separation, Irigaray's "two lips" suggest touching without division. The lips touch each other, not in opposition, but in continuous contact. This reflects a form of pleasure that is internal, relational, and non-dualistic. The woman's pleasure does not require an external object or mediation (such as the male body or phallic symbol). It is self-contained and self-generating. The image resists binary logic (male/female, active/passive) and embraces plurality and movement, which Irigaray associates with feminine subjectivity. Repetition mirrors bodily cycles breathing, menstruation, intimacy, and becomes a way to "write the body" (1976, p. 77), a central idea in feminist theory. Irigaray's metaphor of two lips is about being whole in oneself, experiencing pleasure that is intimate, cyclical, and inseparable from the body. She uses this image to propose a feminine way of thinking and writing, one that values connection, fluidity, and self-expression.

The "two lips" metaphor also connects to Irigaray's broader critique of Western philosophy's obsession with the One, the unified, and the identical. Patriarchal thought, from Plato through Hegel to Lacan, has privileged unity, identity, and sameness as philosophical ideals. Woman, in this system, appears as lack or negation—she is not-One, not-unified, not-identical to herself. Irigaray's "two lips" transforms this apparent deficit into a positive model of subjectivity. If woman is "not one," she is necessarily multiple, plural, in constant relation to herself. This multiplicity is not fragmentation or incompleteness but rather a different model of wholeness, one based on relation rather than self-identity. The lips are always already in contact with each other, creating a form of autoeroticism that requires no external object. This challenges Freud's and Lacan's insistence that desire is fundamentally directed toward an external object (phallus as transcendental signifier). For Irigaray, feminine desire and subjectivity precede and exceed the phallic economy, existing in a realm of self-touching, self-relating multiplicity.

Irigaray proposes a new mode of language through mimesis and repetition, that portrays female sexuality as multiple, fluid, poetic, and irreducible to a singular, linear, phallocentric model of desire: "Her language, hers alone, is never one. It is not reducible to simple linearity, to univocity, to the logic of identity" (p. 104), implying that she refuses to write "like a man" (p. 76), advocating for a new form of expression, *parler femme* (speaking women) (p. 77), which would allow women to articulate their desires, experiences, and

identities in ways that subvert the masculine paradigms. Irigaray posits that sexuality is innate to women, is culturally produced and shaped to silence female erotic desires. *Parler femme* is about creating a new symbolic order that is open-ended and multifaceted, reflecting the complexity and diversity of the female experience. Irigaray argues that women can reclaim their bodies, desires, and subjectivities by challenging the patriarchal structures.

Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic *chora* (1985) provides crucial theoretical support for Irigaray's vision of *parler femme*. Kristeva defines the *chora* as a pre-linguistic space of drives, rhythms, sounds, and energies connected to the maternal body. The *chora*, borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus*, represents a receptive, nurturing space that precedes and undergirds symbolic language. Kristeva writes, "The *chora* is a nonexpressive totality... The semiotic *chora* precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality" (p. 93). This semiotic realm, associated with the maternal and the corporeal, continuously disrupts the symbolic order through poetic language, breaking through in moments of rhythmic intensity, musicality, and semantic slippage. For Kristeva, avant-garde writers like Mallarmé and Lautréamont harness the power of the semiotic to disrupt symbolic structures. Similarly, Ernaux and Duras, through their innovative narrative techniques, allow the semiotic to surface—creating texts that are rhythmic, repetitive, fragmented, and emotionally charged. The semiotic *chora* and *parler femme* work in tandem: the *chora* represents the pre-symbolic reservoir of feminine energy and affect, while *parler femme* provides the linguistic strategies through which this energy can be expressed within (and against) the symbolic order.

Kristeva's semiotic *chora* and Irigaray's *parler femme*, both emphasize the importance of the maternal and the feminine body as sources of meaning. They believe that this *chora* remains underneath, hidden within us, and it never disappears with maturity. The semiotic *chora* and *parler femme* are not identical, but complementary. According to Kristeva, *chora* is a space where raw, unfiltered feminine energy is stored, and it is source from where expressions arise and *parler femme* provides voice and language to those emotions. It transforms emotions into solid language or a feminine symbolic order that reflects women's voice, meaning, experiences, and subjectivity. Through *parler femme*, Irigaray advocates for a distinct style of writing that would cater to ambiguous, myriad rhythms of the female body, creating a space where unadulterated emotions, virgin truths, infinite meanings, and lived experiences can be expressed.

She speaks about a language of self-affection and mutual recognition, where desire is not subordinated to reproduction or male conquest: "Let's be neither husband nor wife, do without the family, without roles, functions, and their laws of reproduction" (p. 73), showing how female sexuality has been historically tied to reproduction. She rejects the social roles that define women through reproduction and marriage and calls for relationships that are free from institutional constraints. Desire should not be tied to reproduction or societal expectations, it can exist for its own sake, as a form of connection and recognition. She argues that this reduces women to biological functions and ignores their capacity for autonomous desire, creativity, and subjectivity. For her, love and connection are not about producing children or fulfilling social roles but about mutual recognition, bodily presence, and emotional depth.

Her writing is fragmented, elliptical, and poetic, which she calls *parler femme* – a feminine mode of speech that privileges rhythm, touch, and relationality over logic and domination. She writes:

"Woman's autoeroticism is very different from man's. Man needs an instrument: woman does not. She touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity, her pleasure comes from within"(p. 10).

She uses repetition and elliptical sentences to summon bodily experiences rather than explaining them analytically. She contrasts the male and female experiences of sexual pleasures and opines that male sexuality mostly depends on external factors, which she terms "instruments" to achieve pleasure. She denies female sexuality as primarily self-contained and internally produced unlike male pleasure. She challenges the conventional notion of binary sexual roles of "active" male and "passive" female that predominantly dictates the Western discourse. For Irigaray, pleasure does not arise from such artificial distinctions; it is a continuous, internal sensation that generates such pleasure.

Ernaux and Duras: Two Approaches to *Parler Femme*

Ernaux and Duras deploy innovative narrative strategies and linguistic experimentation that reflect Irigaray's *parler femme*. They stand as two radically distinct yet complementary figures in French literature.

Each has reshaped the boundaries of autobiographical expression. Ernaux writes with a sociological lens, using her signature *criture plate*, a flat, neutral prose stripped of metaphor and embellishment to document personal experiences as reflections of collective realities. Her works explore themes of class mobility, memory, gender, and shame, drawing on Barthes's and Bourdieu's theories to explore how social structures shape individual lives. Her refusal of fiction in favor of autosociobiography marks her commitment to truth-telling and political clarity. Duras's *écriture courante* embraced a radically different aesthetic. Her writing is elliptical, poetic, and emotionally charged, blurring the line between fiction and autobiography. In works, she explores desire, trauma, colonialism, and silence through fragmented narratives and lyrical repetition. Her style resists linear storytelling, favoring ambiguity and introspection. Influenced by psychoanalysis and the *nouveau roman* movement (Vircondelet, 1994, pp. 210-220), Duras's prose evokes the ineffable, what cannot be said directly but often expressed through gaps, pauses, and absence.

Irigaray insists on a language "by women, of women, for women," (76). This finds resonances in Ernaux's *criture plate* and Duras's *écriture courante*. *criture plate* or "flat writing" is a radical, stylistic, and political gesture that favours a stark, unembellished prose aligned with autobiographical truths. Ernaux purposefully avoids metaphor, lyrical flourish, and narrative suspense, embracing a neutral, almost reportorial tone that mirrors the lived realities of working-class life. She describes her writing as "a writing without affectation... a writing made of facts" and explains, "a knife... a writing that strips the flesh off of things" (Knodell, 2022). She believes in a work that is non-ornate, unromanticised, and piercingly honest. Ernaux rejects ornate or stylized sentences, flowery words, and complex syntax and opts for a minimalist, unadorned, and direct writing style that foregrounds the sociohistorical conditions of female desire.

Duras's *écriture courante* is a flowing, instinctive way of writing, which is natural and unforced, that allows the unconscious and imagination to surface. It is not organised, structured, and polished. It comes from a deep, unconscious place, where Duras lets go of control spontaneously, and allows the rhythm, imagery, and feeling to guide her words. She uses 'water' imagery like rivers and tides to describe this process, suggesting that writing should move and shift like waves, unpredictable and alive. *écriture courante* is deeply personal and poetic, and it reflects Duras's belief that writing should be a form of emotional release, not just a literary craft. She claims that her "writing is the unknown," and elaborates that "there is a madness of writing that is within oneself, a furious madness to write" (p. 23). Duras believes that writing begins in mystery, and she does not know what she will write until it happens. It is a spontaneous, unconscious flow, something that is uncontrollable and deeply internal. This madness is not pathological, its creative, essential, urgent, and tied to emotional truth. Through *écriture courante*, Duras gives voice to the unspeakable desire, trauma, and silence in a way that resonates with Irigaray's vision of a liberated, embodied language.

Ernaux's *criture Plate*: Sociological Precision and Feminist Resistance

Ernaux captures the complexities of women's lives with a stark realism that is unflinching and unsentimental. *criture plate* is the influence of Roland Barthes's zero-degree writing (1953) and Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* (1977). Stolz interprets Ernaux's style as "neutral writing" that rejects literary ornaments in favor of sociological inquiry and political engagement. She further emphasizes, Ernaux's use of "pass compose" (conversational language) (pp. 9-10) instead of "pass simple" (formal narration) (pp. 9-10) a deliberate grammatical choice to distance her work from traditional literary narration and one that adheres with everyday French (Stolz, 2009). Ernaux's refusal to use metaphor and embellishing is not a lack of style but a purposeful rhetorical strategy that prominently identifies the social realities she seeks to represent (Stolz). According to Stolz, this style creates a "sociologico- rhetorical" framework, where this form of writing does justice to the dignity of its subject matter. In *A Man's Place* (1986), Ernaux writes:

"To account for a life subjected to necessity, I do not have the right to take the side of art first, nor to try to make something 'exciting' or 'moving'. [...] No poetry of memory, no jubilant derision" (p. 96).

This passage crystallizes Ernaux's ethical and aesthetic stance. The phrase "a life subjected to necessity" invokes Bourdieu's concept of the "taste of necessity," the way in which working-class individuals' choices are constrained by material circumstances, creating what appears as a particular aesthetic lifestyle but is in fact the mark of deprivation. Ernaux recognizes that to aestheticize her father's life, to make it "exciting" or "moving" through literary devices would be a form of betrayal, a bourgeois appropriation of working-class experience. Her refusal of "poetry of memory" and "jubilant derision" rejects both the sentimental and the satirical modes through which middle-class writers have traditionally represented the working class. This

excerpt explains Ernaux's plain and simple writing style, the one she used to write letters to her parents, conveying only factual information. She believes that literary embellishments would distance the reality of the working-class that she aims to represent. In an interview, she states, "Flat writing comes naturally to me" (Knodell, 2022). By refusing metaphor, suspense, and lyrical flourish, imparting a documentary voice, one that highlights clarity, honesty, neutrality, and emotional restraint on personal and collective experiences. Ernaux's refusal to metaphor and flourish is a way to avoid aestheticizing or distorting the lived experiences of the working class, "Any literary writing that would betray the dominated class to which her father belonged" (Knodell, 2022). This approach allows her to construct what she calls "autosociobiography" blending personal memory with collective history in a way that is both intimate and socially grounded.

Unlike conventional memoir, which typically focuses on the uniqueness of individual experience, autosociobiography insists on the representative nature of personal memory. Ernaux writes not just about herself but through herself, using her particular life trajectory to illuminate the collective experience of her generation, her class, and her gender. This methodology resonates with what sociologists call "embodied memory," the way social history is inscribed in and carried by individual bodies. Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) (1989, pp. 7-23) is relevant here: Ernaux's body, her family home, her parents' café-grocery become repositories of collective working-class memory in post-war France. Her flat style, by refusing individual stylistic flourishes, paradoxically makes the social more visible, the text becomes transparent to the historical forces that shape it.

criture plate is also a form of autosociobiography, a hybrid genre that Ernaux developed by coalescing autobiography with sociological inquiry. The writing is austere, documentary-like, using the neutral "on" or the past infinitive, distancing the self to highlight the collective structures. She challenges the expressive individualism by refusing the lyrical "I." In most autobiographies, "I" represents an expressive, emotional narrator who talks about personal experiences with introspective flourish. Scholars term this form of writing "expressive individualism" (Fluck, 2002), a cultural and literary tradition to celebrate the inner life of the individual. Ernaux subverts this narrative convention by embracing documentarylike tone, minimal emotional expression, and frequent use of impersonal pronoun "on" (meaning "one," "he," "she" and "we" in French). In *The Years*, Ernaux writes, "One believed that everything was going to change"(p. 112). In this sentence, the word "one" universalizes the experience, making it a collective consciousness rather than an individual experience. Ernaux's use of the impersonal pronoun "on" creates what narratologists call a "collective focalizer," a narrative perspective that sees through multiple eyes simultaneously. This technique has profound implications for feminist narratology. Traditionally, narrative authority has been associated with a strong, individualized narrative voice— typically male. By dispersing narrative agency across a collective "we"

or impersonal "one," Ernaux challenges the very notion of narrative authority as it has been conventionally understood. Her narrative voice is simultaneously intimate and distant, personal and collective, specific and universal. This paradoxical quality allows her to speak about deeply private experiences (abortion, sexual desire, class shame) in ways that resonate as collective testimony.

Similarly, she uses third-person "elle" (she) to create a distance between the narrator and the event: "She was ashamed of her parents" (p. 43). Ernaux presents herself as a social subject, rather than the lyrical "I," who is shaped by class, gender, society, and history. The traditional autobiographical "I" represents masculine notion of autonomy, power, and self-mastery (Johnson, 1999), but Ernaux's impersonal style disrupts these norms of singular identity. Her narrator is shaped by class, gender, education, and history. *criture plate* and autosociobiography together form a radical literary practice, one where the writing is stripped-down, deeply layered, combining personal history with sociological insight to unravel the events that govern everyday life. Her refusal of the lyrical "I" is not a loss of voice, but a transformation of voice. A voice that not just speaks for herself, but through herself giving power and strength to articulate collective concerns, experiences and emotions.

Duras was actively involved in Nouveau Roman Movement (1950s -- 1960s) along with Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute, which challenged traditional novelistic conventions and rejected linear narratives and established plot. They sought to break free from traditional storytelling techniques, especially the use of linear plots, elaborate character development, omniscient narrator, and evident closure. The Nouveau

Roman authors emphasized for fragmented narratives, minimal characterization, open endings, and focused more on internal consciousness and the social atmosphere. Duras's *Moderato Cantabile* (1960), is a striking representation of her Nouveau Roman spirit, where traditional narrative structure is dismissed to explore multiplicity of human experience. The novel revolves around a series of repetitive and enigmatic conversation between Anne Desbaresdes, a bourgeois woman, and Chauvin, a working-class man, who meet regularly at a café after witnessing a murder. Their dialogues do not strive to resolve the murder, rather endeavours to create a space of emotional outlets, silent longing, and internal disquiet. Chauvin's reiteration "I told you last time, I told you the time before that, I told you a hundred times, are you sure you don't know?" (p. 34), uses the word "time" repeatedly to show its significance in characters' lives. Duras also uses silences and pauses as expressive tools to say unspoken words. Her prose focuses on atmosphere, rhythm, and psychological nuances. Chauvin says, "Anne Desbaresdes attempts an apologetic smile for having had no choice, but she is drunk and her face takes on the shameless expression of confession" (p. 47), which captures the silence, though betrays Anne's innermost feelings through unsaid words. Duras cultivates a poetics of absence and negation, where the unsaid becomes a locus of meaning.

In *The Lover*, Duras opens the text with the haunting line, "Very early in my life it was too late" (p. 01). This elliptical sentence sets the tone that the narrative is deeply introspective and emotionally charged. The story of her affair with an affluent married Chinese man much older than her, unfurls through fragmented sentences, where gaps and silences emphasize the contradictions of desire and shame. In *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Duras's traumatic memories with the man are expressed thus: "I meet you. I remember you. Who are you? You're destroying me. You're good for me" (p. 07). These opening lines from *The Lover* and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* encapsulate Duras's paradoxical relationship to temporality and identity. "Very early in my life it was too late" suggests that traumatic experience creates a permanent rupture in the subject's relationship to time, the past contaminates the present and future, making linear progression impossible. For Duras, colonial childhood, first sexual experience, war, and loss create temporal dislocations that her fragmented narratives enact. The repetitive, incantatory dialogue from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*—"I meet you. I remember you," blurs the boundaries between meeting and remembering, between this man and that man, between Hiroshima and Nevers. This temporal and spatial collapse reflects what trauma theorists call "intrusive memory," the way traumatic experience returns, unbidden, collapsing past and present.

Ernaux explained how her writing functions "on the knife edge of public and private life," by exhibiting the experiences that frequently relegated women to silences with clinical precision and emotional restraint (2022). This captures the balance between her deeply personal experience and broader collective realities. She challenges this division between "private" and "public" by revealing how her intimate moments of love, loss, shame, desire, and memory are shaped by cultural norms, social structures, and historical events. Ernaux emphasized that her autobiographical narratives are not just simple private confessions, but are social records of everything she witnessed, endured and encountered. She reveals her intimate, painful experiences about abortion, desires, shame, sexuality, illness, family conflicts, and death candidly. She eschews sentimentality in expressing her emotions with unfiltered truth and detached clarity. In *Happening* (2000), Ernaux recounts her illegal abortion of 1963 with unrelenting honesty, "I bled" (p. 52). This short, declarative sentence highlights her physical pain and trauma without sensationalizing the experience. In *A Woman's Story*, through her dispassionate statement post her mother's death, she refuses to romanticize her grief: "I have nothing to say about her death" (p. 96). The Swedish Academy acknowledges her writing for "the courage and clinical acuity with which she uncovers the roots, estrangements, and collective restraints of personal memory" (2022). She describes her writing as "The style must be neutral, like a pane of glass. One must see through it" (p. 45) This reflects her commitment to a transparent, unadorned style.

Ernaux's exploration of shame represents one of her most significant contributions to feminist literature and theory. In her book *Shame* (2002), she excavates the origins of her experience of shame, tracing it back to a single traumatic incident in her childhood when her father threatened to kill her mother: "My father wanted to kill my mother one Sunday in June" (p. 46) However, this event becomes a lens through which she examines the pervasive, structural shame of class difference. Shame, for Ernaux, is not merely a private psychological state but a social phenomenon—what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence" internalized as personal inadequacy. She writes, "I was ashamed of her loud voice, her way of speaking, her clothes" (p. 33). This shame is not simply about her mother's individual failings but about the mother's working-class habitus—her bodily dispositions, linguistic patterns, and cultural tastes, which mark her as inferior within bourgeois

frameworks of value. Ernaux's examination of shame thus becomes a critique of class society itself, revealing how inequality is maintained not just through economic exploitation but through the psychological internalization of social hierarchies. The concept of "class transgression" or "*transfuge de classe*" is central to understanding Ernaux's entire literary project. As someone who left her working-class origins through education, becoming a teacher and eventually a celebrated author, Ernaux inhabits what she describes as an impossible position— belonging fully to neither her class of origin nor her class of destination. This liminal position generates the particular quality of her gaze: intimate enough to understand working-class life from within, yet distant enough to analyze it sociologically and further generates the distinctive voice of her writing: simultaneously insider and outsider, witness and participant, analyst and subject.

Duras's *Écriture Courante*: Colonial perspective and Disembodiment

Hélène Cixous famously celebrated Duras as a central figure of *écriture féminine*, especially in her essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, where she referred to her as "the grand dame of *écriture féminine*" (p. 880), emphasizing her embodied prose, affective language, and non-linear structure. In *The Lover*, Duras recounts a teenage love affair in colonial Vietnam with striking intimacy. The author's physical presence, her body, her clothing, her gaze; is central to the narrative. The writing does not merely describe events; it feels them: "I'm fifteen and a half. Crossing the river. The image lasts a few seconds. I'm fifteen and a half, there are no seasons in that part of the world. We're in the long hot dry season. The image lasts all the way across" (p. 08). Here, the narrator's physical presence, her age, the heat, the movement across the river; is foregrounded. It is not just about crossing a river, it is about crossing into adulthood, into desire, into memory. The simplicity of the language mirrors the clarity and weight of the moment. In *The War: A Memoir* (1986), Duras writes about waiting for her husband's return from a Nazi concentration camp. The text is raw and painful, filled with silence and repetition. Rather than offering a clear narrative, Duras immerses the reader in the emotional atmosphere of trauma and uncertainty: "I was afraid of his return. I was afraid he wouldn't return. I was afraid of suffering less. I write. I do nothing else. I don't know what I'm writing. I'm writing that I don't know anything anymore" (p. 05). The words, "afraid," "return," and "write," are repeated as a direct reflection of psychological collapse and inner turmoil. It becomes a raw expression of grief and anticipation. Duras's writing is non-linear and does not follow a typical beginning-middle-end structure. Her narratives move in circles, jump between time periods, or leave gaps that the reader must fill. In *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, the dialogue between the two main characters shifts fluidly between past and present, personal and historical trauma. The structure mirrors the disorientation of love and loss, refusing to offer closure or clarity. Duras's fragmented, repetitive style enacts this traumatic temporality, her texts return obsessively to the same scenes, the same words, the same images, unable to achieve narrative mastery or closure. The repetition in her writing is not ornamental but structural, reflecting the way traumatic memory operates. Her texts become what Dominick LaCapra calls "writing trauma" (2001), texts that perform trauma rather than simply representing it. The reader is not given a coherent narrative about trauma but is made to experience its disorienting, fragmentary quality.

Françoise Susini-Anastopoulos described Duras's writing style as *écriture fragmentaire* (fragmentary writing) (1997) in her book, because of her tendency to break narrative continuity, favoring disjointed scenes, abrupt transitions, and elliptical phrasing. Guylaine Massoutre, in her essay *Digging to the Bone: The Minimalism of Marguerite Duras* (2007), recognized Duras's writing as *écriture minimaliste*. She defined Duras's prose as a "literature of urgency," marked by pared-down syntax, elliptical phrasing, and a refusal of narrative excess. The structure is simple, yet the emotional weight is profound. The brevity and repetition evoke memory as a sensory flash rather than a detailed recollection. Massoutre's phrase "digging to the bone" captures how Duras removes all literary ornamentation to expose raw feeling. The documentary podcast "Marguerite Duras (1914-1996): Life as Writing Material" (2009), from France Culture, also describes her style as *minimaliste singulier* (singular minimalist or distinctive minimalist) emphasizing how she broke away from traditional novelistic codes to create a grammar of raw enunciation. She breaks away from traditional novelistic codes, using silence, repetition, and poetic rhythm to convey emotion. "Writing also means not speaking. Keeping silent. Screaming without sound" (p. 09). This reflects her prose is fragmented, sparse, and emotionally raw. This captures the deep emotional and existential solitude that she associates with the act of writing. Duras is saying that writing is not just about putting words on a page; it's a way of

expressing things that are too painful, too complex, or too intimate to be spoken aloud. When she says “not speaking,” she’s pointing to the silence that surrounds writing, the isolation of the writer, the quiet space needed to confront inner truths. “Keeping silent” suggests restraint, the decision to hold back from everyday conversation to reach something deeper. “Screaming without sound” evokes the intensity of emotion that writing can carry grief, love, rage; all poured into words, but without the noise of speech.

Duras’s relationship to French colonialism represents a complex and evolving engagement that spans her entire career. Born in French Indochina in 1914, she spent her formative years in Vietnam before leaving for France at eighteen, never to return. Her “Indochinese cycle,” comprising *The Sea Wall* (1952), *The Lover*, and *The North China Lover* (1992)—repeatedly returns to this colonial childhood, each iteration offering a different perspective on colonial experience. As Julia Waters notes in her study *Duras and Indochina* (2006), these texts reveal “the postcolonial subject’s ambivalent relationship to the site of colonial trauma.” Duras occupies a liminal position within colonial society, a poor white colonist, member of the *petits blancs* who lacks the economic and social capital of the colonial elite. Her mother’s failed attempt to farmland in Cambodia, chronicled in *The Sea Wall*, becomes a metaphor for the broader failures of the colonial project. Yet Duras’s critique of colonialism remains indirect, filtered through the lens of personal memory and desire rather than explicit political analysis.

In *The Lover*, the colonial setting is inseparable from the narrator’s sexual awakening. Her affair with the wealthy Chinese man transgresses both racial and age boundaries, embodying the forbidden desire that structures colonial relations. The Chinese lover occupies an ambiguous position in the colonial hierarchy—wealthy and educated, yet racially marked as Other, excluded from full participation in white colonial society. Their relationship, conducted in secret and shame, becomes a microcosm of colonial power dynamics: exploitation and desire, domination and subjection become inextricably intertwined. Duras’s prose style in *The Lover*—fragmented, elliptical, moving associatively between past and present, mirrors the way colonial memory functions: not as linear history but as a series of traumatic traces, sensory impressions, and affective intensities. The famous scene of crossing the Mekong River, with the girl in her man’s fedora and silk dress, becomes an icon of colonial transgression. The crossing represents not just a geographic traversal but a crossing of boundaries: childhood to adulthood, innocence to experience, proper colonial femininity to sexual agency.

In *The Lover*, Duras tells the story in a shifting voice, oscillating between the first person (“I”) and the third person (“she”), collapsing time, and blurring identities. This creates a sense of emotional distance and confusion, reflecting how memory and identity are unstable. The author says, “Very early in my life it was too late” (p. 01). This line collapses time, it suggests that trauma and desire have shaped her so deeply that her life feels already determined. The story is not told in a straight line. Instead, it jumps between past and present, between moments of intimacy and reflections on colonialism, family, and shame. Ehsan Azari Stanizai notes, Duras’s prose enacts “a rhizomatic desire that traverses multiple bodies,” where feminine *jouissance* erupts through syntax, ellipses, and repetition (2024). Literary critic Stanizai calls this “rhizomatic desire,” because it spreads in unpredictable ways, like roots underground. The narrator’s body becomes a site of both pleasure and pain, and her voice reflects that it trembles, fragments, and sometimes disappears. In *The Malady of Death* (1986), Duras stages desire as death-drive, where the female body is both object and abyss, and the male narrator’s failure to “know” her becomes a metaphor for the limits of masculine epistemology. A man hires a woman to stay with him by the sea so he can learn how to love. But he fails. The woman tells him, “You are not capable of loving. That’s your malady. That’s the malady of death” (p. 48). The man’s inability to feel love is described as a kind of spiritual death. The woman is both present and unreachable, he can touch her body, but he can neither touch her soul nor understand her. She becomes an abyss, a mystery he cannot solve. Duras writes the man’s story in the second person (“you”), which makes the reader feel his confusion and detachment. This reflects Irigaray’s critique of masculine epistemology, the belief that everything can be known, controlled, or explained. She argues that men often try to “know” women through logic and reason, but this approach fails to grasp the depth of feminine experience. In *The Malady of Death*, the man’s failure to understand the woman becomes a metaphor for this limit. He wants to possess her, but she remains unknowable. Both authors refuse the linearity of masculine narrative logic, crafting texts that bleed, break, and whisper; where shame is not silenced but made legible through form, and love is not idealized but scrutinized as a site of power, loss, and longing. This further highlights Irigaray’s vision of feminine writing, where women need to write in ways that reflect their own bodies and experiences, not just follow the

rules set by men. Their texts do exactly that. They refuse linearity, embrace fragmentation, and make space for silence, repetition, and emotion. They show that love and desire are complex, painful, and deeply tied to identity.

In *The Years*, Ernaux offers a powerful, quiet reflection on how history shapes personal memory through her flat style of writing which is stripped of decoration, emotion, and metaphor. This “flat” writing style is marked by short sentences, minimal adjectives, and a refusal to dramatize. She avoids literary flourishes and uses plain, factual language. This is especially evident in *The Years*, where she writes, “She will have lived through the war without remembering it” (p. 23). This sentence is simple, almost cold, but it carries deep meaning. Ernaux is describing how the narrator, who represents both herself and a generation of French women who experienced World War II not through heroic action, but through silence, absence, and daily survival. The war is not dramatized or painted in heroic color. It is a shadow in the background, shaping lives quietly and painfully. She often uses the third person “she” or the impersonal “one” instead of “I.” This creates distance between the narrator and the events but also allows her to speak for many women. For instance, “One learned to keep quiet, to not ask questions” (p. 35). This sentence does not name anyone. It is about a shared experience, how women during and after the war were taught to be silent, obedient, and invisible. The use of “one” turns personal trauma into collective memory. This linguistic simplicity allows her to speak from a collective voice, making space for shared experiences, especially those of women. Irigaray’s *parler femme* encourages writing that reflects feminine rhythms like cyclical, nonlinear, and bodily. Ernaux’s writing often moves between past and present, between personal and public, without any clear transitions. In *The Years*, she writes: “Time passed. She grew up. The war was over. She did not know what it meant” (p. 30). This fragmented structure mirrors how memory works, especially for women whose experiences are often excluded from official historical records. The war is not a series of battles or political events; it is something felt in the home, in hunger, in fear, and in silence.

The Years represents Ernaux’s most ambitious attempt to create what she calls “a collective autobiography.” The book spans the period from 1941 to 2006, encompassing the narrator’s entire lifetime while simultaneously documenting the social, cultural, and political transformations of postwar France. What makes *The Years* revolutionary is its systematic refusal of the singular “I.” Throughout the text, Ernaux deploys an arsenal of impersonal narrative strategies: the third person “she,” the collective “we,” the impersonal “on,” and even the second person “you.” This narrative dispersal creates what critics call a voice that is simultaneously singular and plural, individual and collective. The effect makes her experience more universally resonant. Her life becomes exemplary rather than exceptional, a life that can stand for an entire generation’s journey through history.

The structure of *The Years* is organized around photographs of the narrator at different life stages. These photographs function as points of affective intensity that pierce through historical distance. Ernaux writes,

“All the images will disappear” (opening line)—an assertion that places the entire text under the sign of mortality and loss. The urgency of her project stems from this awareness: if she does not write, these images, these memories, this entire world will vanish without trace. Yet paradoxically, she refuses to sentimentalize or dramatize. The photographs are described in neutral, documentary language: “The girl is standing in a garden. She is wearing...” (p. 07). This objectifying gaze toward her own image creates an uncanny effect. the author becomes a stranger to herself, viewing her past self with the clinical detachment of an anthropologist examining an alien culture. This technique allows Ernaux to see her younger self as historically situated subject rather than the center of an individualist narrative.

Her writing also makes shame visible. She writes about poverty, abortion, and sexual desire without apology. During the war, her family’s working-class status made her feel inferior. She recalls: “She was ashamed of her parents, of their clothes, their way of speaking” (p. 43). This shame is not dramatized; it is stated plainly. But the simplicity makes it more powerful. Ernaux does not try to explain or justify it; she just shows how shame lives in language, in silence, and in memory. Irigaray argued that feminine writing should make space for emotions that are often hidden like shame, longing, and bodily desire. Ernaux does this not by using emotional language, but by refusing to hide. Her flat style becomes a form of resistance. Her flat, factual style reflects a feminine way of writing that resists masculine narrative logic. She writes not to impress, but to witness. And in doing so, she gives voice to those who were never asked to speak.

"She kept everything. Bits of string, wrapping paper, buttons, empty boxes. She had lived through the war and rationing. Waste was a sin. She had a horror of waste, of throwing things away. She would reuse plastic bags, wash yogurt pots, and keep old clothes 'just in case'" (pp. 17-18).

Ernaux's unwillingness to delineate the war in its usual form is a blatant rejection to engage in the masculine code of history-as-heroism. Her mother's compulsive saving of everyday items is a clear manifestation of a deeply ingrained survival mentality. This raw portrayal of her belief that wastefulness is morally wrong illustrates their vulnerability, material deprivation, and simultaneously paints a gruesome picture of the war, discarding its artificial heroic grandeur. The mother's compulsive hoarding of small objects like string, wrapping paper, buttons; becomes a metonym for working-class experience of scarcity. These objects carry the trace of human labor and historical circumstance embedded in material things. The mother, shaped by war and deprivation, waste is not merely impractical but morally reprehensible. This habit persists long after material necessity has passed, inscribed in her body as *habitus*. We see the mother's compulsion not as individual pathology but as the somatic trace of historical trauma. The war is present not in dramatic scenes of bombardment or heroism but in these small, repeated gestures of saving and reusing.

In *War: A Memoir*, Duras recounts the period when she waited for her husband, Robert Antelme's return from the Nazi concentration camp. The narrative is not structured around events but around emotional states---waiting, fearing, and hoping. When he finally returns, the reunion is not romantic or redemptive. It is marked by alienation and emotional disorientation. Duras writes: "I was afraid of him. I didn't recognize him. I didn't know how to speak to him. He was no longer a man. He was a body, a ruin" (p. 23). This line reveals the emotional rupture between them. Antelme's suffering has rendered him almost unrecognizable, and Duras's response is not heroic but human, she was confused, overwhelmed, and silent. She does not attempt to restore the romantic bond but rather documents the emotional disintegration with brutal honesty. Her *écriture courante* allows her unconscious emotion and memory to surface, mirrors the psychological complexity of their relationship. Her sentences are often short, repetitive, and elliptical. She writes: "I am waiting. I am afraid. I am waiting" (p. 29). This repetition enacts the rhythm of trauma and emotional paralysis. The style avoids traditional narrative progression, dwells in the moment, and allows the reader to feel the weight of time and uncertainty that she felt. This repetition resists the rational, masculine logic of conventional storytelling. In *The Sea Wall*, Duras portrays her mother as a woman crushed by colonial injustice and economic failure. The mother's obsession with land and survival becomes a metaphor for emotional deprivation. Duras writes, "She had fought for that land like a madwoman, and it had betrayed her" (p. 07). This crude sentence captures the mother's external struggle and her internal collapse, where she is not idealized; but is shown as desperate, angry, and emotionally distant.

Ernaux's relationship with her mother is marked by deep ambivalence, a blend of love, resentment, admiration, and guilt. This complex dynamic is powerfully rendered through her signature style of *écriture plate*, which strips away the emotional embellishment to expose raw experience. In *Cleaned Out* (1974), she describes her mother as a constant observer, a figure who polices Ernaux's behavior, language, and sexuality. This maternal gaze becomes oppressive: "She watched me like a hawk, correcting every gesture, every word" (p. 20). Ernaux further recalls, "She had a way of saying nothing that made me feel everything was wrong" (p. 20). This surveillance is not just disciplinary; it is a form of emotional control. The mother's insistence on propriety and modesty reflects her working-class values, but for Ernaux, it becomes a source of shame and rebellion. The daughter's body, desires, and intellect are not her own, they are subject to maternal scrutiny. This passive-aggressive silence is a form of emotional violence. It creates an atmosphere of tension and guilt, where love is conditional and approval is rare. Ernaux's language captures this dynamic with precision; she does not embellish or interpret; she records. She is ashamed of her mother's working-class background, she feels alienated from her values and manners, especially after entering middle-class academic circles. She writes, "I was ashamed of her loud voice, her way of speaking, her clothes" (p. 33). This shows the mother's disgust towards Ernaux and her way of living. Ernaux does not idealize or sentimentalize her mother, rather showcases her flaws, mistakes and weaknesses.

The mother-daughter relationship in Ernaux's work can be read through the lens of Adrienne Rich's concept of *matrophobia* (1976), the fear of becoming one's mother combined with the fear of betraying her. She defines matrophobia as the daughter's fear of "becoming her mother," not simply in personality but in

being trapped in the same limited roles, silenced desires, and social subordination. For Ernaux, education provides the means of escape from her mother's fate—she will not spend her life behind the counter of a provincial café. Yet this escape is also a betrayal. The daughter's success is predicated on rejection of the mother's world, her language, her manners, her body. Ernaux writes, "My mother lived so that I would not become her" (p. 89). This sentence captures the painful truth that the mother's sacrifice enables the daughter's class mobility, yet this mobility requires the denial of everything the mother represents. The ambivalence Ernaux feels, love mixed with shame; gratitude mixed with resentment, stems from this impossible position.

A Comparative Analysis: *criture Plate* and *criture Courante* as Feminist Praxis

Despite their radically different stylistic approaches, Ernaux and Duras share a fundamental commitment to what might be called "writing the unwritable," giving form to experiences that patriarchal culture has rendered unspeakable or invisible. Both authors refuse the conventional narrative structures that would impose false coherence on fragmented experience. Both prioritize the body as a site of knowledge and memory. Both use repetition, not as rhetorical ornament, but as a structural principle that enacts the temporal logic of trauma and desire. Yet their differences are equally significant. Ernaux's *criture plate* aims at transparency; she wants the reader to see through the text to the social reality it documents. Duras's *criture courante*, by contrast, makes the text itself opaque, drawing attention to language as medium rather than transparent window. Ernaux privileges the collective and the sociological; Duras the individual and the psychoanalytic. Ernaux writes against forgetting, seeking to preserve memory of a disappearing world; Duras writes into forgetting, exploring the dissolution of memory and identity.

These differences reflect the authors' distinct social positions and historical contexts. Ernaux, born in

1940 into a working-class family, belongs to the generation that experienced postwar reconstruction and mass education. Her upward mobility through education shapes her entire literary project. She writes from the position of the *transfuge de classe*, the class traitor who has left her origins but cannot fully join the bourgeoisie. This liminal position generates her distinctive voice: neither fully insider nor outsider, she can analyze class structures with the precision of a sociologist while maintaining emotional connection to working-class experience. Duras, born in 1914 into a colonial family, belongs to an earlier generation shaped by colonialism, war, and the trauma of the Holocaust. Her work is marked by loss of colonial childhood, loss of husband to Nazi camps, loss of coherent narrative possibility in the wake of historical catastrophe. Where Ernaux seeks to preserve and document, Duras explores dissolution and disappearance.

Both authors deploy what might be called "minimalist maximalism," an apparently simple, pared down prose that nevertheless carries immense emotional and political weight. Ernaux's minimalism derives from her rejection of literary ornamentation; she writes, "I have no style" (2022), by which she means she refuses personal stylistic flourishes that would mark the text as belonging to the bourgeois literary tradition. Yet this refusal of style is itself a style, a working-class aesthetic that values plainness, directness, and utility over decoration. Duras's minimalism operates differently: she strips away narrative detail not to reveal social reality but to create a space for affect, for the unsayable. Her texts are filled with gaps, ellipses, and silences that the reader must inhabit. Both minimalist approaches refuse the explanatory, interpretive mode of traditional realism; both force the reader into active engagement rather than passive consumption.

Conclusion: *Parler Femme* and the Future of Feminist Writing

Ernaux and Duras, though stylistically distinct, reflect Irigaray's vision of *parler femme* that expresses female subjectivity outside the constraints of patriarchal language. Ernaux's writing style is marked by simplicity, clarity, and emotional restraint. Her use of *criture plate*, a flat, neutral prose rejects literary embellishment and metaphor, allowing her to present personal and collective experiences with directness and precision. She documents her life and the lives of others through a sociological lens, showing how class, gender, and memory shape identity. Her choice of verb tense, particularly the *pass composé* and *pass simple*, reinforces her commitment to realism and accessibility. Her writing does not seek to dominate or explain, but to witness and reveal, offering a form of expression that is both ethical and political. Duras also embraces a lyrical and fragmented style that aligning with Irigaray's idea of a fluid, nonlinear feminine language. She uses repetition, silence, and ambiguity to evoke the emotional and sensual dimensions of female experience. Her narratives often resist closure and coherence, allowing desire, trauma,

and memory to unfold in ways that defy rational structure. Duras's prose is deeply embodied, reflecting the rhythms of thought and feeling rather than the logic of plot. She creates a space where the unspeakable and the invisible aspects of women's lives can be felt and expressed. Together, they demonstrate two powerful ways of realizing Irigaray's vision of feminine expression. Ernaux's restrained realism and Duras's sensual experimentation both challenge the norms of patriarchal language and offer alternative modes of writing that center women's experiences.

In conclusion, Ernaux's *criture plate* and Duras's *criture courante* represent two powerful instantiations of Irigaray's *parler femme*, a feminine language that writes the body, disrupts linear masculine logic, embraces multiplicity and fluidity, and creates space for experiences patriarchal culture has rendered invisible or unspeakable. Through their divergent but complementary approaches, these writers demonstrate that there is no single form for feminist writing, no fixed style that can be prescribed. Rather, *parler femme* must be understood as an ongoing practice of linguistic resistance and experimentation, responsive to the specific historical and social conditions it seeks to represent and transform. Their work continues to inspire contemporary feminist writers seeking to develop new forms adequate to the complexity of women's experiences in the twenty-first century. As we face ongoing struggles for gender justice, their texts provide both theoretical resources and practical models for creating a language truly "by women, of women, and for women."

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Stylistic Subversion: critique Plate, critique Courante,
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