

Private Writing in French Female Film: A Case Study on *L'évènement*

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Abstract: *The film L'évènement is adapted from Anne Ernaux's autobiographical novel of the same name, which is a powerful and profound personal description of the traumatic events in her youth. As a model of women's private writing, Ernaux uses a first-person narrative to explore females' personal experiences and emotions in a very intimate and introspective way, and through her writing, Ernaux gives a nuanced and emotional account of the complexity of being a woman in the world. In order to maintain the privacy of the novel, the film creates an immersive visual representation of the physical and emotional experience through the cinematic language, focusing on the physical and emotional experience of the female protagonist. This approach provides a unique perspective on the protagonist's experience and allows the audience to participate in the emotional landscape of the story in a more intimate way. Film L'évènement provides valuable insights for the study of female personal writing of female motion picture, it gives a unique interpretation to Anne in the novel, the visual performance of female experience, and the exploration of the impact of traumatic events on women's life, which makes it an important female film in the study of complex female physical and emotional experience.*

Keywords: *L'évènement, Private writing, Female film, Anne Ernaux*

1. Introduction

The creation of Anne Ernaux's female novel is an in-depth analysis of her personal life, but at the same time, her narration also covers individuals and groups in the general social sense, so her works are no longer a daily narrative of a woman, but the silhouette of women of that era. She skillfully interweaves personal and social dimensions, and uses personal stories to understand and show the society on which she lives, and this technique expands the narrow vision of traditional female literature. Ernaux's works demonstrate the power of personal storytelling to shed light on broader social issues and themes. In particular, the author grasps the relationship between women's private stories and social and historical tension, so that the works have more rich aesthetic connotation and reflect the aesthetic value of female literature with the depth of realism. In other words, her works are no longer just a record of the lives of individual women, but a mirror of the time and society. As an autobiographical novel by Anne Ernaux, *L'évènement* depicts a traumatic experience in her youth, and at the same time reflects the survival picture of women in that era. In this work, Ernaux uses minimalist style and plain language to describe her own personal story, explores her experiences, thoughts and feelings with straightforward and sharp language, and melancholy introspection to reflect the personal sadness, pain and uneasiness in the context of the era. Anne Ernaux's work stands as a powerful testament to the importance of personal storytelling and the role of women in shaping society.

The personal record, plain and simple text narrative and emotional expression is often full of challenges in transferring into the motion picture while the film adaptation of *L'évènement* is a remarkable example of how a complex autobiographical novel can be transformed into an equally profound motion picture. The filmmakers have successfully captured the essence of the book's minimalist style while also creating a cinematic language that emphasizes the physical and emotional experience of the female protagonist. The film's visual language and aesthetic elements, such as the fragmented editing, shaking handheld shots, and close-up shots, provide an intimate and immersive perspective on the protagonist's experiences. The use of a 1.37:1 aspect ratio gives the film a nostalgic atmosphere, emphasizing the historical context of the story and creating a sense of distance from the present. The film not only depicts the protagonist's personal experience but also portrays the social and historical tensions of the time. Through the use of naturalistic sound and music, the film creates an

atmosphere of melancholy and loneliness, highlighting the emotional struggles of women in that era. The immersive and intimate experience provided by the film enables the audience to connect with the protagonist's experiences and emotions in a profound way, and provides insights into the complex physical and emotional experiences of women.

2. The female body and the female emotion under the lens

Unlike the usual 4:3 format, the film uses a 1.37:1 image format. With a more compact format, it allows the audience to experience the ordeal through the eyes of the heroine Anne. "With this 1.37:1 format, the more we push into the story, the more we get me to stand behind the heroin and push the door with her without knowing who is on the other side of the door and what would happen."^[1] Thus creating an immersive image that brings the audience closer to the protagonist and her personal emotional experience. Through close-up shots, extreme close-ups, and handheld camera follow-ups, the film reproduces the introspective style of female writing in the novel. The story of the protagonist is the flow of first-person memories and emotions. These shots focused on the protagonist present a strong sense of empathy and immediacy on the screen, allowing the audience to experience her life from the perspective of the protagonist. The film contains a large number of close-ups, close-range shots, and handheld follow-up shots, with a tight and narrow composition that focuses on the changes in Anne's facial expressions. In some scenes, the camera is completely occupied by her face, leaving almost no blank space in the composition, creating a sense of oppression for the audience and pulling them into the emotional world of the female protagonist. At the same time, a large number of close-ups obscure the surrounding environment, isolating the protagonist from the world around them and turning them into the sole object of the camera and the sole subject of the audience's attention. Inevitably, the audience shares this loneliness and despair with Anne. This cramped and isolated state also corresponds to Anne's helpless and lonely situation in the story.

Just as Anne Er's works fully utilize the first-person "I" autobiographical narrative form, the narrator and the protagonist are merged into one, directly viewing the world through the eyes and soul of a woman. Director Audrey Diwan brings the camera in close proximity to Anne, always shooting her from the side or behind, with the audience only seeing her back or profile. In this way, it completely avoids the dominance of male discourse, allowing for direct expression of the protagonist's true feelings and experiences, and directly displaying her own emotions and inner journey. Through the use of narrow framing and long handheld shots that always follow the protagonist Anne, the director successfully recreates the first-person, autobiographical style of the original novel. Meanwhile, Anne's visual center of gravity is always positioned in the three-quarters of the frame, creating a sense of following in her footsteps and accompanying her, which echoes the need for realism and immediacy required by the title *L'évènement*. Prior to Anne's successful abortion, in order to create a sense of oppression on the subject being filmed, the director opted for tight, enclosed shots. Her camera moves in close for close-ups and medium close-ups, significantly restricting her movements and leaving her powerless and vulnerable in the frame. Compared to open shots, this type of framing creates a stronger sense of oppression. A large-scale exposure of nudity appears in the subsequent communal shower scene, which is a common occurrence in university life. The camera once again abandons scrutiny of the female body, and the women's bodies in the frame are neither judged as beautiful or ugly, healthy or sickly, but are presented as ordinary, natural, and unique in their own way. The girls' faces always appear on screen simultaneously with their bodies and voices, reminding the audience that these are autonomous bodies.

Meanwhile, the movie extensively uses handheld photography, with the camera particularly focusing on Anne's back and profile. Walking alone on the beach, anxiously searching for an abortion clinic in the middle of the night, wandering hopelessly in the deserted alleys of Paris... the inevitable shakiness of the handheld camera focusing on Anne creates a sense of impending crisis throughout the film's atmosphere. The camera follows the character from behind, placing the audience in the position of a voyeur. With each time the protagonist walks alone, the accompanying camera brings the audience into an atmosphere of tense anxiety that cannot be comforted, allowing them to experience a series of emotional ups and downs with the character and together go through Anne's emotional changes from beginning to end. *L'évènement* tells the story of a young French female college student Anne who accidentally becomes pregnant during a period when abortion was illegal and would get crucial punishment in France in the 1960s. She is confused, in pain, afraid, and privately seeks a solution to get aborted. The focus on the subtle facial expressions of the female character and the use of handheld camera techniques create an atmosphere of anxiety and tension. The graphic depiction of the female body and the realistic portrayal of the abortion scene intensify the sense of empathy, immersion, and

agony for the audience during the movie-watching process. This visual impact brings about psychological pain, which is the most significant manifestation of the film's attempt to recreate its textual impact. In previous films, the female body and female physiological responses were often portrayed as a "sexual" symbol and spectacle, while the real physiological and emotional experiences of women in sex and reproduction were often overlooked. The intense abortion scene in the movie shocks and even disgusts and repels the audience, but this strong emotional feedback is precisely what the director wants the audience to understand about women's pain.

Like many other French films, *L'évènement* is also known for its explicit scenes, but the director consciously avoids unnecessary nudity to minimize the sexual exploitation of the female actors and to avoid any ambiguity in the depiction of those scenes. The pain of the abortion procedure is not conveyed through Anne's exposed body, but through sound—the cold metallic instruments and her painful moans. The film honestly and almost without omission records Anne's numerous attempts at a self-induced abortion. Unlike the everyday presentation of the body, these shots gradually shift from the overall body to specific body parts, creating a metaphorical exposure of Anne's alienation from her own body. Her body becomes an object that others—including Anne herself—can dispose of, control, manage, or even harm. The film's camera positions the audience as an intimate friend who can view life through Anne's eyes, allowing them to empathize with her experiences. In women's films, viewers often take on the role of a judge, eager to uncover the truth about the relationship between the film and real-world society, criticize and discuss it. Sometimes, female films require viewers to have a certain level of sensitivity and empathy to understand the director's intentions. Throughout the film, the unique and intimate camera angles, which are from Anne's subjective perspective, greatly amplify the emotional power of Anne's character and enable the audience to fully immerse themselves in the predicament of a pregnant student in the closed society of the 1960s. For a women's film, the greatest challenge may be how to overcome gender barriers and enable everyone to view their experiences from a female perspective, including the many harms they may encounter.

3. Female survival and psychological state depiction in the color structure

The movie uses the contrast between warm and cool color tones to shape the characters' personalities and states. Anne's clothing is mostly designed as different styles of blue short-sleeved shirts or blouses in most scenes. In Christian art, the Virgin Mary is always depicted wearing a blue cloak, which symbolizes purity and nobility, which is very consistent with Anne's innocent image in the eyes of others. However, the blue clothing becomes highly ironic when Anne seeks help from her one-night stand boyfriend Maxim. Anne wears a red dress, takes the train on a sunny day to Maxim's town. The boy was pleasantly surprised by Anne's arrival he accommodates Anne in his home. He takes the liberty to go through Anne's clothes and suggests that she wear a blue dress to meet his friends, seemingly wanting them to have a pure and conservative first impression of her. His happiness ends when Anne tells him her pregnancy.

When Anne first arrives at her one-night stand boyfriend Maxim's house, his room is all in blue (cool tones), with the only touch of warmth being Anne's red dress. At this time she holds the hope that the man can help her for the abortion, red is the color of blood but to Anne it is the color of hope. Maxim forcibly makes Anne wear cool-toned clothing without asking if she really likes it. His behavior symbolizes the patriarchal society's coercive domestication of women, which is a compulsory and oppressive confrontational subjugation. What is more dangerous is that this kind of coercive behavior, whether in the interaction of actors in the movie or in real life, is not a mandatory image with impact, but a natural and everyday behavior. On the surface, a man wants a woman's color as he sees fit but the connotation is that patriarchy society is constructing a woman's aesthetic, body, and routine.

Meanwhile, cool tones and dark hues appear frequently in Anne's subjective shots, particularly during her search for abortion methods, in hospitals and underground clinics. These colors, presented through Anne's perspective, allow the audience to immerse themselves in her life and deeply feel her fears. In the movie, the hospital is bright but chilling. The male doctor refuses Anne's request and sarcastically gives her a shot to preserve the fetus when he hears her say, "I want to be a mother, but not right now." On the other hand, the dimly lit and oppressive underground clinic, despite seeming dangerous, is where the seemingly indifferent female doctor performs the abortion for Anne. The bright and life-saving hospital, along with the respectable and authoritative male doctor, destroys a young woman's life in the name of protecting the unborn. In contrast, the dark yellow underground clinic and the seemingly indifferent female doctor save a young woman's life by performing the abortion. In the climactic and most chilling abortion scene towards the end of the film, Anne wears the red shirt she

wore when she met Maxim, creating a striking and harrowing contrast against the dimly lit dorm room and her face covered in cold sweat from pain. She risks her life to end an unborn life. As she passes out, she is wheeled onto an ambulance with warm white light constantly sweeping through the hospital corridors, as if foreshadowing her upcoming rebirth.

The color palette in *L'évènement* is understated and cool, except for the scenes in the underground abortion location. For most of the film, the emphasis is on soft, natural colors, reviving a nostalgic and unforgettable feeling of sorrow in Anne Ernaux's original novel and writing style. The film's cinematography uses warm, simple tones such as brown, green, and blue, adding a naturalistic and contemplative atmosphere to the film. At the same time, the film also employs a soft, hazy texture in some scenes, adding a nostalgic and melancholic mood to the film. This soft quality is particularly effective in the film's flashbacks and dreamlike shots, where viewers see that Anne's memories of the past are not only painful, but also imbued with a soft, warm, nostalgic, and calm tone. These montage-like campus scenes, such as fragmented conversations with friends, teachers' lectures in class, and Anne's personal walks and meditations, all have a sense of tranquility and beauty due to the soft lighting. Anne's life should have been bright and beautiful, but unexpected pregnancy is like her rare red dress, which turns her peaceful life into a bloody one. At the end of the film, after her miscarriage, Anne returns to the university classroom, and the camera shows her in close-up wearing a blue shirt, flipping through literature books. With the bright sunlight, Anne begins her new life.

4. Fragmentation and life-oriented female private writing

Annie Ernaux abandoned the narrative of the novel and established a literary writing paradigm known as "photo narration"^[2]. By describing photographs, she evokes her own related memories. Adopting photo narration aims to construct a writing style that expresses only the facts, without emotion, and is limited to self-description, thereby achieving a pursuit of reality. On the one hand, some scattered photo narratives construct a persistent but uncertain "self" over time; on the other hand, photo narration implies the characteristics of neutrality and objectivity. The film recreates this fragmented, photographic writing style through montage, with the plot consisting of multiple fragmented images that weaken the continuity of time and space through editing, guided by emotions and rapidly spliced together through short shots. The editing techniques reconstruct the time and space of the film. The jumps caused by the montage create temporal and spatial displacement, making the image more visually impactful but simultaneously omitting the causal logic between shots. This approach makes the audience an important part of the story's re-enactment, as they must constantly reshape the protagonist's experience during the film to understand the time and space depicted. This approach also brings a sense of immediacy and identification, allowing the audience to immerse themselves actively in Annie's life. Montage is an important component of the film's visual style, effectively strengthening the film's themes and emotions. This fragmented montage style intertwines the protagonist's memories and reflections with her present experiences, reflecting the protagonist's fragmented mental state when recalling painful experiences and the fragmented nature of memory and sadness.

The strength of the film is also reflected in the portrayal and viewing of the female body. This narrative about the body is primarily everyday, and the film aims to capture the protagonist's raw and emotional experiences in a realistic and intimate way. The film uses a naturalistic photography approach, capturing the actors' subtle expressions and emotions with close-up and mid-shot lenses. This naturalistic style is particularly effective in conveying the emotional impact of the film and attracting the audience into the protagonist's world. The film begins with Anne and her friends changing clothes in their dormitory. They adjust each other's bras, look at each other in the dressing mirror, and joke around. Mirrors and bare bodies can easily create a sexual atmosphere, but the film's images do not have any voyeuristic or gazing connotations. The camera is more like a member of the girls' dormitory, naturally flowing with the conversation between the girls. In literature, realism refers to the practice of reflecting life realistically and authentically, making the work rich in the atmosphere and flavor of life, as rich and complicated as life itself. This film starts with the female perspective of the plot and uses a realistic expression technique to capture fragments of the protagonist's life, expressing the real scenes of the real world to the audience and showing the unjust treatment that women suffer in real life.

The aspect ratio of 1.37:1 is designed to create suspense at the dramatic level, such as not directly shooting the abortion process. The images presented in the off-screen space are far more cruel than those presented directly. The audience's strong sense of tension towards the female protagonist does not come from the images themselves but from the other world the director creates in the off-screen

space. Most of the film's main scenes take place indoors, in places like campuses, bars, school bathhouses, underground clinics, hospitals, Anne's family grocery store, and the girls' dormitory. Most of these scenes are driven by images and dialogue, and this fragmented, realistic style allows the audience to enter the ordinary life of a female university student in 1960s France with a strong sense of empathy.

The film's realistic style is also reflected in its sound design. The use of environmental and classical music enhances the film's natural and intimate atmosphere. The film's use of silence also contributes to its realistic style, allowing the audience to fully immerse themselves in the protagonist's world and experience her emotions in a more profound and influential way. Through the handling of sound, the director creates a three-dimensional space that enhances the film's visual realism. This film has almost no Hollywood-style emotional music but instead uses the sounds of real scenes to recreate life on a French campus in the 1960s. The film's sound design and music play an important role in conveying the film's themes and emotions. The film's sound design is minimal, with a focus on environmental sounds, which enhances the film's naturalistic and intimate atmosphere. For example, the film uses bird sounds, rustling leaves, and footsteps to create a sense of place that immerses the audience in the protagonist's world. One of the most memorable aspects of the film's sound design is its use of silence. The film utilizes extended periods of silence to allow the audience to focus on the visual elements of the movie and fully immerse themselves in the world of the protagonist. In scenes where Anne walks alone and undergoes an abortion, the director emphasizes the sound of breathing, with many shots excluding all other sounds except for breathing. This allows the viewers to tangibly feel the pain, anxiety, and tension in the protagonist, and the hyper-realistic authenticity amplifies the fear of Anne's illegal abortion, enhancing the audience's experience of Anne's pain in a compelling and realistic manner.

5. Conclusion

Feminine private writing refers to a type of writing that has become an important genre in women's creative expression^[3]. Female authors explore their personal experiences and emotions in an intimate and introspective manner. This type of writing often involves themes of interpersonal relationships, sexuality, identity, and the body, and can take the form of diaries, memoirs, or essays. By exploring their own lives and experiences, female authors are able to reclaim their narratives, challenge mainstream cultural norms and expectations. A key characteristic of feminine private writing is its honesty and authenticity. These authors often depict a raw and unvarnished portrait of their lives, illustrating the complexity of being a woman in the world. This type of writing can also serve as a form of catharsis, allowing women to process their experiences and emotions in a safe and supportive space. In recent years, feminine private writing has gained recognition and popularity, as these authors continue to explore the complexities of the female experience, challenge traditional grand narratives, and help create a more inclusive and diverse literary and visual landscape.

Feminine private writing has also played a significant role in shaping contemporary female films. Many works have drawn inspiration from females' personal experiences and insights of female creators, creating a rich and diverse tapestry of narratives that explore the complexities of the female experience. Films and documentaries have sought to capture the power and intimacy of feminine private writing, bringing these stories to a wider audience and helping to foster greater empathy and understanding.

L'évènement is a story that is, as its name suggests, unfolding within the bodies and souls of women, a story that extends from the 60s and beyond. As Anne Ernaux's autobiographical work, the first-person narrative in *L'évènement* naturally carries a strong introspective quality, which to some extent limits the film's consideration of structural issues, but at the same time brings a rich and detailed sensory experience. This flat, autobiographical, and colloquial work is presented on the big screen by filmmaker Audrey Diwan in a visual way, inviting the audience to intimately enter the world of Anne, and also the personal, private writing of author Anne Ernaux during her youth, which is also a glimpse into the lives of French women in the 1960s. By abandoning the possibility of traditional grand narratives, this work about women's personal lives recalls the past of women in a fragmented and realistic way. This autobiographical film about French women in the 1960s has received countless accolades in the 21st century. In the current context of the implementation of anti-abortion laws in the United States, it seems to have even more relevance and ironic significance.

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