

Reading Women's Lives: Autobiography, Education, and Social Mobility in European Women's Histories

This presentation examines the narrative construction of women's life stories and their significance in cultural memory, focusing on Annie Ernaux's autobiographical and sociographic text *A Woman's Story* from an educational and women's history perspective. The study explores how experiences related to women's education can be narrated and how linguistic and narrative strategies transform individual life stories into narratives with broader social meaning. Particular attention is given to the relationship between memory and its ethical and pedagogical dimensions. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate how autobiographical narratives can illuminate the educational and social experiences of women that are often absent from institutional histories.

Methodologically, the study employs qualitative document analysis and close textual reading, drawing on narrative and discourse analysis while integrating perspectives from feminist literary studies and cultural memory research.

The analysis shows that Ernaux's work operates at the intersection of autobiography, sociology, and cultural memory, revealing how personal narratives can transform individual memory into collective cultural reflection. The representation of the mother–daughter relationship, linguistic socialisation, class mobility, and bodily educational experiences highlights important non-institutional spaces of learning. These subtle yet revealing narrative details portray the demanding process of social mobility through education that enabled access to the intellectual sphere. Comparable dynamics of educational mobility and linguistic transformation appear in autobiographical texts such as *The Illiterate* by Agota Kristof.

The findings suggest that autobiographical narratives can serve as valuable sources for reconstructing the history of women's education, while also demonstrating how literary texts contribute to preserving the cultural memory of women's lived experiences and social mobility. The paper contributes to interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies, education history, and memory studies.

cultural memory, intersectionality, narrative identity construction, women's education, women's life narratives

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