

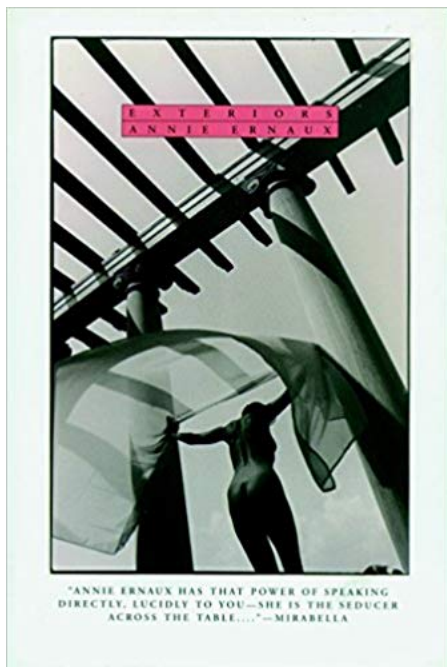
# The Columbus Dispatch

October 13, 1996

**Section:** FEATURES - Accent & Arts

**Edition:** Home Final

**Page:** 07C



## **MARVELING IN THE EVERYDAY** *Nancy McAllister, Of The Dispatch Staff*

Extérieurs, by renowned French author Annie Ernaux, is a collection of journal entries that spans more than seven years. With an unflinching, sharp eye, Ernaux observes the world in which she lives. Each journal entry is clean, clear and piercing - a quick take on modern existence.

In Extérieurs, Ernaux examines ordinary people, places and objects in the cosmopolitan district where she lives.

She records her walks through shopping malls and the urge to buy that comes over her. She overhears pieces of conversations on the bus and wonders about the meaning behind

the words. She considers the significance of graffiti. She watches the gestures and behaviors of those she meets in chance encounters.

Ernaux wrote *Exteriors* during a time her mother was suffering Alzheimer's disease. She wrote, she says, to "ease my grief and keep me in touch with the world that was gradually slipping away from my mother's own consciousness."

Ernaux believes that "the violence and shame inherent in society" can be found in anything considered "unimportant and meaningless." In her journal writing she takes the ordinary and familiar and turns them inside out - and reveals to her readers new possibilities for recognizing the consequences of their contemporary customs.

Reading *Exteriors* is like leafing through a series of skillfully composed snapshots. Tableaus are created - freeze-frames of the world as Ernaux perceives it.

Ernaux tells of her shame and anger when an automatic teller machine refuses to spit out money for her; she tells of the smugness of a supermarket customer who catches a cashier's mistake on her bill; she tells how a woman orders a steak for a man in a butcher shop. Through such stories, she brings the often-murky reality of modern existence into sharp focus.

Our actions and surroundings are everything, she seems to be saying. *Exteriors* is honest, genuine and skillfully executed. Pay attention, it calls out; take the time to observe and listen to all that you can.