**The Nobel banquette and class journeys**

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This year’s winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Annie Ernaux (82), was in Stockholm last week to receive the Nobel gold medal, diploma and cheque, give her Nobel lecture and interviews, attend the Nobel concert, and the festive high point, the Nobel Banquette hosted by the Nobel Foundation. Present at the latter were the Swedish King and Queen and other royals, the PM, ministers and other top politicians, civil servants and other leaders from home and abroad, and, last but not least, the laureates in the fields of physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, since 1901, and since 1968, also the memorial prize in economic sciences. The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded by the Norwegian Nobel Committee in Oslo since Norway was in a union with Sweden when the prize was established. This year, those who won during the two previous corona years had also come to the ceremonies and the banquette, well, save for one or two, including one who had become sick in nothing less than corona.

[Let’s not settle for less!](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Jan-2023/let-s-not-settle-for-less)

At the Nobel Banquette, there were no less than 1300 guests in the historic, pompous Blue Hall of the Stockholm City Hall. I watched this event, and several other events, on TV, and I concluded that not even the Brits or the French could have done a better job and made it all more elegant and snobbish, or should we say, more memorable and special, observing all kinds of protocol, as the Swedes, too, can, despite being down to earth and IKEA-like in everyday situations.

Well, so I thought, but then I realized that there were some less pompous aspects about it all, and the majority of the guests being quite ordinary people, having made class journeys. They seemed to find the tone quickly and engage in good conversations at the table, across class borders, but only the majesties knew in advance who their table company would be so they could prepare for the conversation. The Swedish TV (SVT) showed the active and pleased guests, probably also being aware of the great honour of having been invited; the guests were many but at the same time, they were just a select few. The musical interludes added to the glitter and glamour, making it quite cultural, with composers like the Norwegian Edvard Grieg, a Finnish composer, several Swedish composers, and more. The unique evening ended with lighter music and dance, so the women could show off their new dress creations and hairstyles. I could hardly recognise the elegant Magdalena Andersson, former PM and current chair of the Social Democratic Party, who usually is not overdoing the use of makeup and jewellery. True, representing the social democratic labour party, she does right, and it is good that some still stick to old ways, but still can cross the border, this time not a class journey but a fashion journey.

[PDM bigwigs call on PM Shehbaz amid political heat](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Jan-2023/pdm-bigwigs-call-on-pm-shehbaz-amid-political-heat)

The Nobel Banquette was high culture, made available for all present and those watching on TV. Yet, the Swedes not only value being ordinary and equal, but they may also have a streak of the formal and stiff upper lip to them, usually hidden well as all the Nordics cherish equality. And then, I suppose that only a small fraction of the banquet guests were from the upper classes, but rather from the middle classes, some even from the working classes. That means that many at the event, probably the majority, would have made class journeys during their lifetime, or that of their parents.

When they left the banquette and sobered up from the dreamlike evening the next morning, in their practical and unfussy homes, they would realize that they are just ordinary people, like the rest of us. Even the winners of the Nobel prizes would be quite ordinary people who have worked hard and been successful, plus a good proportion of luck, yes, and shrewd calculation. Besides, being original researchers or writers mean that they have failed more often than succeeding in their studies, research, and writing. In addition, except for writers, the Nobel Prize Winners did not work alone, but usually in teams with colleagues, superiors, students and support staff. In that sense, it is a bit outdated to single out one or a few winners for excellent work since it is usually the result of teamwork and environment, including family support, too. This year, it was discretely revealed that as for the latter, there are untraditional family constellations and forms of companionship. We know that artists are exploring new and alternative ways of living and working, and so are scientists. Even when people make class journeys, women break the glass ceiling, and so on they leave their comfort zone and do new things which bring the world ahead.

[PM Shehbaz vows to strengthen ties with US](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Jan-2023/pm-shehbaz-vows-to-strengthen-ties-with-us)

The prize winner in literature, Annie Ernaux, has written about relationships and social issues in new ways, as all writers do, but she has managed to cross the borders of describing and analysing sociological structures of how groups and individuals live. Her book about abortion, illegal as it was in France and most other European countries in the 1960s, has become a classic for women, especially ordinary and working-class women. The upper classes always had ways of hiding social taboos and paying for proper medical treatment at home or abroad, not having to take cheap and dangerous services from backstreet quacksalvers.

Ernaux writes about how working-class people experience situations and issues, how they live and make the best out of things, sometimes moving away from backward villages or city neighbourhoods to more open-minded cities or towns, and many make class journeys, too. Such literature is in the genre of social realism, but when Ernaux began writing about ordinary people forty or fifty years ago, especially featuring women, it was not common in France. She created and developed further a particularly important analytical literary style.

[Country should be saved from Ishaq Dar's policies: Hammad Azhar](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Jan-2023/country-should-be-saved-from-ishaq-dar-s-policies-hammad-azhar)

When Annie Ernaux writes about these and other issues, indeed class journeys, she draws on her social background having grown up in the poor Normandy region in the north of France, which suffered terrible destruction during WWII. Her parents ran a modest cafe and patisserie in a working-class area of Lillebonne town. Her mother was a keen reader and passed on books to her daughter even from a young age. Ernaux did particularly well at school and became a school teacher, moving to the country’s capital, Paris, after studies in Rouen and Bordeaux, but returning to work as a teacher in her home town for some time. She is not only a writer but has also been a professor of literature.

In interviews, Ernaux has emphasized that class travels must be respected by those who move up, and by parents and others who stay behind, not being judgemental about it in either direction. Literature is different from politics, but it often also describes issues that are political, not only social and psychological. In her books, often short and easy to read, Ernaux writes in a factual and concrete style, letting the reader have more freedom to interpret, reflect and draw their conclusions. This almost sociological style also makes her books concise and analytical. I believe that social scientists can learn from her in their ways of working, and other scientists, too. Often unorthodox creativity is the case, but not spoken about, and scientists also combine their giftedness in their main field, plus other fields, and this year, many had great interest and skills in music.