



# Trauma and Sensory Perception: A comparative study of cognitive response to trauma and sensory perception and processing in "The Lover" and "Ourika"

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## Abstract

This paper offers a comparative analysis of trauma and cognitive response in *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras and *Ourika* by Claire de Duras, focusing on how psychological trauma reshapes perception, memory, and identity. By applying cognitive literary theory and trauma studies, the research examines how both narratives use fragmented structures, internal focalization, and sensory distortion to reflect the emotional and neurological consequences of chronic trauma. Set in colonial Vietnam and post-revolutionary France, the texts explore the lived experiences of two young women navigating racial marginalization, gender expectations, and emotional alienation. The study draws on interdisciplinary insights from neuroscience—highlighting the role of the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex in trauma processing—to deepen the analysis of disjointed memory, emotional numbing, and dissociative narrative techniques. It also integrates postcolonial feminist criticism to contextualize the protagonists' suffering within broader systems of power and exclusion. The findings reveal that trauma in both texts transcends plot and becomes embedded in narrative form and sensory language. Ultimately, this paper argues that the Durases' works provide not only a literary but also a psychological mapping of trauma, offering profound insights into the human condition.

## Keywords:

Trauma, Cognitive Literary Theory, Sensory Perception, Marguerite Duras, Claire de Duras, Postcolonial Feminism

## Introduction

The exploration of trauma through a cognitive and sensory lens has become increasingly significant in literary studies, especially in female-authored narratives. This paper investigates how trauma reshapes perception and identity through sensory and cognitive disruptions in Marguerite Duras's *The Lover* and Claire de Duras's *Ourika*. Both novels depict young female protagonists grappling with the aftermath of personal and societal traumas, including racial alienation, familial dysfunction, and romantic disillusionment. Set against the backdrops of

colonial Indochina and post-revolutionary France, these narratives foreground the emotional and psychological turmoil of their heroines while also challenging broader structures of colonialism, patriarchy, and social exclusion.

In both texts, trauma is presented not as a singular event but as a continuous, embodied experience that alters sensory perception and narrative structure. As Meyer (2023) categorizes it, the trauma endured by the protagonists is complex and chronic, rooted in prolonged exposure to emotionally distressing circumstances. Neuroscientific research supports this literary portrayal, revealing that trauma can dysregulate brain functions associated with memory, emotion, and perception (Bremner, 2006; LeDoux, 2002). These disruptions are illustrated through narrative fragmentation, heightened or numbed sensory details, and the psychological detachment of the narrators. For instance, Ourika's physical collapse upon hearing her social fate underscores the amygdala's role in fear responses (MacLean, 1952; Mancing and William, 2022), while the fragmented recollections and emotional numbness of the unnamed narrator in *The Lover* reflect hippocampal dysfunction and dissociative coping mechanisms (Chen et al., 2018; McIsaac & Eich, 2004).

By comparing these two works through the lens of cognitive poetics, this paper argues that trauma, as represented by the Duras, is both a psychological rupture and a sensory disorder, destabilizing the self's ability to process, relate, and belong. In doing so, it also situates the protagonists' suffering within a larger discourse of marginalization and identity distress, linking their individual experiences to the social traumas of race, gender, and class (Scott et al., 2014; Kira et al., 2019). Through their unique narrative strategies and visceral portrayals of embodied trauma, *The Lover* and *Ourika* illuminate the intricate entanglement of memory, identity, and perception in the aftermath of psychological rupture.

## Objectives

1. To analyze how trauma alters cognitive responses through the distortion of sensory perception in *The Lover* and *Ourika*.
2. To examine the use of fragmented narrative structures as a literary technique to represent psychological rupture.
3. To explore the intersection of trauma with identity, race, gender, and social alienation in the protagonists' experiences.
4. To apply cognitive literary theory in interpreting the embodied manifestations of trauma within the texts.

## Literature Review

The intersection between trauma and cognition has emerged as a vital framework in contemporary literary studies, especially within feminist and postcolonial critiques. Cognitive literary theory—concerned with how readers mentally process narrative and how characters cognitively respond to events—provides a compelling lens through which to explore trauma as both an emotional and physiological experience. In the works of Claire de Duras and Marguerite Duras, trauma is not only thematically significant but also structurally embedded in the narrative design, manifesting through fragmented timelines, disjointed memories, and altered sensory perception (Caruth, 1996; Zunshine, 2006).

Joseph LeDoux's exploration of the amygdala's role in emotional regulation and Pavlovian fear conditioning underscores how fear-induced trauma often leads to involuntary bodily responses, which are visible in the physical reactions of characters like Ourika (LeDoux, 2002). This aligns with Howard Mancing and Jennifer Marston William's argument that trauma influences emotional processing even before conscious awareness takes place, pointing to the brain's pre-cognitive reaction to distress (Mancing & William, 2022). For instance, Ourika's fainting and physical symptoms such as "palpitations" and "dimmed vision" illustrate these involuntary, embodied reactions triggered by psychological turmoil (Duras, 1994, p. 13).

Further supporting this neurocognitive view, Bremner (2006) identifies the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex as critical regions impacted by trauma. The hippocampus, vital for memory consolidation, is often impaired in trauma survivors, leading to fragmented and non-linear recollections, such as those presented in *The Lover*. The unnamed protagonist's tendency to "bury" memories and recall only "clear periods" (Duras, 1985, p. 8) demonstrates how narrative disjunction mirrors neurological dysfunction. Chen et al. (2018) confirm these effects, showing that hippocampal atrophy in PTSD sufferers results in memory lapses and distortions, reinforcing the literary representation of incomplete autobiographical memory.

Berntsen and Rubin (2006) provide a slightly different angle, suggesting that trauma memories are not necessarily inaccessible but are often vividly remembered, intrusive, and emotionally overwhelming. This dichotomy is reflected in both *The Lover* and *Ourika*, where the protagonists oscillate between numbness and hyper-awareness. The phenomenon of dissociative narration—observed when the narrator of *The Lover* refers to herself in the third person—aligns with McIsaac and Eich's (2004) theory of "observer perspective," a mechanism used to distance oneself from traumatic memories.

The psychological toll of trauma is further intensified when it intersects with social structures of oppression, including race, gender, and class. Kira et al. (2019) argue that collective identity trauma, such as that arising from systemic racism or colonization, can lead to internalized inferiority and social alienation. This is evident in Ourika's self-hatred and her description of her black skin as a mark of "reprobation" (Duras, 1994, p. 6), indicating the deep psychological damage caused by racial othering. Similarly, the protagonist in *The Lover* navigates the complex terrain of colonial and patriarchal power structures, where her sexuality becomes both a site of agency and stigmatization, reflecting Scott et al.'s (2014) notion of identity distress following trauma during adolescence.

Cognitive literary theorists like Lisa Zunshine (2006) have emphasized the importance of understanding how the mind interprets narrative elements like perspective, time, and emotion. Applying these insights to the Duras' works highlights how literary form and content coalesce to simulate trauma's cognitive and sensory impact. The nonlinear storytelling and tactile imagery employed by both authors mirror the disrupted perception and internal chaos experienced by their characters. Finally, Harricharan et al. (2021) contribute a vital understanding of how trauma impairs sensory integration, leading to hypersensitivity or numbing and impacting social engagement. This aligns with the protagonists' detachment from society, where both Ourika's withdrawal into the convent and the unnamed heroine's emotional disengagement are symptomatic of cognitive overload and sensory fragmentation. Collectively, this literature establishes a multidimensional framework for analyzing trauma in fiction—bridging literary theory with neuroscience and psychology. It affirms that trauma, as depicted in *Ourika* and *The Lover*, transcends mental anguish, embedding itself within the very narrative fabric and sensory experience of the characters.

## Research Gap

While significant scholarship exists on trauma narratives and postcolonial or feminist readings of *The Lover* and *Ourika*, there remains a noticeable gap in comparative studies that specifically integrate cognitive literary theory with trauma and sensory perception in these texts. Most existing analyses focus on themes of race, gender, or colonialism in isolation, without sufficiently examining how trauma is embodied and processed cognitively by the protagonists. Additionally, few studies explore how sensory distortions—such as disorientation, numbness, or heightened perception—are used narratively to reflect psychological rupture. This study addresses that gap by combining neurocognitive insights with close literary analysis, offering a fresh interdisciplinary perspective on how trauma reshapes identity, memory, and perception in both works.

## Literary Approaches

**Cognitive Literary Theory (Cognitive Poetics):** This approach explores how literature represents the workings of the mind—focusing on perception, memory, emotion, and consciousness. It draws on cognitive science to analyze how readers process narrative and how characters internally experience the world. In the document, cognitive literary theory forms the foundational framework for analyzing how trauma alters the cognitive functions of the protagonists in *The Lover* and *Ourika*. The study examines how trauma affects memory (e.g., fragmentation and dissociation), perception (e.g., distorted sensory inputs), and identity construction. For instance, the unnamed narrator in *The Lover* exhibits a disjointed memory recall and dissociative narration, which is interpreted using theories on the hippocampus and amygdala's role in trauma (Chen et al., 2018; LeDoux, 2002). This aligns with the cognitive approach's goal of linking internal mental states with literary form and content.

**Trauma Theory:** Trauma theory investigates how psychological trauma is represented in literature, often focusing on memory, silence, repetition, and the disruption of narrative time and coherence. It draws from psychoanalysis (Freud, Caruth) and clinical psychology. The document uses trauma theory to dissect the psychological landscapes of both protagonists. It examines how *Ourika*'s vivid recollections and psychosomatic symptoms represent deep emotional trauma, while the narrator of *The Lover* presents narrative gaps and emotional numbness. The use of repetition, nonlinear structure, and flashbacks are seen as formal manifestations of unresolved trauma. Caruth's (1996) notion of "unclaimed experience" is referenced in the conclusion, tying the characters' fragmented storytelling to trauma's resistance to full representation.

**Postcolonial Feminist Criticism:** This approach critiques how colonialism and patriarchy intersect to marginalize voices, especially those of women and people of color. It focuses on issues like racial othering, gender oppression, and cultural hybridity within literary texts. The protagonists in both texts are marginalized by race (*Ourika*) and by gender, class, and colonial boundaries (*The Lover*). The study investigates how their trauma is not only psychological but also rooted in systemic oppression. *Ourika*'s internalized racism and cultural alienation are interpreted through postcolonial feminist lenses, as is the unnamed narrator's struggle for agency and identity in a patriarchal, colonial society. Kira et al.'s (2019) idea of collective identity trauma and Scott et al.'s (2014) work on identity distress in marginalized youth are used to underscore how personal trauma is compounded by structural violence.

## The Battle of the Durases

The phrase “The Battle of the Durases” serves as a symbolic framework for this comparative study, not just because of the authors’ shared surnames—Marguerite Duras and Claire de Duras—but because of the thematic convergence and divergence in their narrative portrayals of trauma, identity, and sensory experience. Both *The Lover* (1984) and *Ourika* (1823) present nuanced female perspectives in environments marked by racial, social, and psychological upheaval. Despite being set in vastly different socio-historical contexts—colonial French Indochina and post-revolutionary France—both texts highlight the emotional and cognitive fragmentation that follows trauma, particularly in the lives of women navigating oppressive structures.

In *Ourika*, Claire de Duras introduces a Black female protagonist adopted into white aristocratic society, only for her to experience devastating alienation upon realizing that her racial identity makes her inherently unfit for the very world that raised her. The trauma she experiences is not a singular event but a culmination of chronic social exclusion, unrequited love, and internalized racism. Her collapse into illness and early death can be read as a psychosomatic response to these emotional burdens. As MacLean’s extension of the Papez theory posits, trauma affects the “visceral brain,” eliciting profound bodily responses to emotional pain (MacLean, 1952). Ourika’s episodes of fainting and sensory disorientation—her “dimmed vision” and “loud heartbeats” (Duras, 1994, p. 13)—are indicative of the amygdala’s heightened fear response, as explained in LeDoux’s theory of Pavlovian fear conditioning (LeDoux, 2002). In contrast, Marguerite Duras’s *The Lover* presents an unnamed French girl caught in the paradox of sexual agency and social ostracization. She engages in a taboo relationship with an older Chinese man, a liaison shaped by colonial hierarchies and economic desperation. Her trauma is rooted in a deeply dysfunctional family system and a society that condemns female sexuality while exploiting it. As Mancing and William (2022) observe, the brain’s emotional systems often override cognitive evaluation in trauma, explaining the protagonist’s dissociation and fragmented narration. She recalls her past with emotional detachment, using third-person references such as “the little girl” to distance herself from painful memories—a form of dissociative coping aligned with McIsaac and Eich’s (2004) findings on traumatic memory perspectives.

Despite differences in historical setting and character background, both heroines display symptoms of cognitive dissonance and emotional dysregulation, reflective of trauma’s impact on the prefrontal cortex—the region responsible for executive function and emotional regulation (Arnsten, 2009). In *Ourika*, this manifests as a total shutdown of social and emotional engagement, while in *The Lover*, it takes the form of emotional numbness and selective memory. Both characters are alienated not just socially but neurologically, struggling to integrate their traumatic experiences into a coherent sense of self, a phenomenon supported by Berntsen and Rubin’s (2006) research on trauma centrality and identity fragmentation.

Furthermore, the trauma experienced by these characters is compounded by their positions at the margins of their societies. Kira et al. (2019) emphasize the concept of collective identity trauma, wherein marginalized individuals internalize the structural violence of discrimination and exclusion. Ourika’s racial identity isolates her within a culture that both nurtured and rejected her, leading her to describe her own body as “monstrous” (Duras, 1994, p. 6). Similarly, the protagonist in *The Lover* faces cultural and familial alienation, caught between colonial French elitism and Vietnamese-Chinese social boundaries. Her sexual transgression renders her a “prostitute” in the eyes of both her mother and her lover’s family, underscoring

the intersection of gender, class, and race in the stigmatization of female desire (Scott et al., 2014).

While *Ourika* culminates in death—a final surrender to the psychological and physical toll of trauma—*The Lover* ends with a form of survival, albeit through emotional withdrawal and narrative control. The act of writing becomes a tool for the unnamed narrator to impose order on her disordered past, demonstrating what Caruth (1996) describes as the paradox of trauma: the attempt to narrate the “unclaimed experience” that resists full understanding. This contrast positions the “battle” between the Durases not as a competition but as a dual lens through which to understand how trauma is lived, embodied, and told by women. In sum, *The Battle of the Durases* represents a literary confrontation with trauma in its most intimate forms. Both Claire de Duras and Marguerite Duras construct narrative spaces that make visible the hidden wounds of their protagonists—wounds shaped by social inequities and processed through the fragmented lens of sensory and cognitive perception. Their works stand as powerful testaments to how trauma distorts, silences, and ultimately reshapes the self.

### Trauma and Cognitive Response

Trauma profoundly disrupts the cognitive and emotional processes of the human brain, often manifesting through fragmented memory, disorientation, and altered sensory perception. Within the literary sphere, this disruption is reflected in narrative disjunctions and characters’ impaired ability to engage coherently with their reality. In both *Ourika* and *The Lover*, trauma serves not just as a thematic concern but as a structural and sensory framework through which the heroines’ psychological deterioration is explored. The internal chaos of the protagonists is mirrored by the non-linear timelines, sudden narrative shifts, and overwhelming or numbed sensory experiences that define their storytelling.

At the neurological level, trauma significantly affects three key brain regions: the amygdala, the hippocampus, and the prefrontal cortex. As Bremner (2006) explains, these regions are central to memory processing, emotional regulation, and rational decision-making. The amygdala, often referred to as the brain’s “fear center,” is responsible for initiating instinctive responses to perceived danger. When trauma occurs, the amygdala becomes hyperactive, often resulting in involuntary physical reactions such as fainting, trembling, or dissociation—responses seen vividly in Ourika’s experience. Upon overhearing the Marquise’s painful conversation about her social prospects, Ourika reports that her “legs were giving away,” her “eyes closed,” and she “thought [she] was going to die” (Duras, 1994, p. 13). These psychosomatic responses reflect Joseph LeDoux’s (2002) theory of fear conditioning, where a neutral stimulus—in this case, overheard words—elicits a severe physiological reaction due to its emotional significance.

In Marguerite Duras’s *The Lover*, the protagonist does not faint but instead internalizes her trauma, responding with emotional numbness and detachment—a form of the “freeze” response also linked to amygdala activity (Šimić et al., 2021). She displays dissociation, not only from her environment but from her memories, struggling to recall her past clearly and stating she only remembers “the clear periods” and has “buried” the rest (Duras, 1985, p. 8). This aligns with Harricharan et al. (2021), who argue that trauma disrupts the integration of internal and external sensory information, causing cognitive overload and emotional shutdown.

The hippocampus, critical for consolidating short-term into long-term memory, is frequently impaired in trauma survivors. Research by Chen et al. (2018) has shown that individuals with PTSD often have smaller hippocampal volumes, correlating with fragmented memories,

disorientation, and false recollections. These symptoms are directly echoed in *The Lover*, where the protagonist's storytelling is nonlinear and filled with omissions, contradictions, and retrospective reinterpretations. This not only disrupts the coherence of her narrative but reflects the neurological instability brought on by prolonged exposure to distress. Conversely, in *Ourika*, memory becomes overwhelming rather than fragmented. She replays specific traumatic episodes in vivid detail, suggesting intrusive memory patterns that Berntsen and Rubin (2006) associate with trauma centrality. Although she remembers clearly, the emotional weight of these memories distorts her self-image, leading her to describe her black hands as those of a "monkey" and her face as something that "filled [her] with horror" (Duras, 1994, p. 6). This internalization of trauma reflects not only individual suffering but also social alienation, as her race and identity are othered by the society that raised her.

The prefrontal cortex (PFC), responsible for higher-order cognition such as decision-making and impulse control, also plays a crucial role in trauma response. Arnsten (2009) notes that chronic stress impairs the PFC's regulatory function, reducing the brain's ability to suppress the amygdala's fear signals. In *The Lover*, this neural dysfunction may explain the protagonist's emotional detachment and difficulty maintaining relationships. Her survival mechanism is rooted in disassociation—a strategy often seen in trauma-affected individuals who struggle to regulate emotion. Norbury et al. (2019) add that sustained trauma can lead to long-term changes in PFC structure, which correlates with increased vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress.

These cognitive effects of trauma are not merely physiological—they have profound implications for identity formation. According to Scott et al. (2014), trauma, particularly during adolescence, disrupts the developmental process of forming a coherent sense of self. Both protagonists embody this identity distress. The girl in *The Lover* is forced to reconcile her poverty, racialized romantic relationship, and family dysfunction, all while attempting to assert agency through her sexuality. This complex interplay of trauma and identity leaves her emotionally adrift and narratively fragmented.

Ourika, too, struggles with identity. Though culturally assimilated into aristocratic French society, she remains perpetually marked by her race, leading to an internal conflict that ultimately destroys her. Kira et al. (2019) conceptualize this as collective identity trauma, wherein social exclusion and racial marginalization become embedded in the individual's sense of self. Ourika's trauma is not just personal—it reflects a historical and cultural violence inflicted on Black bodies during and after colonialism. Finally, the difference in coping strategies between the two heroines further illustrates the cognitive variance in trauma response. Ourika internalizes her suffering, leading to psychosomatic illness and death. Before narrating her story, she admits, "I welcomed the decline of my health because I saw no hope in the future" (Duras, 1994, p. 2), highlighting the fatalistic result of unresolved trauma. In contrast, the unnamed narrator in *The Lover* attempts to regain control through narration—her act of writing is a form of cognitive restructuring, a therapeutic process that helps trauma survivors make meaning of their past experiences (Levine, 2015). Caruth (1996) emphasizes that literature, like psychoanalysis, serves as a medium to access and reframe traumatic memory, allowing the unspeakable to be partially articulated.

Thus, both novels embody the spectrum of trauma's cognitive and sensory consequences. They depict how trauma alters perception, fragments narrative continuity, and distorts identity. Through vivid imagery, internal focalization, and disjointed timelines, Claire de Duras and Marguerite Duras create psychologically rich texts that exemplify how trauma not only wounds the body and mind but fractures the narrative self.

## **Future Research Perspective based on the works of Ehigie, Braimoh, and Igbinovia (2019-2024)**

Building upon the comparative analysis of trauma and cognitive response in *The Lover* and *Ourika*, future research can greatly benefit from broadening the interdisciplinary scope and extending the study to other culturally, thematically, and psychologically rich texts. The works explored in this study establish a foundation upon which broader, cross-cultural, and genre-diverse investigations into trauma, perception, identity, and narrative technique can be constructed. Incorporating the following four studies provides fertile ground for developing this trajectory.

Firstly, Ehigie (2019) in *Une étude thématique et stylistique de L'Orange de Noël de Michel Peyramaure* provides a model for how socio-historical themes such as education, religion, and war intersect with stylistic expression. This approach complements the present study's focus on trauma and sensory disruption by suggesting that external societal forces—such as the secularization of education and wartime dislocation—can be explored through thematic and stylistic layers. Future trauma-focused research can adopt a similar structure to analyze how sociopolitical factors intensify or shape trauma across different narrative forms. Secondly, Ehigie and Braimoh (2024), in *Secularization and Religious Intolerance in Early 20th-Century French Education*, examine the religious and ideological tensions within Michel Peyramaure's *L'Orange de Noël*, particularly the conflict between laïcité and religious conservatism. These themes open pathways for future trauma research to engage with ideological trauma—trauma not only from personal loss but from clashes between belief systems. This perspective could enrich literary trauma studies by incorporating psychological and philosophical dimensions of identity crisis caused by cultural or spiritual dislocation.

Thirdly, Ehigie and Braimoh (2024), in their work *Exploring the Intersection of Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication in Moussa Konaté's La Malédiction du Lamantin* highlight how communicative failures and pragmatic misalignments are rooted in cultural misunderstanding. This direction provides a compelling link to trauma theory, especially in postcolonial contexts where communication breakdowns are not merely linguistic but psychological and epistemological. Future research might investigate how trauma is exacerbated by intercultural misrecognition or the inability of characters to be seen or heard in culturally foreign spaces—a concern deeply relevant in *The Lover*. Finally, Igbinovia, Braimoh, and Ehigie (2023), in *L'évasion comme défense psychologique dans La Petite Roque de Maupassant*, propose a multidisciplinary lens for analyzing denial and psychological escape. The study draws on Freud, Beck, and Baumeister to show how trauma victims, like Maupassant's Renardet, construct elaborate psychological defenses. This offers a framework for future comparative literary analyses focused on the diverse mechanisms—denial, repression, fragmentation—used by characters to survive trauma. It encourages a layered cognitive-emotional approach, one that blends literary structure with psychological function.

In sum, future research can build on this study by:

- Expanding comparative trauma analysis into historical, educational, and ideological narratives (Ehigie, 2019; Ehigie & Braimoh, 2024),
- Exploring the linguistic and cultural tensions that complicate trauma narratives (Ehigie & Braimoh, 2024),
- And incorporating multidisciplinary psychological frameworks to deepen understanding of narrative evasion and defense (Igbinovia et al., 2023).



These paths will further bridge the gap between literary form and psychological function, enhancing trauma studies with richer socio-cultural and cognitive insights.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study makes a significant interdisciplinary contribution to the fields of literary trauma studies, cognitive poetics, and postcolonial feminist criticism by offering a nuanced analysis of how trauma is cognitively processed and narratively represented in *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras and *Ourika* by Claire de Duras. By drawing connections between psychological trauma and sensory distortion, the paper bridges the gap between literary analysis and cognitive neuroscience, providing a more embodied understanding of how trauma disrupts perception, memory, and identity.

One of the key contributions of this work lies in its integration of cognitive literary theory with trauma studies, a pairing that remains relatively underexplored in traditional literary scholarship. Rather than treating trauma as a purely thematic element, the study highlights how it structurally manifests in narrative fragmentation, shifts in narrative perspective, and sensory overload or numbing. This deepens our understanding of how trauma operates not just within characters but also within the very form and rhythm of the text. Additionally, the comparative nature of the analysis—spanning two different historical and cultural contexts—advances knowledge on how social trauma is experienced at the intersection of gender, race, and colonialism. The study shows how both protagonists suffer not only from personal psychological wounds but also from systemic forces such as racism, patriarchy, and socio-economic disenfranchisement. This contributes to a growing body of postcolonial feminist literature that seeks to recover marginalized voices and examine the embodied effects of structural violence.

Furthermore, the research highlights the embodied nature of trauma, presenting it not just as a mental affliction but as a physiological and sensory experience. The application of neurocognitive findings—particularly those related to the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex—adds scientific weight to the literary interpretations, offering a holistic view of trauma's effect on the mind-body connection.

Lastly, the study lays important groundwork for future research by proposing new interdisciplinary frameworks and comparative methodologies that can be applied across other trauma narratives. By doing so, it encourages a more empathetic, multidimensional reading of literature—one that considers how readers engage emotionally and cognitively with texts that echo real psychological wounds. In essence, this work not only deepens our understanding of trauma representation in literature but also expands the methodological toolkit for scholars seeking to explore the human psyche through storytelling. It situates literature as a vital space for reflecting, embodying, and making sense of psychological trauma, thus contributing to both literary scholarship and broader conversations in mental health, identity politics, and the cognitive sciences.

### **Conclusion**

In examining *The Lover* and *Ourika* through the lenses of trauma studies, cognitive literary theory, and postcolonial feminist critique, this study has demonstrated how trauma permeates both the inner lives of literary characters and the structural fabric of the narrative itself. Marguerite Duras and Claire de Duras, though separated by time, geography, and thematic scope, converge in their literary portrayal of female protagonists whose psychological suffering manifests through fragmented memory, distorted sensory perception, and profound alienation.

The narratives explored do not merely tell stories of trauma—they embody trauma. Their non-linear constructions, shifts in narrative voice, and visceral descriptions of emotional and physical disintegration mirror the cognitive and neurological effects of traumatic experience. The application of scientific insights—particularly regarding the functions of the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex (Bremner, 2006; LeDoux, 2002; Arnsten, 2009)—has shown how literary form can parallel clinical understandings of trauma response, particularly in terms of memory disruption, emotional dysregulation, and sensory overload.

Equally significant is the way the protagonists' traumas are shaped by structural forces—colonialism, racism, gender inequality, and socio-economic marginalization. Ourika's existential despair stems not only from her circumstances but from the social rejection embedded in 19th-century French racial ideologies. The unnamed narrator in *The Lover* also navigates trauma rooted in family dysfunction and colonial dislocation, further complicated by gendered expectations of sexuality and emotional detachment. These depictions align with Kira et al.'s (2019) notion of collective identity trauma and Scott et al.'s (2014) work on trauma's impact on adolescent identity development.

By blending literary analysis with cognitive science, this paper underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in uncovering the depth and complexity of trauma narratives. It affirms that trauma is not simply a theme to be read but an experience to be *felt*—by characters, readers, and even by the narrative structure itself. As Caruth (1996) argues, trauma resides at the intersection of knowing and not knowing, and it is within this liminal space that literature becomes a powerful medium for exploring the unspoken and the unspeakable. Ultimately, *The Lover* and *Ourika* compel us to consider not just how trauma is represented in literature but why such representations matter. They invite readers to witness the lingering effects of emotional pain, to feel the weight of societal exclusion, and to experience, through narrative and sensory language, the fragmented nature of memory and identity. These texts are not only artistic achievements; they are also psychological and political testimonies that reveal the deeply human consequences of trauma—both personal and collective. Future scholarship, as outlined earlier, stands to benefit from deeper explorations of trauma's cognitive and cultural dimensions in literature. As we continue to examine how stories reflect and shape our understanding of the mind, works like those of the Durases remind us that literature remains an essential space for making meaning out of suffering, resistance, and survival.

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