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CHILDHOOD MEMORY AND EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S "PIANO": A COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I provide a cognitive-psychological reading of D. H. Lawrence's lyric poem "Piano" [1] as a dramatization of the interaction among memory, emotion, and sensory perception. The article draws on Bartlett's reconstructive theory of memory [2] and Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's model of the self-memory system [3] to argue that the poem's central event—an involuntary return by the adult listener to a scene from childhood—closely enacts processes that have been independently described by cognitive psychology since: the triggering of involuntary autobiographical memory by an external sensory cue [4]; the integration of music and personal memory within self-referential neural processing [5]; and the bittersweet, dual-valenced character of nostalgic affect [6]. Drawing on close reading and cognitive poetics [7,8], the analysis traces how Lawrence's imagery, diction, and shifting grammatical person stage the speaker's gradual surrender from adult composure to childhood vulnerability. The article demonstrates that memory in "Piano" operates as a two-edged sword, at once comforting and grief-inducing, a duality that closely resembles what psychologists call the bittersweet structure of nostalgia. The study concludes that lyric poems, though brief, can give voice to the architecture of involuntary memory and emotional regression with a precision that supplements, and in some ways anticipates, empirical cognitive research, and that "Piano" is a particularly economical case study for cognitive literary criticism.

Keywords: D. H. Lawrence; Piano; Cognitive poetics; Involuntary memory; Nostalgia; Childhood

1 INTRODUCTION

Poetry is very special amongst all the forms of literature. It takes language and drives it to its highest pitch, using rhythm, imagery and sound to summon feelings that cannot be expressed in ordinary prose. Poetry is the first language, says Nemerov [9], harking back to people's earliest attempts to describe experience. Poetry has been the main way in which human beings have transmuted grief, joy, longing and wonder into a common form, from proto-narrative verse in prehistoric cave paintings to the sophisticated lyric traditions of the modern period. Poetry is a form of verbal art that employs heightened language to convey experience, feeling, or states of consciousness. This intensification signifies that poetry is no longer a referential discourse. Prose tells; poetry shows. The formal properties of verse—meter, line break, repetition—produce a sensory experience that reflects the psychological processes it depicts. Nowhere is this more evident than in lyric poems dramatizing memory.

Psychology and literature are distinct disciplines, but their relationship is deep and productive. Art, as Akhter argues [10], is essentially a psychic activity and therefore a legitimate topic of psychological investigation. Both disciplines are concerned with understanding the inner life: psychology through the empirical method, literature through aesthetic form. Cognitive psychology in particular, with its focus on perception, memory and emotional processing, provides a precise vocabulary for analyzing how literary texts work their effects on readers.

D. H. Lawrence's short lyric "Piano" [1] is a particularly productive site for such an analysis. The poem concerns a man's involuntary regression to childhood as he listens to a woman sing and play the piano, music becoming a portal through which adult consciousness is overwhelmed by remembered experience. It is one of the most psychologically transparent expressions of Lawrence's career-long preoccupation with the tension between instinct and civilization, and between the remembered past and the living present. The brevity of the poem—twelve lines, three quatrains—paradoxically increase its emotional power, making it an apt text through which to explore the link between memory, emotion and sensory experience.

There is a large body of scholarship relating poetry to human emotion in generic terms. However, literary psychology has tended to privilege extended narrative forms (novels, plays, lengthy autobiographical writing) over short lyric poems, and to describe emotional response in broadly impressionistic rather than specific cognitive terms—the sensory triggering, reconstructive memory, and emotional regression that a single poem can be shown to perform. The interface of stimulus, memory, and emotion that "Piano" condenses into twelve lines has not received the sustained psychological attention one might expect, given the poem's evident power over readers.

This article addresses that gap. It examines the cognitive-psychological processes prompted by the poem's imagery and structure: sensory triggering, the reconstruction of memory under the strain of present emotion, and the regression of an adult consciousness to a condition of childhood. It investigates how Lawrence's formal techniques—diction, rhyme, and the shifting grammatical anchoring of perspective—reinforce and intensify those processes for the reader, and it situates the resulting reading within the developing field of cognitive literary criticism.

Lawrence's poems on the piano are among the most emotionally intense of his work. Short and plotless, formally unconstrained, they reveal the psychological core of his concerns more directly than his novels do. Most critical attention has focused on Lawrence's longer prose fiction and on the general relationship between music and emotion; this study shifts the focus to the specific cognitive mechanisms at work in a single short lyric and offers a model that is, in principle, adaptable to other memory-centered lyric poems.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant literature: it begins with the general relationship between poetry, psychology, and emotion; sets out the theoretical and empirical foundations of the analysis—Bartlett's reconstructive theory of memory, the self-memory system, research on involuntary and music-evoked autobiographical memory, and the psychology of nostalgia; and reviews Lawrence's psychological preoccupations as a writer. Section 3 presents the methodological framework that guides the analysis. Section 4 presents a cognitive-psychological analysis of "Piano" in five stages, followed by a synthesizing discussion. Section 5 concludes the paper and outlines its limitations and directions for future research.

This gap can be formalized more precisely. Previous research has broadly discussed the psychological aspects of poetry, and separately, cognitive psychology has produced detailed models of reconstructive memory, involuntary recall, music-evoked memory, and nostalgia; relatively little research, however, has applied these particular frameworks to Lawrence's "Piano." Existing literary-critical discussions of the poem tend to describe its nostalgic effect in general terms, understandably, but without tracing in detail how particular words and images correspond to documented psychological mechanisms such as cue-dependent involuntary retrieval or the self-memory system's integration of past content with present emotional goals. This paper reads the poem closely against the theoretical and empirical literature discussed in Section 2, asking how the cognitive processes of cue-dependent memory, reconstructive recall, and bittersweet nostalgia are enacted within the compressed form of a single short lyric.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Poetry, Psychology, and Emotion

Poetry is an art form that uses carefully selected words, imagery, and rhythm to express ideas and feelings. It has a musicality, a concentrated form, and a power to evoke deep emotional reactions that distinguish it from ordinary prose. Repetition, assonance, and metaphor are among the devices that create poetry's distinctive aesthetic and psychological experience.

Previous studies have highlighted the close relationship between poetry and human emotion. Plato was concerned about poetry's ability to stir up uncontrolled passions [11]. Modern psychological research, however, has shown that poetry is an important component in understanding mental processes such as memory and perception [12]. Poetry, when read or heard, can heighten emotional responsiveness and engage cognitive functions such as memory, imagination, and self-reflection.

Hanauer [12] found that poetic language fosters greater emotional involvement and prompts personal reflection, and that poetry is frequently connected to readers' memories of experience. Peskin [13] studied the cognitive processes of poetry comprehension and found that readers employ deeper interpretive strategies for poetry than for prose, and that poetic imagery stimulates memory and complex emotional responses. Miall and Kuiken [14] found that the affective response of readers to literary texts is heightened by formal features such as imagery, rhythm, and foregrounding, which produce greater emotional involvement and self-reflection. This supports the view that literature can affect psychological awareness and memory recall; Jacobs [15], for example, studied the neurocognitive processes involved in reading literature and found that literary texts activate brain regions associated with empathy, imagination, memory, and emotion.

2.2 Theoretical and Empirical Foundations: Memory, Music, and Nostalgia

Bartlett [2] proposed that memory is an active reconstruction rather than a passive recording: people reconstruct reality according to existing cognitive schemas and current emotional state, and the remembering mind does not repeat events verbatim but rewrites and reinterprets them. This emphasis on reconstruction has been a major premise of cognitive theories of memory and forms the basis of the present investigation. Bartlett's perspective has since been substantially extended. Conway and Pleydell-Pearce [3] argue that autobiographical memories are not recalled from storage in their entirety but are instead formed in the moment within what they call a self-memory system – an architecture in which a long-term autobiographical knowledge base interacts continuously with the goals and concerns of a 'working self.' On this model, the way an individual recalls and retains a memory is as much a product of the individual's current emotional state and concerns as of the event itself; memory is of the past recalled and of the self who remembers it. This model provides an apt vocabulary for a phenomenon that “Piano” stages directly: the speaker does not passively recover a childhood scene but reconstructs it under the pressure of a present emotional need, so that the memory he produces is inseparable from the adult self who produces it.

Another major line of research concerns the specific mechanism by which autobiographical memories are activated automatically, without conscious effort. Berntsen [4] has shown, in diary studies, that involuntary autobiographical memories are consistently associated with identifiable external cues – very typically features of the immediate sensory environment. Such involuntary memories tend to concern single, specific episodes rather than generalized routines, and are accompanied by stronger emotional and physiological reactions than deliberately retrieved memories. Berntsen identifies music, among other environmental cues, as a characteristic trigger for this kind of spontaneous, unbidden recall.

Neuroscientific research provides further evidence for a specific role of music in this process. Janata [5] used functional brain imaging to demonstrate that the vividness of memories evoked by familiar music correlates with activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, a region otherwise implicated in self-referential thought – suggesting that music and autobiographical memory are integrated within the same neural systems that support a continuous sense of self. “Piano” assumes an intuition for which Janata's findings provide empirical support: that music is not merely a soundtrack to memory but is neurally processed as continuous with it.

The special emotional quality of memories conjured up in this way has itself become the subject of extensive psychological research under the name of nostalgia. Sedikides and Wildschut [6] review a large body of experimental evidence to characterize nostalgic recollection as a reliably bittersweet emotion – predominantly positive in tone, yet inseparable from an awareness of loss and irreversibility, and capable nonetheless of improving mood, strengthening a sense of meaning, and increasing feelings of social connectedness. This composite structure – comfort inextricable from grief – maps closely onto the emotional logic that the present analysis traces in Lawrence's poem, written more than half a century before nostalgia became an object of systematic empirical study.

These psychological frameworks are complemented, at the level of literary form, by the field of cognitive poetics. Stockwell [7] argues that cognitive poetics offers a useful framework for understanding how readers make sense of literary texts, linking literary analysis and psychological investigation, with particular attention to shifts in deixis – the grammatical framing of a text's perspective in person, place, and time – and their effect on readers' cognitive involvement. Tsur [8] explores the relationship between the structure of poetry and human perception, suggesting that rhythm, imagery, and sound patterning together contribute to the emotional and cognitive effects that poetry evokes. Together with Bartlett's reconstructive model, the self-memory system, and the empirical literature on involuntary and

music-evoked memory and on nostalgia, these frameworks supply the analytical vocabulary through which the remainder of this article reads “Piano.”

2.3 D. H. Lawrence and Psychological Themes

Whether in the intense mother-son intimacy explored at length in his fiction or in the recurring opposition, across both his poetry and prose, of instinctual feeling to the constraints of civilized adult self-control, Lawrence's preoccupation with emotional conflict, memory, and human consciousness has been a constant theme of the criticism of his work. Lawrence condenses these longstanding concerns into one brief scene in “Piano”: the involuntary resurgence of childhood memory, provoked by music, revealing the conflict between the adult's wish for self-control and the child's unguarded emotional life. His literary style—marked by simplicity, emotional intensity, and vivid sensory imagery—serves the psychological depth of his subject without recourse to explicit psychological terminology, making the poem unusually well suited to a cognitive-psychological reading from outside the discipline of literary criticism.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology adopted here is qualitative and textual, suitable for close literary analysis conducted within the framework of psychological theory. The primary text is Lawrence's “Piano” [1], chosen because it openly enacts the triggering of memory, emotional regression, and the tension between adult and childhood consciousness—all core topics of the cognitive-psychology literature reviewed in Section 2. Secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, and academic reference works in literary psychology, cognitive poetics, and memory studies. In-text citations and the reference list follow the Vancouver numbered referencing style.

The analysis proceeds in two stages. The first stage attends to the formal and linguistic features of the poem—structure, meter, imagery, diction, and semantic organization—stanza by stanza. The second stage applies the cognitive-psychological constructs identified in Section 2 (reconstructive memory, the self-memory system, involuntary and music-evoked recall, and the bittersweet structure of nostalgia) to the textual evidence identified in the first stage. The analytical model thus treats the poem not merely as an aesthetic object but as a communicative structure that depicts and performs cognitive processes, with Bartlett's reconstructive model [2] and Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's self-memory system [3] serving as the primary theoretical lens, and Stockwell's cognitive poetics [7] and Tsur's cognitive aesthetics [8] as complementary frameworks connecting formal literary features to psychological response.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Poem

Piano

by D. H. Lawrence (1918)

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;

Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see

A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings

And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

Despite myself, the insidious mastery of song

Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong

To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside

And hymns in the cozy parlor, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour

With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

4.2 Sensory Triggering and Involuntary Memory

The poem opens with a passive receiving: “Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me” (l. 1). The adverb ‘softly’ and the temporal marker ‘dusk’ establish conditions of quiet, waning light, and heightened sensory receptivity in which involuntary memory is most likely to occur. Berntsen’s diary studies [4] empirically confirm this intuition, demonstrating that involuntary autobiographical memories reliably occur in conjunction with identifiable external cues, very often unremarkable aspects of the immediate sensory environment, encountered when conscious attention is otherwise unfocused or relaxed. The dusk-lit room supplies such a cue; the unguarded act of listening lowers the speaker’s conscious defenses, and the musical stimulus strikes deeply encoded memory traces.

“Taking me back down the vista of years” (l. 2) is notable for its spatial metaphor, which images memory as a corridor through time, a structure that suggests the survival of the past in present thought. This is consistent with Bartlett’s observation [2] that memory is not a storehouse of unmodified items but a living schema in permanent revision through experience, and with Conway and Pleydell-Pearce’s thesis [3] that autobiographical recall is an act of construction rather than retrieval. The ‘vista’ through which the speaker passes is not a static scene to be uncovered but one he is actively and involuntarily building as the music proceeds.

The retrieved image is psychologically informative in its particularity: “A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings / And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings” (ll. 3–4). The child not only hears the music but is literally immersed in it, sitting under the instrument so that the sound is felt as well as heard; the sensory detail of the mother’s feet pressed against him supplies warmth, safety, and physical connection. Cognitive research supports the view that memories encoded through multiple sensory modalities are more vivid and more readily reactivated [15]. Janata’s neuroimaging findings [5] extend this point specifically to music, showing that the brain integrates musical and autobiographical information within regions that also support self-referential processing. The poem’s multisensory imagery—sound, touch, and sight—reproduce exactly the kind of richly encoded memory that, on this model, would be most vulnerable to involuntary reactivation by a later musical cue.

4.3 Emotional Regression and the Conflict of Selves

The second stanza introduces the adult speaker’s resistance to what is happening. The phrase ‘despite myself’ (l. 5) concedes that the emotional regression is neither chosen nor preferred: it is imposed from without by the “insidious mastery of song” (l. 5). The adjective ‘insidious’ suggests something working slowly and secretly—an apt description of how sensory stimuli can slip past conscious control and reach encoded memory. The music has activated an autobiographical knowledge base in opposition to the regulatory goals of the speaker’s present ‘working self’ composure, adult self-possession—and the line dramatizes a contest between those goals [3]. The verb ‘betrays’ (l. 6) captures the outcome of that contest from the perspective of the working self: the speaker experiences his own emotional reaction as a form of betrayal, a failure of the adult self to control a relation between present goal and past content that, on Conway and Pleydell-Pearce’s model, is normally reciprocal rather than one-sided.

The recovered memory is now more specific and culturally located: “the old Sunday nights at home, with winter outside / And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide” (ll. 7–8). The contrast between ‘winter outside’ and ‘cozy parlor’ spatially encodes the psychological difference between threat and safety, between the exposed adult world and the sheltered domestic world of childhood. The scene recalled is not a discrete, datable event but a ritualized repetition ‘the old Sunday evenings,’ plural and habitual—which closely resembles what Conway and Pleydell-Pearce [3] characterize as a ‘general event’ in the autobiographical knowledge base: a thematically coherent, repeated experience rather than an isolated episode, and thus one of the most stable and emotionally weighted units of long-term self-knowledge. This is precisely the kind of schematic organization that Bartlett [2] identified as central to memory: experience is not stored as a film recording but as a structured narrative shaped by affect.

4.4 Surrender, Loss, and the Dual Nature of Memory

In the third stanza, the speaker surrenders completely to memory. The singer’s present-tense attempt to “burst into clamour / With the great black piano appassionato” (ll. 9–10) is thwarted. The word ‘appassionato’ (‘with passion’) frames the present performance as an explicitly passionate appeal, but it is no match for the “glamour of childish days” (ll. 10–11); here ‘glamour’ retains its older meaning of enchantment or spell, reinforcing the involuntary, almost magical character of memory’s power.

The poem's psychological argument crystallizes in the final lines: "My manhood is cast / Down in the flood of remembrance; I weep like a child for the past" (ll. 11–12). The flooding metaphor figures memory not as a passive pool but as an active, overwhelming force, and the word 'cast' implies both violence and downward motion. Importantly, the speaker does not cry for the child he once was but 'like a child' he has not simply remembered childhood but has, for a moment, become it again, enacting a complete psychological regression. This dramatizes Bartlett's insight [2] that reconstructing a memory does not leave the remembered unchanged: to reconstruct a past emotional state is, in some measure, to re-enter it.

The poem thus offers memory as double-edged: it gives comfort, the warmth of the childhood scene, and it gives pain, the recognition that what it offers cannot be reclaimed. This duality matches with unusual precision what Sedikides and Wildschut [6] identify as nostalgia's defining structure—a bittersweet emotion, predominantly positive in tone yet inseparable from an awareness of irreversible loss, which is nonetheless empirically associated with improved mood and a heightened sense of meaning rather than with simple unhappiness. In the poem's final line, Lawrence's speaker is left with only the bitter pole of that compound emotion; the sweetness that Sedikides and Wildschut's research documents is implicit in the very warmth and vividness of the memory he has just reconstructed, even as his tears register its loss.

4.5 Language, Style, and Cognitive Effect

Lawrence's stylistic choices reinforce the poem's psychological content throughout. The regular rhyme pattern (AABB) and the long, rolling, alexandrine-like lines generate a musical quality that enacts the very musical experience described in the poem, drawing the reader into the same sensory receptivity that overcomes the speaker. This formal regularity also functions as a container; yet the poem's content repeatedly exceeds it—while the couplets close perfectly, the passion they carry escapes the speaker's control, so that form and content are thrown into productive tension rather than simple correspondence.

The shift from third person ('a woman is singing,' 'a child is sitting') to first person ('the heart of me,' 'my manhood') is gradual, paralleling the transition from observation to immersion. Such shifts of deixis—the grammatical anchoring of perspective—signal and produce shifts in the reader's cognitive engagement with the text, as Stockwell [7] argues in his account of cognitive poetics; readers are drawn from a position of detached observation into one of identification with the speaker's collapsing self-control. In Tsur's account of cognitive aesthetics [8], the long vowel sounds and unhurried meter of the poem ('boom,' 'tingling,' 'appassionato,' 'glamour') also slow the reader's processing in a way that iconically enacts the dilation of subjective time characteristic of absorptive, involuntary recollection, when a few seconds of present listening open onto years of remembered experience.

4.6 Discussion: Toward a Cognitive Poetics of Lyric Nostalgia

Taken together, the textual evidence marshalled above suggests that "Piano" does not simply describe memory and emotion in general terms but performs, with some precision, processes that cognitive psychology would only later formalize. The poem's opening conditions correspond to the cue-dependent triggering that Berntsen documents [4]; its multisensory imagery corresponds to the neural integration of music and self-referential memory that Janata locates in the medial prefrontal cortex [5]; its central conflict between adult composure and reactivated childhood content corresponds to the contest between the working self and the autobiographical knowledge base that Conway and Pleydell-Pearce formalize as the self-memory system [3]; and its closing fusion of comfort and grief corresponds to the bittersweet structure that Sedikides and Wildschut establish as the defining signature of nostalgic affect [6]. This is not to claim that Lawrence anticipated twentieth- and twenty-first-century cognitive science, but rather that careful introspective attention to a remembered emotional experience—the kind of attention a skilled lyric poet brings to a single charged moment—can independently arrive at structures of feeling that empirical psychology subsequently confirms by other means.

This convergence has implications for the practice of cognitive literary criticism more generally. Much of the work in this area, including Stockwell's [7] and Tsur's [8] own pioneering studies, has tended to draw its primary evidence from narrative fiction, where extended plot and characterization provide correspondingly extended opportunities to trace cognitive processes such as memory, empathy, and perspective-taking across a text. "Piano" suggests that lyric poetry, precisely because of its brevity and compactness, can be an equally or even more accessible site for this kind of examination: without a plot to work out, and with only twelve lines in which to operate, every image and grammatical turn is drafted directly into the depiction of a single cognitive-emotional event. In this respect, the compression routinely treated as a difficulty for psychological analysis—the lyric's refusal of extended narrative unpacking—may be better understood as an analytical advantage.

The reading developed here also speaks to a longstanding debate, beyond the immediate concerns of Lawrence criticism, about the value of nostalgic experience. In everyday and even some academic discourse, nostalgia has traditionally been seen as a regressive, sentimental, or self-indulgent state—a retreat from, rather than an engagement

with, the present. This view is complicated, however, by research showing that although nostalgic reminiscing is melancholic on the surface, it is empirically associated with psychological benefits, including improved mood, an increased sense of meaning, and greater social connectedness [6]. Lawrence's poem is ambivalent toward this revisionist reading. The final image of an adult reduced to childish crying would seem to validate the older, more pejorative view of nostalgia as regression and loss of self-mastery; yet the richness and tenderness with which the recovered memory is rendered—the smiling mother, the warm parlour, the shared hymns—suggest that what the speaker loses in composure he gains, if only for a moment, access to a stored reservoir of comfort and connectedness that his adult life, performed in the dusk before a singing stranger, clearly lacks. The pathos of the poem lies in holding these two readings—regression as loss, and remembrance as a fugitive return to comfort—in unresolved tension: the poem dramatizes the bittersweet structure of nostalgia without resolving it into either of its component poles.

Finally, the analysis makes a more general claim about the relation between literary form and the temporality of memory. Lawrence packs into three short, rhyming quatrains, read in under a minute, what would otherwise be a phenomenologically long and slow process—cue, recognition, resistance, and surrender. This formal compression is not merely a by-product of the lyric genre; it also displays a feature of involuntary memory that the psychological literature has recognized as definitional. Such memories, once triggered, tend to unfold rapidly and with a felt sense of inevitability that resists the intentional, effortful pacing of active remembrance. The poem's headlong rhyme scheme and accelerating imagery do not simply describe this rapidity but reproduce it in the reader's own experience of moving through the text.

5 CONCLUSION

This article has offered a cognitive-psychological reading of D. H. Lawrence's "Piano," demonstrating how the poem's central event—an adult listener's involuntary return to a scene from childhood—enacts, with some precision, processes described independently by cognitive psychology: the cue-dependent triggering of involuntary autobiographical memory [4]; the integration of music with self-referential memory at the neural level [5]; the reconstructive and goal-directed character of autobiographical recall [2,3]; and the bittersweet structure of nostalgic affect [6]. The analysis has shown that the poem's formal features—its imagery, diction, rhythm, and shifting grammatical perspective, read through the cognitive poetics of Stockwell and Tsur [7,8]—do not simply describe these psychological processes but actively enact them for the reader.

The present study confirms that short lyric poems are not peripheral to literary psychology but can illuminate psychological concepts with particular clarity because of their condensation and formal self-consciousness. In "Piano," memory is not a passive store but an active emotional reconstruction that can elide the boundary between past and present, childhood and adulthood. Lawrence's poem anticipates, in concentrated lyric form, the central insight that later cognitive psychology would formalize: that to remember is not to replay but to rebuild, and that such rebuilding is never affectively neutral.

This study is limited to a single poem by D. H. Lawrence and to a cognitive-psychological framework grounded in a substantial but bounded body of theory and research. It does not systematically engage biographical, historicist, or psychoanalytic approaches to the poem, nor does it carry out empirical reader-response research of the kind that might directly test whether actual readers of "Piano" undergo the cognitive processes the analysis attributes to its speaker. These limitations define the study's scope rather than weaken its claims: the analysis is offered as a contribution to cognitive literary criticism rather than as a comprehensive or exclusively authoritative account of the poem.

The analytical model offered here—reading the formal features of a short lyric poem against specific, empirically grounded cognitive-psychological constructs rather than against psychological theory in general terms—is, in principle, transferable to other memory-centered lyric poems, both within Lawrence's own oeuvre and within other lyric traditions in which a sensory cue, very often music, precipitates involuntary recollection. Future research could extend the present approach comparatively, testing whether the specific textual markers identified here—cue-establishing imagery, shifts in grammatical person, schema-consistent 'general event' memories, and a closing fusion of comfort and loss—recur across a wider corpus of lyric poems centered on involuntary memory, thereby evaluating the generalizability of the cognitive framework developed in this article. A further avenue would be empirical reader-response work, combining methods from cognitive poetics and experimental psychology, to test whether readers of "Piano" report the affective and cognitive responses that the present close reading infers. Such work would extend the contribution of this study to the growing field of cognitive literary criticism: a demonstration that psychological theory, far from applying only to extended narrative prose, can yield precise and illuminating results when applied to the concentrated form of the lyric poem.

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