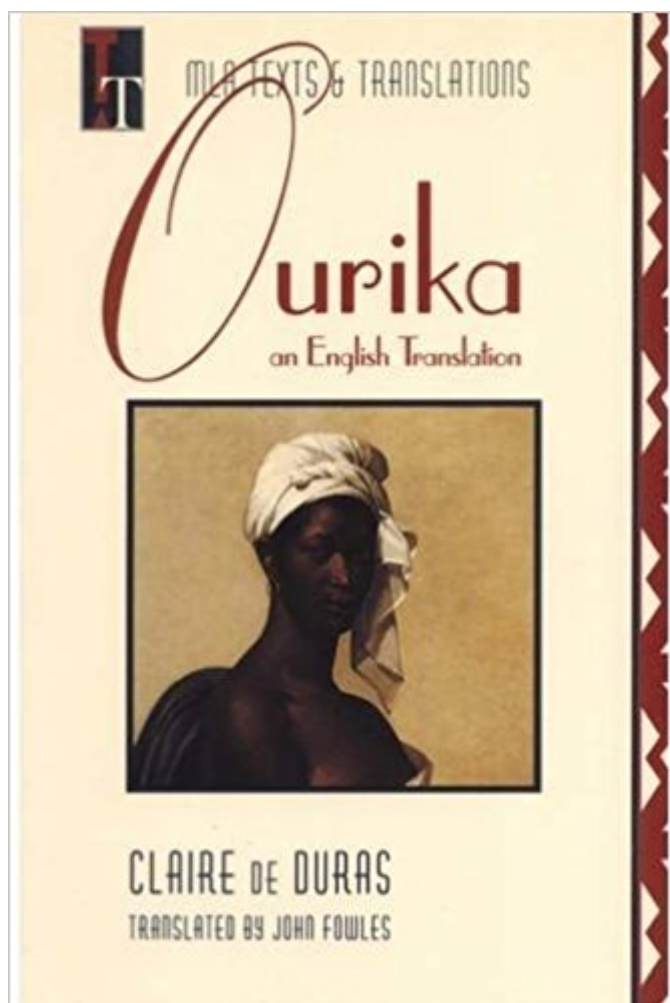


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# Ourika: An English Translation (MLA Texts And Translations)



## Synopsis

John Fowles presents a remarkable translation of a nineteenth-century work that provided the seed for his acclaimed novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and that will astonish and haunt modern readers. Based on a true story, Claire de Duras's *Ourika* relates the experiences of a Senegalese girl who is rescued from slavery and raised by an aristocratic French family during the time of the French Revolution. Brought up in a household of learning and privilege, she is unaware of her difference until she overhears a conversation that suddenly makes her conscious of her race--and of the prejudice it arouses. From this point on, Ourika lives her life not as a French woman but as a black woman who feels "cut off from the entire human race." As the Reign of Terror threatens her and her adoptive family, Ourika struggles with her unusual position as an educated African woman in eighteenth-century Europe. A best-seller in the 1820s, *Ourika* captured the attention of Duras's peers, including Stendhal, and became the subject of four contemporary plays. The work represents a number of firsts: the first novel set in Europe to have a black heroine; the first French literary work narrated by a black female protagonist; and, as Fowles points out in the foreword to his translation, "the first serious attempt by a white novelist to enter a black mind."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Ourika* is a delightful tale set in France during the French Revolution. Published in 1823, de Duras' novel represents a number of firsts: the first novel set in Europe to have a black heroine; the first French literary work narrated by a black female; and the first serious attempt by a white author to

express the feelings of a black character. The story is based on a true account of a Senegalese girl rescued from slavery and raised by an aristocratic French family. When Ourika overhears a conversation that makes her aware of her race and the prejudices it produces, her reality is shattered. This revelation causes her to become ill and no longer able to enjoy the lifestyle to which she is accustomed. Her struggle to reject living as a French woman and to exist as a black woman causes her to choose an "invisible" subsistence by removing mirrors and by wearing gloves to cover her hands and dresses to hide her neck and arms. Her desire to be cured causes her to seek medical attention. It is after her visits with the doctor that her "happiness" is restored. This enchanting story will be enjoyed by all. Lillian Lewis

Ourika is based on a real story of a Senegalese girl rescued from slavery and raised by a French family during the French Revolution: appearing here as a short translation, this provides in English the first French literary work narrated by a black female protagonist. --Midwest Book Review

I read "Ourika" for a college literature analysis class. That being said, I divided my feelings on the book into two respects: academic and leisure. Academically, this book was groundbreaking, as it presented, for the first time in French literature, a clear woman protagonist of African descent. Women in literature at this point in time were often constrained by one (or more) of three factors: convent, marriage, or death. That is, these societal factors were used to punish a woman protagonist in any book so that she would not be viewed as free-spirited and able to roam as she would please in a male-dominated literary society. Ourika, without giving away spoilers, represents a new main protagonist not only, then, regarding her race but also her sex. This book by de Duras, originally oral, is laced with symbolism and with a clear picture of revolutionary French aristocracy as de Duras saw it. Leisurely, I did not enjoy this book to the fullest, as I felt that the narrative, at points, was somewhat contrived and nonsensical, not representative of a true portrait of real society at the time. It does, however, deserve credit for its examination of racism.

While the seeds of the French Revolution were maturing, a French aristocrat rescued a little black child in Senegal from a slave ship and brought her back to France. She was raised in an aristocratic home as one of the family. After the Restoration of the monarchy, Claire de Duras told the story in her brilliant literary salon. It caused a sensation - and the friends of the duchess urged her to write it down. The resulting novella, *Ourika*, was privately published in 1823. By 1824, it was a best seller. *Ourika's* tragedy arises out of her good fortune. By the time she reaches young womanhood,

she is well read, accomplished, beloved by her "family" and totally at home in her exclusive circle. Then one day she overhears a conversation that strips away all her illusions. She realizes that as a black woman in a racist country, she will always be alone. She can never marry and have children. The novel goes on to show Ourika's attempts to deal with her predicament. Claire de Duras enters the mind of her black character in a way that had never been done before. Ourika is also the first example of a black heroine in a European setting. Duras perfectly captures her sense of alienation. There are three prefaces in this book, two by scholars, one by the translator, John Fowles. All are illuminating in different ways. They reveal the complex historical background that gives layers of significance to an apparently straightforward narrative. But I especially liked John Fowles' view of the novel as "the case history of an outsider." Ourika can be seen as Camus' eternal stranger, as well as the victim of nineteenth-century racism.

Without reading this essential work, it would be very hard to understand Fowles' intuitivity regarding "The French Lieutenant's Woman." More than that, Fowles' foreword is highly influential. Like a confession... I would like to say that fulfills its mission to make us happy. I got this book within 4 days from the U.S.A to Turkey very very fast.

Ourika, by Claire De Duras, is a unique depiction of an African American during the French Revolution. Previous portrayals of Africans in French Tradition are reportedly vague and are not frequently described as individuals. The story of Ourika is a true story about an African woman who is rescued from slavery at a young age by the governor of Boufflers and is raised in a wealthy aristocratic white family. Claire De Duras was born in France in 1777 and was forced to flee her homeland shortly after the execution of her father. She doesn't return until 1808 with her French husband, the Duke of Duras. De Duras doesn't have the desire to publish the story of Ourika until she sees what an interest is provoked by telling it orally to the customers in her salon. When De Duras does publish it in 1823, she does so gradually because female authors were not given much, if any, credibility at this point in time. The first edition had no author or date printed on it and consisted of only 25 private copies. The book did not remain a secret for long and several thousand copies were printed over the next few years. De Duras wrote four other novels the same year as Ourika, but only two others were published before she passed away in 1828. The story of Ourika is quite personable. The story is told by a doctor whom Ourika is one of his patients. At this point, Ourika's depression has taken a severe toll on her health and the doctor (who remains unnamed throughout the text) is determined to cure her despite her poor physical state. The doctor is initially

taken by her gentle and eloquent manner, curious as to where an African woman had learned to be so proper. She insists that he can not cure her without knowing what troubles have ailed her health. Ourika tells him the struggles she has had to face as an outcast throughout the course of her entire life as a black woman raised in a white person's world. As Ourika gets older, she is reminded daily of how alone she is. She has no family and no white man will marry her. She doesn't understand the culture of her own people since she has never experienced it, so she doesn't fit in anywhere. The only male friend Ourika has ever had marries a beautiful wealthy white woman. Ourika is constantly sneered at by those who do not know her, so she limits her time away from home. The accounts of Ourika's life are told in dramatic detail and give the reader much sympathy for her. Her depression causes frequent fevers and she falls unconscious on numerous occasions. All of Ourika's oppression is eventually relieved as she turns to God and becomes a nun, but at this point her body is too frail to continue much longer. Ourika is a remarkable story for someone who is interested in nineteenth century Europe or studying inequality between races throughout history. Ourika touches deeply on subjects not commonly written about in the early nineteenth century and paints a vivid picture of how difficult life was for women and minorities during the French Revolution.

Written by a woman in 1823, *Ourika* is a fascinating short work set during the French Revolution. Ourika is an attractive, intelligent young black woman who was rescued as a child from slavery. She is raised as any wealthy white child would have been. She excels in her pursuits and charms all. By chance, she discovers who she is, and what it means to be black. The truth changes her. This work raises many questions, and provides some haunting insights into human nature. Highly recommended

Good book

The book came in a timely fashion was quite cheap and i hope people looking for a good historical book to read are equally as satisfied as i am

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