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**Retrieval of Traumatic Memories in James Joyce's
"The Dead" and Haruki Murakami's "Drive My Car"**

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Abstract

Over the centuries people have been afflicted with painful memories that have triggered feelings of fear, vulnerability, anger, loss, and vengeance. Traumatic memories have always been at the core of human experience. Following traumatic events, memories keep coming back into people's minds, sometimes when they are least expected. In both James Joyce's "The Dead" and Haruki Murakami's "Drive My Car," there is a character suffering from the loss of a loved one. In "The Dead", Gretta suffers from sad memories of the sudden death of her boyfriend; while Kafuku, in "Drive My Car", suffers from memories of his unfaithful wife, who has passed away. The study examines the means of recovering from or adapting to the retrieval of traumatic memories in both short stories.

Keywords: Adapt, Memory, Recovery, Retrieve, Trauma

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قسم اللغة الانكليزية/ كلية التربية للبنات/ جامعة بغداد

استرجاع الذكريات المؤلمة في قصتي "الموتى" لجيمس جويس و "قودي سيارتي" لهاروكي

موراكامي

المستخلص

الذكريات المؤلمة كمشاعر الخوف والضعف والغضب والخسارة والانتقام تشكل جزء من معاناة الانسان على مر الزمان. الذكريات المؤلمة بذلك تعتبر في قلب التجربة الإنسانية على الدوام. بعد الأحداث المؤلمة التي يختبرها الانسان، تستمر الذكريات في العودة إلى ذهنه، وأحياناً عندما لا يتوقعوها على الإطلاق. في كل من قصتي "الموتى" لجيمس جويس و "قودي سيارتي" لهاروكي موراكامي، هناك شخصية تعاني من فقدان انسان عزيز. في قصة "الموتى"، تعاني غريتا من ذكريات حزينة بسبب الموت المفاجئ لصديقها ؛ بينما يعاني كافوكو في قصة "قودي سيارتي" من ذكريات زوجته الخائنة التي توفيت. تبحث الدراسة في سبل التعافي من استرجاع الذكريات المؤلمة أو التكيف معها في القصتين القصيرتين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تكيف، ذاكرة، شفاء، إسترجاع، ذكيات

مؤلمة

Human memory is a complicated activity that includes many stages, one of which is the retrieval of past traumatic events. Generally, there are two kinds of memory: the explicit or conscious memory and the implicit or unconscious memory. The conscious or explicit memory is only the tip of the iceberg. The implicit memory is buried in the unconscious mind, and it is the main force that drives human behaviour. The memory of very bad and stressful experiences, i.e. traumatic memory, "shocks the brain, stuns the mind, and freezes the body. It overwhelms its unfortunate victims and hurls them adrift in a raging sea of torment, helplessness, and despair" (Levine, 2005, Introduction, para. 7). Unlike ordinary memories which could be bad, and change over time; traumatic memories are permanent, "they are imprints (engrams) from past overwhelming experiences" (Levine, 2005, ch. 1, para. 13). This study addresses the retrieval of traumatic memories in James Joyce's "The Dead" and Haruki Murakami's "Drive My Car." Significantly,

Memories of specific autobiographical events are usually discussed in the literature as episodic memories, a concept introduced by Tulving to describe a memory system that makes possible the acquisition and retrieval of information about specific experiences that occurred at a particular time and place Retrieval from episodic memory is unique in that it involves auto-noetic awareness (the sense or experience of the self in the past). (Ehlers et al, 2004, p. 403)

The study aims to examine the characters' response to their painful memories in both short stories. This gives an insight into human nature, helps finding positive meaning in undesired experiences, and shows the necessity of releasing the past and letting go.

James Joyce's "The Dead" opens with the annual dance party hosted by Gabriel Conroy's spinster aunts, the Misses Morkan. "The *milieu* of the story is the provincial, middle-class, 'cultivated' society of Dublin at the turn of the century" (Tate, 1976, pp. 390-391). Both Gabriel and his wife, Gretta, attend the party. Though very much in love with his wife, yet Gabriel is embarrassed by her origins. Gretta is from the west of Ireland, from Connacht. "The west of Ireland is connected in Gabriel's mind with a dark and rather painful primitivism" (Ellmann, 1976, p. 379). When one of the guests in the party, Miss Ivors, asks him if Gretta is from Connacht, he shortly answers that "her people are" (Joyce, 1914, p. 161). At the end of the party, while leaving the Misses Morkan's house, Gretta remains still at the top of the staircase, leaning on the banister, listening to a man singing while playing on the piano. Gabriel, standing below the staircase, couldn't hear the words of the song, just "a few chords struck on the piano and a few notes of a man's voice singing" (Joyce, 1914, p. 179). Yet he is mesmerized at the view of his wife listening to the distant music. He is "surprised at her stillness" (Joyce, 1914, p. 179). He looks up admiringly and reflects "what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of" (Joyce, 1914, p. 180). The singing man is the Irish tenor Mr. Bartell D'Arcy, one of the guests in the party. He lingers in the drawing-room after everyone has left. When he is down, in the pantry, preparing to leave, Gretta asks him about the song: "'Mr. D'Arcy,' she said, 'what is the name of that song you were singing?' 'It's called *The Lass of Aughrim*,' said Mr. D'Arcy, 'but I couldn't remember it properly. Why? Do you know it?' '*Lass of Aughrim*,' she repeated. 'I couldn't think of the name'" (Joyce, 1914, p. 182). *The Lass of Aughrim* triggers Gretta's long buried memories. Aughrim is a village west Ireland; and the song is about a peasant woman seduced and abandoned by Lord Gregory. The woman returns to her lover with their

baby, but he refuses to let her in. The song is relevant as it “brings together the peasant mother and the civilized seducer” (Ellmann, 1976, p. 380). It parallels Gretta, from peasant origins, and Gabriel, the civilized Dubliner. The song, however, evokes Gretta’s autobiographical memories. Gabriel, unaware of old memories flooding into his wife’s mind, notices the rich bronze colour of her hair, the colour of her cheeks, and her shining eyes. “A sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart” (Joyce, 1914, p. 182). His feelings of love for her are renewed.

Gabriel and Gretta have arranged to stay at a hotel overnight, and return home the next day. On their way to the hotel, Gabriel was physically craving his wife. Watching her listening to the distant music triggered his deepest emotions towards her. In their room, “he stood holding her head between his hands. Then, slipping one arm swiftly about her body and drawing her towards him, he said softly: ‘Gretta, dear, what are you thinking about?’” (Joyce, 1914, p. 197). She tells him it is the song, *The Lass of Aughrim*. Then she releases herself from Gabriel’s arms and runs towards her bed. She throws herself on the bed, hides her face, and starts crying. Gabriel, confused, asks her: “What about the song? Why does that make you cry?” (Joyce, 1914, p. 187). She tells him that she is thinking about a boy whom she knew a long time ago, and who used to sing that song. That boy lived in Galway, and she met him when she was living with her grandmother. The boy’s name was Michael Fury; and he used to work in a plant for manufacturing gas. “The smile passed away from Gabriel’s face. A dull anger began to gather again at the back of his mind and the dull fires of his lust began to glow angrily in his veins” (Joyce, 1914, p. 188). He asks her if she was in love with him. She replies he was a boy she once knew, and who used to sing that song. Gretta further adds: “‘I can see him so plainly,’ ... ‘Such eyes as he had: big, dark eyes! And such an expression in them—an expression!’” (Joyce, 1914, p. 188). Gabriel asks her

again if she is in love with him; and if she wants to see him again. Gretta replies that Michael Fury died when he was seventeen. “Gabriel felt humiliated ... by the evocation of this figure from the dead, a boy in the gasworks. While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another” (Joyce, 1914, p. 188). He is annoyed he was not in her mind, instead she was thinking of a boy of the west country, a place whose people he believes to be his inferiors.

Gretta tells Gabriel in a sad voice that her relationship with Michael Fury was great. She says that they used to walk in the country, and that he was going to study singing. Yet he had a poor health. Gabriel assumes that Michael Fury died of consumption; he wants to pretend that his feelings are of pity. The final blow comes when Gretta replies “I think he died for me” (Joyce, 1914, p. 189). But “since Joyce has already made clear that Michael Fury was tubercular, this answer of Gretta has a fine ambiguity. It asserts the egoism of passion, and unconsciously defies Gabriel’s reasonable question” (Ellmann, 1976, p. 380). In this regard, critics of the concept of fragmentation of the traumatic memory argue that “every autobiographical memory encoding is incomplete, and memory is always a reconstruction rather than an exact record” (Ehlers, 2004, p. 407). Gretta elaborates on the incident of Michael Fury’s death, and makes it plain how he passed away for her sake. She tells Gabriel that when she had to leave Galway and come to Doblin, to the convent, Michael Fury was already very sick. It was winter, and she was not allowed to meet him. So she wrote a letter, promising to see him next summer. But, Gretta resumes, “the night before I left, I was in my grandmother’s house in Nuns’ Island, packing up, and I heard gravel thrown up against the window. The window was so wet I couldn’t see, so I ran downstairs as I was and slipped out the back into the garden and there was the poor fellow at the end

of the garden, shivering” (Joyce, 1914, p. 190). She begged him to go back, or he would die in the rain. He answered he doesn’t want to live. She clearly remembers him standing by a tree. So Gretta misses the place, alongside the people of her community. A week after Gretta left to the convent, she learned that Michael Fury had died and been buried in Oughterard, in his family’s burial places. Gretta “stopped, choking with sobs, and, overcome by emotion, flung herself face downward on the bed, sobbing in the quilt. ... She was fast asleep” (Joyce, 1914, p. 190). Gretta relives the trauma of losing her boyfriend many years ago, triggered by the song. Some traumatic memories “may linger, pungent and poignant, for years, sometimes seeming to have the same bite when they are recalled as when they first happened” (Levine, 2005, ch.1, para. 11). Gretta cries as if the past were still present, she relives the past. Her kind of traumatic memory is implicit, unconscious, and invoked by a song. Her long repressed memory recalls a past love, along with a lost and rich peasant life that was spontaneous and passionate.

Haruki Murakami’s “Drive My Car” also addresses traumatic memories experienced by Kafuku who has lost his wife. Kafuku hires a young woman, Misaki Watari, to be his personal driver. He owns a yellow Saab 900 convertible, which he is attached to. “His wife had still been alive when he had purchased it new. She had chosen the yellow color. During the first few years, they had often gone out for drives together. ... Yet, for what was now nearly ten years, he had always driven alone” (Murakami, 2018, p. 7). Kafuku and his wife are actors. She was a beautiful woman, two years younger than him. Kafuku would always be hired to play the supporting role. He was not quite handsome, growing bald, and not appropriate for the leading man roles. His wife, on the contrary, was a leading actress. Yet, as they both grew old

together, Kafuku became to be known as a skilled and distinctive actor, while his wife's status started to decline.

However, Kafuku informs Misaki, his newly hired driver, that she should arrive at his apartment at half past three p.m., take the car from the garage, and drive him to the theatre. Kafuku is playing the role of Uncle Vanya in a Meiji-era adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Kafuku rehearses his lines on the way to the theatre, reciting with an audio from the car cassette player. On their way home, they listen to Beethoven pieces or Kafuku's favorite rock music. This is significant because Murakami, who is a lover of all kinds of music, regards music as "the best means of entry into the deep recesses of the unconscious, that timeless other world within our psyche. There, at the core of the self, lies the story of who each of us is" (Rubin 2002, p. 2). Therefore, Kafuku shares his traumatic memories with Misaki on their way home, while the music is playing, and she is a good listener.

Kafuku was deeply in love with his wife since he first met her till her death after twenty years. He never slept with another woman during their marriage, and never felt the need to do so. Unlike him, his wife had slept with four men during the years of their marriage. Kafuku, who has a strong sixth sense, was able to sense it every time it happened. She cheated on him with younger actors working on the same movie. The relationship would end when the filming ends. Kafuku never understands why his wife cheated on him. "Their relationship as a married couple and as life partners had been excellent from the beginning. When time permitted, they talked with passion and honesty about a wide variety of subjects, and tried to trust one another. ... they were a most compatible pair, both spiritually and sexually" (Murakami, 2018, p. 16). After his wife's death, Kafuku is tormented by memories of her infidelity. He regrets not asking her about her affairs with other men, about what is lacking in him.

When Kakuku closes his eyes, he would immediately imagine his wife making love with another man. "The images whittled away at him like a sharp knife, steady and unrelenting" (Murakami, 2018, p. 17). Kafuku's memory is episodic, a "form of explicit memory" that is warm and infused with feelings (Levine, 2005, ch. 2, para. 4). Kafuku suffers from sad, unwanted, and repetitive memories.

Kafuku consequently responds to his anger and tries to seek revenge. He tells Misaki about this experience after she asks him whether he has any friends. She has been his personal driver for two months and figured out that he has none. Kafuku replies that the last time he became friends with someone was ten years ago; a tall and handsome man whose name was Takatsuki. He was seven years younger than Kafuku, always given the role of romantic lead, though not being a proficient performer. Finally, Kafuku admits, Takatsuki was the last of his wife's lovers. To this "it took Misaki a long moment to get her head around what she had just heard. 'You mean he was having sex with your wife?' she said at last". Kafuku replies "That's right. I think he was having sex with my wife on a regular basis for three or four months" (Murakami, 2018, p. 23). Kafuku made him his friend to understand why his wife needed to have an intimate relationship with someone other than her husband. Kafuku had not avoided the company of Takatsuki. He did not dissociate from the man whose company would waken poignant memories and strong repulsion. However, according to American Psychiatric Association, the retrieval of traumatic memories "can take various forms, including intrusive images, flashbacks, nightmares, and distress and psychological reaction when confronted with reminders" (Ehlers, 2004, p. 403). Hence, Kafuku's friendship with Takatsuki is not just a desire to know his rival's strength and weaknesses. Kafuku was distressed; he had a plan in his mind, and which he would gradually reveal to Misaki.

Takatsuhi visited Kafuku after six months of his wife's death. He wanted to offer his condolences. Kafuku seized the opportunity and asked Takatsuki out for a drink and to remember his deceased wife. He told Takatsuki that his wife would often mention him. Takatsuki was shocked and suspected that Kafuku knows of their affair. Yet, Kafuku was an experienced actor and the expression of his face did not betray him. They agreed to meet the next day at a well-known bar, and they shook hands. After Takatsuki had left,

Kafuku sat down on a chair in the green room, opened his right hand, and stared hard at his palm. The sensation left by the handshake was still fresh. *That hand*, those fingers, had caressed his wife's naked body. Slowly and deliberately, exploring every nook and cranny. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply. What in heaven's name was he trying to do? He felt that whatever "it" was, he had no choice but to go ahead and do it. (Murakami, 2018, p.27)

After drinking together, Kafuku concluded from Takatsuki's talk that he was still in love with Kafuku's wife, that she was the one who ended their relationship—that was the pattern of all her extramarital affairs—and that he was unable of hiding his emotions and grief after her death.

Kafuku told Takatsuki that what hurt him the most is that there was a part in his wife's heart that he couldn't really fathom, a blind spot. Takatsuki replied that they can never see into a person's heart perfectly and clearly. He told Kafuku that "if we hope to *truly* see another person, we have to start by looking within ourselves" (Murakami, 2018, p. 34). Their eyes met and there were a sign of recognition in their looks. On parting, they shook hands. Kafuku again looked at his palm which just shook the hand of the man who caressed his wife's naked body. Yet it didn't pain or disgust him. "Instead, his reaction was, yes, such things do happen. They do happen. After all, it's just a matter of flesh and blood. No more than a pile of bone and ash in the end, right? There has to be something more important than that" (Murakami, 2018, p. 35). Kafuku tells Misaki that the friendship lasted for six months and then he decided to end it; he did not answer Takatsuki's phone calls and did not attempt to contact him. He decided to do so because there was no need for further acting. He tells Misaki that he was intending to punish Takatsuki by pretending to be his friend, finding a flaw in him, and making up a scandal. It was easy, especially that Takatsuki let off his guard when he drank. Takatsuki was divorcing his wife, and the scandal would make him lose the right to see his son. Kafuku thought that Takatsuki would never recover from that blow. In this regard, Peter A. Levine (2005) writes that the retrieval of traumatic memories

can alter a person's biological, psychological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint, and dominate, all other experiences, spoiling an appreciation of the present moment. The resulting *tyranny of the past* interferes with the ability to focus effectively on both new and familiar situations. When people pay selective attention to the riveting reminders of their past, sleep becomes the enemy and life becomes colorless (Introduction, para. 2)

Therefore Kafuku relentlessly sought revenge. Yet finally he realized that this would not alleviate his pain:

It was slightly different from revenge "I wasn't able to forget what had taken place between them. I tried really hard. But I failed. The image of her in another man's arms was stuck in my mind, as real as life. As if there was a demon with nowhere else to go clinging to a corner of the ceiling, eyes fastened on me. After my wife's death, I expected the demon would disappear if I just waited long enough. But it didn't. Instead its presence grew even stronger. I had to get rid of it. To do that I had to let go of my rage. (Murakami, 2018, p. 38)

As Kafuku let go of his rage, the demon disappeared. He couldn't figure out why his wife cheated on him with Takatsuki. Kafuku admits that Takatsuki is a handsome and good man. Yet he is not an accomplished actor and his character is weak. It remains a mystery for him that his strong and clever wife should fall for Takatsuki. Misaki suggests that probably Kafuku's wife was never in love with Takatsuki, and that's why she went to bed with him.

Significantly, Kafuku shares with Misaki the process of breaking free from anger and regret at a time when he is playing the role of Uncle Vanya. He even quotes the following lines from the play to Misaki:

Oh, my God! I am forty-seven years old. I may live to sixty; I still have thirteen years before me; an eternity! How shall I be able to endure life for thirteen years? What shall I do? How can I fill them? Oh, don't you see? ... Don't you see, if only I could live the rest of my life in some new way! If I could only wake some still, bright morning and feel that life had begun again; that the past was forgotten and had vanished like smoke. (Chekov, trans., 2015, IV)

In Chekhov's play, Sonia would reply to Uncle Vanya, telling him "What can we do? We must live our lives. ... Yes, we shall live, Uncle Vanya. We shall live through the long procession of days before us, and through the long evenings; we shall patiently bear the trials that fate imposes on us" (Chekov, trans., 2015, IV). Performing this play, it seems, helps Kafuku to overcome his traumatic memories. He realizes that the only thing he could do is to endure, continue working, and move on with his life.

In Conclusion, the retrieval of overwhelming traumatic memories becomes less distressful through communicating them to a trusted other. In "The Dead", Gretta

shares her memories of the sudden death of her boyfriend with her husband. Her memories are implicit and triggered by a song which he used to sing for her. Her memories do not govern her life, though when retrieved they give her pain. Yet Michael Fury represents more than a person of the past whom Gretta could have been in love with. He also symbolises Gretta's origins, community, and a lost life. Unlike Gretta, Kafuku, in "Drive My Car", is suffering from his explicit memories. He is haunted by painful recollections of his deceased wife, who was unfaithful. He calmly and coherently shares his story with his personal driver, Misaki. His trauma is triggered by his thoughts. He succeeds to come to inner peace and harmony by letting go of anxiety over them. Performing the role of Uncle Vanya helps him to understand that the only thing he can do is to endure his misfortune and let go of negative feelings. He heals through sharing the experience of the fictional character that he is performing on stage. Kafuku is not totally liberated from past pain, but it does not control his behaviour.

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