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Interpretative essay on “ UFO in Kushiro” by Haruki Murakami and “ The swimmer” by John

Cheever.

Haruki Murakami’s “ U. F. O. in Kushiro” and John Cheever’s, “ The Swimmer” are two fictional accounts with a similar message on the significance of tragedies in life on our perspectives and decisions. Based on the relationships and communications between the different characters, the conversations in the two texts seem ominous to reality but are in essence a keen explanation of the relationship between reality and the inner personal reactions to tragedies like loss. Komura and Neddy are the two main characters that are stylistically used to communicate how tragedies expose both the vulnerability and the consequent rediscovery of different individuals.

Haruki Murakami’s “ U. F. O. in Kushiro” is a story inspired by the 1995 earthquakes in Kobe, Japan and was originally published on the 19th of March, 2001 in The New Yorker magazine. Set in Tokyo, Japan, Komura, a salesman at Akihabara “ Electronics Town” has to deal with a murky phase of separation and possible divorce in his 26 year old marriage that has been sparked by the recent earthquake. Ever since the earthquake had hit Kobe, his wife had never been the same again. She suddenly became glued to the television, keenly following the stories and images on news. She neither ate nor left the room, Komura grew concerned until finally on the sixth day of the week, she left with a note that she was never coming back again. The story explores how Komura realizes the significance of his loss and how it is related to his own self-rediscovery.

Initially published in *The New Yorker* on the 18th of July, 1964, and later on republished in the same year, "The Swimmer" on the other hand is set in the wealthy neighborhood of Westchester County in New York City. It is a short story concerning a man Neddy Merrill, who takes it upon himself to swim his way home after a night out of drinking. He figures he would be able to get home by taking a dogleg south west (Cheever, 1978, pp. 727) from the Westhazy's where he had spent the night through each private and public pool he encounters, approximately eight-miles. He therefore decides to name the stream Lucinda, after his wife and sets on his journey. As he progresses on however, a tragic progression develops, he finds himself increasingly alienated and denied drinks from his friends, the Hammers, the Lears, the Howlands, the Crosscups and the Grahams just to name a few. It is this paradoxical backbone of his increasing disorientation of his perception as he gets closer home that forms the basis and backbone of the story.

Cold, alone and confused

On comparison with Murakami's "U. F. O. in Kushiro", Komura is a tall, slim and stylish dresser who is good with people and after getting married had never had any extra marital affair as was the case in "the Swimmer".

However, later on as the story builds up, his wife leaves him coincidentally after an earthquake that hit Kobe, Japan. She left a note and according to her, "he was too much like a chunk of air," "I am never coming back," she wrote, and even went on to clearly explain that she simply no longer wanted to live with Komura (Haruki, 2001). "The problem is that you never give me anything," she further wrote. "Or, to put it more precisely, you have never had anything inside you that you can give me, you might be

handsome and good and kind, but living with you is really like living with a chunk of air. It's not your fault. There are lots of women who will fall in love with you". She asked him to never call her but to just get rid of all her stuff. The letter left him alone and distracted. She had always left letters saying she was going to visit her parents and always came back after some days more at ease. But there was something different with this letter and he could not help but feel it. The story therefore takes a similar turn to Cheever's as Komura's separation from his wife sets him on a journey. After taking a leave from job, his colleague Sasaki suggest he travels to Hokkaido to help him deliver a small package to his sister as he takes time off from work. Komura therefore takes a vast trip to the small cold town with chilling winds and frozen borders and it is in Kushiro in Hokkaido that he is reawakened from his frozen and numb state through a seemingly provocative encounter with Keiko Sasaki and Shimao (Haruki, 2001). His close communication with Shimao in particular stirs something in him that he only recognizes in passing. He realizes that although, she is unfamiliar to him, she imparts into him a knowledge deep in depth and crucially applicable to his present predicament. She for instance, reminds him that " no matter how far you travel, you can never get away from yourself" (Haruki, 2001). Shimao consequently becomes a close and understanding friend to Komura in a strange twist of fate.

Works Cited

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