

**UNWANTED CHILD OF LITERATURE: KITSCH IN *THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING***

**BUSE MALKOÇ**

**112667011**

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**PROF.DR. JALE PARLA**

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Edebiyatın İstenmeyen Çocuđu:

*Varolmanın Dayanılmaz Hafifliđi'*nde Kitsch

Unwanted Child of Literature: Kitsch in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

Buse Malkoç

112667011

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Jale Parla



Jüri Üyesi: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Rana Tekcan



Jüri Üyesi: Yrd. Doç Dr. Köksal Seyhan



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- 5) Polyphony

## ABSTRACT

In this study, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is discussed with a depth analysis in order to trace Kundera's art of the novel. In accordance with this analysis, the study dwells on what is defined as the notion of kitsch and how Kundera's art of the novel opposes it. His art of the novel referred to in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is also examined in terms of the notion of polyphony. Here, by taking polyphony into consideration, he emphasizes the plurality of different voices over totalitarian voice of the kitsch.

Analysis of Kundera's idiosyncratic novelistic devices in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* illustrates how his art of the novel resists affirmations and certainties. In this context, his novel allows the reader to explore ambiguity represented in his novelistic techniques. In addition to this, posing questions is integral part of his novel and for this reason; the purpose of the study is to explore Kundera's method of posing questions by studying the author's collaborative approach to the creation of his novel.

**Key Words:**kitsch, the art of the novel, totalitarianism, ambiguity, polyphony.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışmada; *Varolmanın Dayanılmaz Hafifliği*, Kundera'nın roman sanatını gözlemleyebilmek için derinlemesine bir inceleme ile irdelenmektedir. Bu analiz doğrultusunda, çalışma; kitsch nosyonu ile ne demek istendiğine ve Kundera'nın roman sanatının bu kitsch mefhumuna nasıl direndiğine değinmektedir.

*Varolmanın Dayanılmaz Hafifliği*'nde betimlenen roman sanatı, çokseslilik nosyonu bakımından da incelemektedir. Burada Kundera çoksesliliği dikkate alarak, farklı seslerin çoğulluğunu kitsch'in totaliter sesinden daha çok vurgulamaktadır.

Kundera'nın *Varolmanın Dayanılmaz Hafifliği*'ndeki özgün roman tekniklerinin analizi, onun roman sanatının olumlamalara ve mutlak yargılara nasıl direndiğini göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda, Kundera'nın romanı, okura roman tekniklerinde temsil edilen muğlaklığı keşfetmesini sağlamaktadır. Bununla birlikte, soru sormak bu sanatın vazgeçilmez bir parçasıdır ve bu sebeple çalışmanın amacı; yazarın romanının oluşumundaki işbirlikçi yaklaşımını inceleyerek soru sorma yöntemini keşfetmektir.

**AnahtarKelimeler:**kitsch, roman sanatı, totaliterlik, muğlak, çokseslilik.

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## UNWANTED CHILD OF LITERATURE: KITSCH IN *THE UNBEARABLE*

### *LIGHTNESS OF BEING*

#### INTRODUCTION

In *Performing Hybridity*, cultural theorist Manthia Diawara describes kitsch as “cheap imitation of art” (177). In that sense, situated on the side of the low culture, kitsch is considered to be a counterfeit product that rests on ready-made sentiments. According to critic Thomas Kulka “kitsch is simply parasitic on the emotions that it refers to” (*Kitsch and Art*, 80). Since it manipulates the experience of art by evoking only the sweetest emotions, it renders ethical and aesthetic problems. Likewise, once the notion of kitsch is revisited in the art of the novel, it comes to an understanding which is the matter of aesthetical taste and ethics as well.

Milan Kundera brings light to the characteristics of totalitarian kitsch thanks to his theories on kitsch reflected in his novels. With reference to his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera defines kitsch with Kantian “the categorical agreement with the being” (245). Concerning this definition, it can be claimed that kitsch removes undesirable and unacceptable notions to sustain as “categorical agreement with the being”. His novels are critiques of the kitsch serving to mask the inherent instabilities of the human condition via weakening the memory. One of the most significant theories of Kundera on kitsch is that kitsch brings about forgetting as he stated *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (3) and here he further argues that “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (3). Considering this, it is possible to see that

kitsch, craving unconditional adherence, removes the unpleasant through its saccharine taste and therefore causes forgetfulness of the human condition for some to promote Kantian “categorical agreement with being” or reduction of pluralities. Nevertheless, emphasizing novelist as an “explorer of the existence” in *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera as an intruder into the realm of kitsch, explores the possibilities and multiplicities of the human condition in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. With reference to Kundera’s wisdom of the novel, his novel can be regarded as a reminder of the memory against the anesthetic effect of kitsch. The novel favors questions and ambiguities to challenge kitsch by employing novelistic techniques and themes about the existence of the human.

My thesis will not only seek to revisit the notion of kitsch with reference to Kundera’s novel, but also it endeavors to delve into how Kundera resists style of graphomania in novels written in need of affirmation. In that sense, this study aims to show how Kundera’s novelistic techniques in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* transgress totalitarian kitsch and graphomania. When notions of graphomania and kitsch are analyzed in the light of Kundera’s art of the novel, it can be claimed that they are against the spirit of the novel.

Totalitarian kitsch and graphomania only seek to assert and they merely present answers and certainties because kitsch, intentionally evoking the sweetest emotions, gives no permission for the weed in the garden, thereby excluding the other; the bitter, the unacceptable one. However, his novels focus on destabilizing certainties and assertion and uphold multiplicities to celebrate uncertainty and ambiguity and at the same time, they reveal multiple voices that kitsch intentionally disclaims. For this reason, Kundera’s novels pose questions. In the light of these, in this study, I aim to show Kundera’s devices of posing questions and exploration by analyzing his art of the novel.

Finally, the study will be divided into the following chapters: Chapter 1 will deal with the overall framework of the thesis as well as review of Kundera's art of the novel. It will touch upon Kundera's aesthetic values and style with reference to his novels. With regard to these, this chapter will also show the spirit of Kundera's novel through analysis of his style.

In chapter 2 idiosyncratic novelistic devices of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* with reference to Kundera's art of the novel will be identified and what is meant by the notion of kitsch will be specified. This chapter will also examine the importance of ambiguity and uncertainty in analyzing Kundera's art of the novel. I will deal with how his novel focuses on individualism, doubt and irony as opposed to the notions of kitsch and graphomania. Chapter 3 will provide an overview about how Kundera affects other writers with his theory about the notion of kitsch.

Finally in conclusion part, the results of the study will be presented and discussed.

## CHAPTER I

### Kundera's Understanding of the Novel

Kundera says "Outside the novel, we're in the realm of affirmation: everyone is sure of his statements: the politician, the philosopher, the concierge. Within the universe of the novel, however, no one affirms: it is the realm of play and hypotheses" (*The Art of the Novel*, 78). As a great novelist himself, he focuses on this idea. We see that when Kundera feels disappointed with the world he lives in, he attaches himself to the "wisdom of novel" (158). This exactly indicates how important novels are for Kundera and what they mean to him. By looking for answers in the "incognitive capacities" of the novel, Kundera feels uncomfortable in a world where everyone asks questions only because they know the answer to them. He sees this as totalitarianism which does not include risk for the authority. In other words, man asks the question only to affirm his own answer, but not to explore new answers. When the novelist writes a novel in need of this affirmation, or graphomania, he falls into the criticisms of Kundera. About graphomania, Kundera states "The most grotesque version of the will to power and the mania not to create a form but to impose one's self on others" (131).

As to how or when this graphomania begins, Kundera goes back in history and says that the more man advanced in science and knowledge, the less he sees the world or himself as a whole. As for how graphomania continues in the society, it is necessary to take a look at Kundera's novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. In this book Kundera dwells more on the topic of graphomania and restates that isolation is what breeds graphomania and that generalized graphomania in return intensifies the isolation. As he refers to science as well, it can be said that "The invention of printing formerly enabled people to understand one another. In the era of universal graphomania, the writing of

books has an opposite meaning: everyone surrounded by his own words as by a Wall of mirrors, which allows no voice to filter through from outside" (*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 128). For this reason, in the era of graphomania, people surrounded by the wall of mirrors get lazy to be curious about things. Kundera believes that not to forget being, the author should explore and experiment tirelessly and in his own words, he should be a man of "explorer of the existence" (AN, 44). For his philosophy, *The Trial* by Kafka will be a perfect example about what he resists and wants to do with his writings. In *The Trial*, the reader does not know, or is not allowed to know whether K. is guilty or not. This is somewhat against the nature of the man in the totalitarian style of writing as a man feels the need to etiquette things as good and evil. This is what Kafka prevents in his novel because he wants his reader not to be able to separate black from white and to go on with some grayspots. Thus, the only thing the reader sees is a continuous interrogation of K. and his endless waiting. By not providing the answer of whether K. is guilty or not, Kafka provides the reader an answerless question, creating some grayspots for the reader to work with. These answerless questions form the essence of Kundera's novels, and it is with this uncertainty that he writes his novels. With this "wisdom of uncertainty" (AN, 7), Kundera's novels are able to acquire a kind of platform that enables things to be seen from different perspectives. With black and white separations, there would be a limitation of what black and good consist of, and thus they become quite predictable. By breaking off this limitation, Kundera is able to explore deeply and justly. He speaks of this in his book *The Art of the Novel* and points out that what he wants to examine is "not reality, but existence" (42) because "existence is not what has occurred, existence is in the realm of human possibilities" (42). In addition to these, he sees novels as a great platform and instrument to examine "everything that man can become, everything he's

capable of”(42). While examining his novels and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, it will become clearer how his explorations are able to provide depth to the characters and his art of the novel. This need of exploring also emphasizes the importance that Kundera gives on individualism. However, he in a sense looks into the possibility of his own assertion about trying to explore every character with a dialogue in the novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. During the dialogue, one of the characters states that an author cannot really include every character, as there is an infinite multitude of different characters. In a sense, the character continues to talk to Kundera by saying “Are you trying to make us believe that you know all about them? That you know what they look like, what they think, how they’re dressed, the kind of family they come from?” (123). With reference to these, Kundera never states anything meaning that he knows all about every character and how they think exactly. The dialogue continues to say that “All anyone can do, is to give a report on oneself. Anything else is an abuse of power. Anything else is a lie” (124). In the light of this, it can be claimed that his theory of “wisdom of uncertainty” plays a pivotal role in his art of the novel.

As an author opposing graphomania, Kundera is against an environment where everyone speaks and no one listens. In *Kundera and Ambiguity of Authorship*, Knoop also identifies the Kundera’s style “as the vehicle of a revolt against attempts to sort and classify the World religiously or philosophically” (2). Parallel to Kundera’s rejection of graphomania, Knoop’s identification once again shows that Kundera is not willing to write in an environment where everyone talks but no one listens because it has a close relationship with what a totalitarian environment is. For this reason, by creating gray spots, Kundera does not only allow a more suitable environment for exploration, but also he acknowledges the validity of democratic environment that does not allow

classifications. Moreover, thanks to the endless possibilities that he explores, he is also able to explore human behavior and human beings overall.

### **How Kundera's Understanding of the Novel Was Shaped by Other Artists**

Delving into how Kundera is influenced by many other great writers and explorers is a necessity to understand what the art of novel means to Kundera and in this context, the similarity between the ideas of Kundera and Barthes is a topic that needs exploration in order to trace Kundera's style of writing. In *Kundera and the Ambiguity of Authorship*, Knoop examines the similarities of Barthes and Kundera in terms of their approaches to the indeterminacy of meaning. Barthes argued that "the text is an aesthetic object exposed to infinite indeterminacy and therefore to endless interoperation and rewriting" (205). In that sense, Barthes' and Kundera's ideas about the indeterminacy of the text and the ambiguity of meaning are very parallel. However, Barthes and Kundera do not really agree on how the author is expected to present himself in the narrative and whether the reader should be aware of the author's own personal experiences and ideas or not. According to "Meaning, Play and the role of the Author" in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, while Barthes' style is more of a modern writer or even a scriptor who does not really say new things, but writes down different versions of what he says, in Kundera's style the author himself should not be evident in the narrative. (18) Kundera insists on "the literary text's independence from its author, claiming that the author cannot be used to provide explanations in the text, and the new points of view arise from the text with every reader" (Knoop, *Kundera and the Ambiguity of the Authorship*, 8). This explanation puts forward two main points of Kundera's understanding of his novels; the lack of explanation and the need for multiple points of perspective.

Though these points have already been discussed earlier, a comparison of Barthes and Kundera actually provides a new perspective to analyze the authorship of Kundera. To achieve the uncertainty that he strives for, he makes sure that his own personal identity is not shown in his novels because stating his own identity would actually mean that he is asserting his own ideas. This would be similar to graphomania, which he strongly resists.

Kundera is influenced by the approaches of Barthes, however, does have a unique method of his own. With reference to this, Kundera's authorship is identified as "hide and seek" one by Knoop (8). Kundera's own personal voice does speak up in his novels, however, it ends up with playing hide and seek when the reader sees his ideas sometimes refuted and sometimes ridiculed in the end. In *Testaments Betrayed*, Kundera depicts this voice as being heard "obliquely, ironically, as one among many" (139). This once again strengthens Kundera's desire to question everything and thus; he ends up questioning his own ideas that were voiced in his essays and his novels. With reference to these, in *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera adds that "the sole raison d'être of a novel is to discover what can only be discovered by a novel" (108). Furthermore, to reject the possibility of one-sided ideological position, Kundera, like Diderot usually uses digressions in his works. Kundera sees Diderot's style as a proof of how Diderot views reality in a constantly changing continuum. For Diderot, the same language cannot be used truly to represent the reality or the multiplicity of conceptions of reality because of the continual change. To keep up with this continuous change, Kundera adopts Diderot's use of digressions and disruptions in his novels. On this matter, Sterne, who is regarded as the master of digressions by Kundera, says "Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine—they are the life the soul of reading, take them from this book, you might as well take the book along

with them" (Sterne, *The Life and the opinions of Tristram Shandy*, 163). He wants this paced rhythm of the change to compel his readers to be aware and stay awake for any chance that he can provide his readers with a question. With his authorship influenced by Barthes and Diderot, Kundera's view of the novel as knowledge is very much influenced by Hermann Broch. In the interview of Kundera with Christian Salmon, Kundera points out that he does not only take Broch as an inspiration for the things he has accomplished, but also for the things he couldn't accomplish.

### **Kundera's Aesthetic Values**

To have an idea about authorship and what novels mean to Kundera, his aesthetic values should be reviewed as well. For him, aesthetic value is acquired only by things that surprise and present the reader with something new that has not been demonstrated before. Regarding this, Kundera goes on to say "This is what I consider the knowledge of the novel. The author unveils a realm of reality that has not yet been revealed. This unveiling causes surprise and the surprise aesthetic pleasure or, in other words, a sense of beauty" (Elgrably Jordan, "Conversations with Milan Kundera", 6).

With reference to the use of already known and explored experiences and topics in the aesthetic of the novel, Kundera defines "a thousand times already told" (6) as "kitsch". Kundera's own definition of kitsch is "the translation of the stupidity of received ideas into the language of beauty and feeling" or "a perversion of beauty" (AN, 163). More than beauty, Kundera believes that kitsch represents the universal culture as the lowest common denominator of the sameness. Then, Kundera considers kitsch as the conformity and the absence of interrogative and creative manner which contradict with his art of the novel. As it will be explored in this thesis, Kundera makes sure not to create his works with this "kitsch beauty" and he struggles to discover new beauties through

interrogation and his theory “wisdom of uncertainty”(7) against this evil within the novels.

### **How Kundera wants to be read by his readers**

While Kundera’s literary techniques and theories suggest his approach to the art of the novel, they also give some clues as to how his novels should be read. As he writes his novels to discover and to explore as much as he can, Kundera wants his readers to explore as well.

As it is suggested above, he plays hide and seek with his own voice and ideas in his narrative and he wants his readers to join his game to make them feel comfortable enough to explore as well. As opposed to graphomania’s novelistic style, Kundera strives to make readers feel comfortable. Because for him, as how the citizen of a totalitarian regime would be afraid to speak up and to explore his own identity, the graphomania’s novelistic style threatens the reader or asserts power over the reader so that the reader’s own ideas are silenced and thus, the reader has no more questions. Just like a democratic ruler, Kundera’s desire is to hear what his reader says about his novels. To hear the reader, he makes sure that he provides his readers with enough information that is not sufficient to answer a question but just enough to pose one. With reference to these, Kundera’s relationship with the reader does not constitute an authoritative one. In an interview, Kundera says “the incompatibility (between the novel and the totalitarian universe) is deeper than the one that separates a dissident from an apparatchik, or a human-rights campaigner from a torturer, because it is not only political or moral but

ontological” (14). This assertion of Kundera’s is much like a guide as to how readers should analyze his novels. Here, Kundera regards the existence of the totalitarian approach in a novel as an ontological problem that is against the sole *raison d’être* of a novel.

He also makes an earnest request to his readers for not to view his novels too seriously. He explains his use of seriousness by saying “A person is serious if he believes in what he would have others believe.” (“An Introduction to a Variation”, 1) In that sense, he seems to be in pursuit of greater knowledge and understanding instead of kitsch or conformity which means absence of questioning. By not taking the World too seriously, he wants his readers to step out of the limitations of the real World and explore the endless possibilities with him.

“Man thinks, God laughs” (*AN*, 158) is an important Jewish proverb that Kundera seems to adopt. Kundera believes that as the man is taking things too seriously and trying to sort everything out, God laughs because he sees that the man is unaware of the truth which is constantly slipping away from him. Kundera even takes one more step to identify this serious man as the mortal enemy of the novelist and he calls him as the “agaleste”. As Agaleste forgets to question, the novelist and Agaleste will be utterly incompatible. Kundera states:

No peace is possible between the novelist and agaleste. Never having heard God’s laughter, the agalestes are convinced that the truth is obvious that all men necessarily think the same thing, and that they themselves are exactly what they think they are. But it is precisely in losing the certainty of truth and the unanimous agreement of others that man becomes an individual (*AN*, 159).

Kundera's passion of laughter in his novels comes from his desire to question everything from the actions of the man to the meaning of the man.

### **Kundera's Style**

Before moving on to the style of Kundera, it is necessary to examine why Kundera insistently states that his novels are not philosophical. For Kundera, the novel can never be solely philosophical and he explains this as a "new art of novelistic counterpoint which can blend philosophy, narrative and dream into one music" (71). For him, the universe of the novel can absorb philosophical notions without being determined by them. In that sense Kundera follows Broch:

The novel has extraordinary power incorporation: whereas neither poetry nor philosophy can incorporate the novel, the novel can incorporate both poetry and philosophy without losing thereby anything of its identity, which is characterized precisely by its tendency to embrace other genres, to absorb philosophical and scientific knowledge (64).

Then, it can be claimed that as the novel incorporates the philosophical notions, they are reshaped and they do not directly mean what they say because of the polyphony which means "equality of voices where no one voice should dominate, none should serve as mere accompaniment" (75). For this reason, the novel cannot be merely philosophical.

Kundera also claims that his "novels aren't psychological" (23). He feels closer to Kafka in this sense, and says in "Dialogue on the Art of the Novel": "He does not ask what internal motivations determine man's behavior. He asks a question that is radically different: What possibilities remain for man in a world where the external determinants have become so overpowering that internal impulses no longer carry weight?" (26). Therefore, while psychological novels examine how man acts in front of all the external

determinants that he faces in the World, Kundera wishes to examine how these external determinants actually affect the actual possibilities that man could face. However, it is also necessary to state that just because Kundera places his own work outside of the psychological novels; it doesn't mean that he deprives his characters of an interior life. As for what his novels pursue with reference to psychology, "self" will be the correct answer. In his interview, Kundera replies to Christian Salmon's question by saying that he is interested in self questions like "What is self? How can the self be grasped?" instead of dealing with how the self works and thinks. (Egrably, Jordan, "Conversations with Milan Kundera", 6). Therefore, his approach to philosophy and psychology in his novels allows Kundera to enjoy the wisdom of uncertainty and the freedom of seeing the possibility that is denied to him in the real world.

### **The Common Style and the Recurring Themes in Kundera's Other Novels :*The Joke, Immortality, Identity, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting***

All of Kundera's novels have a unity in themes or styles; hence, before moving on to analyzing *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, it will be inspirational to see how these novels have been thematically reunited by Kundera. The same themes and styles will be seen in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* as well.

#### **Style of His Other Novels**

Stylistically speaking, one of the most important elements that Kundera utilizes is polyphony. Although the term, which literally means many-voiced, is very often used in music, it was Bakhtin's study (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*) that first introduced polyphony as a narrative element. However, for Kundera the meaning of polyphony and his use of it actually does not derive from Bakhtin. In *The Art of the Novel*,

Kundera indicates that the source for his own understanding of the term is Hermann Broch, who wrote well known novel trilogy *The Sleepwalkers*. In Kundera's terms, the polyphony in texts is the literary technique that makes possible the disappearance of an authoritative voice and thus, it equalizes every voice and prevents one opinion or idea from being stronger than the other. Kundera says, "Polyphony in music is the simultaneous presentation of two or more voices that are perfectly bound together, but still keep their relative independence" (*The Art of the Novel*, 74). He considers polyphony as a great instrument to stop any particular voice from dominating and as a result of this, polyphony triggers posing questions instead of presenting opinions.

Through polyphonic manner, Kundera plays the game among genres in a novel. His style changes from a novel to a short story, from a reportage to a poem and then to an essay. Kundera goes much further to explain how he came to the definite meaning of his polyphony: "I've described that sort of construction by a term borrowed from musicology: polyphony. You'll see that it's not farfetched to compare the novel to music. Indeed, one of the fundamental principles of the great polyphonic composers was the equality of voices: no one's voice should dominate, none should serve as mere accompaniment" (74). In this case, the voices mentioned are not only limited to the voices of the characters that differ in opinions, but also these varieties of voices that polyphony provides can actually be the own voice of the author. As he is trying to write about a particular topic, he might choose to write about the same thing differently, which again can be considered as polyphony. In that sense, polyphony in Kundera's novels transcends narrow interpretations offered by a narrator. Therefore, polyphony does not only consist of a variety of voices, but also it suggests an "architectonic reading" through which he shows

endless possible questions and themes regarding human existence via plurality of perspectives.

Polyphony is a word related to music, and actually it still preserves its meaning while being used by Kundera. As a music lover, in an interview with Christian Salmon Kundera says: "My purpose is like Janacek's: to rid of the novel of the automatism of novelistic technique, of novelistic word spinning" (*the Paris Review: "The Art of Fiction No.81"*). In this sense, Kundera thinks of his novels as a sonata or a quartet piece which is indicated by the difference between the number of chapters and the number of pages. The aim of Kundera's novel in polyphony is already same with the aims of a sonata or a quartet because it proposes musical instructions, tempos and sets the emotional atmosphere.

A great example of the similarity between Kundera's use of polyphony and the musical use of polyphony is Kundera's novel *Life is Elsewhere*. *Life is Elsewhere* includes harmonic forces, such as andante, allegretto, allegro and prestissimo. Thus, while some chapters are andante written with a calm and melancholic tone, others are prestissimo written with a fast tempo which jumps from one topic to another. Moreover, many of Kundera's novels are divided into seven parts, and a perfect harmony is distributed among these seven parts.

Polyphony's application in Kundera's novels is quite usual, as he actually calls his book *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* as a "novel in the form of variations" (*Paris Review, The Art of fiction, No.81*). In this case, variations mean variety of genres. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, part 1 is named as "Lost Letters" and it is actually about a man called Mirek, who has not seen the woman he once loved for 20 years. While the reader observes their relationship and the things that caused them to drift apart, s/he is surprised by different parts that the author writes as if he himself is speaking and he gives

the reader the background for the environment that Zdena and Mirek fall in love. While doing so, Kundera reflects his personal experiences and actually adopts an essayistic and historical tone. After 1-2 pages of digressions where Kundera interrupts the flow of the story to comment on, the story goes on from where it was cut off by leaving the readers with abilities to visualize and imagine why that character actually did that. In that sense, different parts contribute to the total composition of the novel. In this polyphonic experience of reading, Kundera suggests that “he assumes that in the reading experience of a novelistic polyphonic composition, the voice of a particular part persists in the background as an echo, while the reader is engaged with the following parts.” Kundera’s attempt in polyphony is to show that these various voices in the novel are not successive, where former voice fades away with the succession of the new one, but they are simultaneous.

Polyphony in Kundera’s novels is a literary device in creating novels that are thematically united in the sense that the reader is able to grasp many other dimensions of the character. There is an exhaustible plurality of viewpoints regarding characters and themes. For instance, while reading the story “Mama” in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the reader isn’t only reading about Karel’s mother with whom everybody seems to be uncomfortable. With the digression that Kundera adds to this story, the reader is reading about a mother who has seen the invasion of their country, but still she only cares about the pears at her home. This small digression that Kundera makes in the story enables the reader to realize that the reason why Mama is still concerned with the pears is actually because she thinks that the “tanks are perishable, pears are eternal” (*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 41). This reflection of the past adds another dimension to the character of Mama, since without it the only thing that the readers would know

about her would be the fact that her children are immensely bored with her and they are constantly trying ways to get rid of her. This specific digression that he does is termed as “chronological displacement” (AN, 77) by Kundera. The part goes back to the day when the city of Mama is invaded, while actually the storyline is on today, in Karel’s house.

Kundera employs the similar technique and theme in his novel *The Joke*. During the novel, while he is talking about his relationship with Lucie, another voice comes up. This voice is the voice of the historical Kundera, which reflects his own past. Kundera jumps up to Communism and talks about why he has become a Communist. With this both chronological and personal digression, Kundera stops talking about his relationship with Lucie and starts to question himself by trying to answer why he had become a Communist.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Kundera’s Literary Techniques in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being***

#### **Kundera’s Approach to the Characters of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being***

Kundera has his unique narrative and literary techniques which suggest his understanding of the novel and his idea of what a novelist is. Before delving into Kundera’s idiosyncratic techniques, a broader look at his portrayal of the characters in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* will be more informative. First and foremost, Kundera explicates the technique in creating his characters: “It would be senseless for the author to try to convince the reader that his characters once actually lived. They were not born of a mother’s womb; they were born of a stimulating phrase or two or from a basic

situation” (39). Kundera reminds the reader that what they read is a piece of imagination and here he clearly explains the fictiveness of the storyline. Thus, he highlights the impossibility of telling a complete story as an author. In this way, when the reader’s imagination automatically completes the novelist’s, the novel provides a world of infinite variety and possibility. Another technique of Kundera for building possibilities through characters is that his voice never becomes too definitive or sure while he is dealing with a character. For example, when explaining Tereza’s relationship with her mother, he says, “She took after her mother, and not only physically, I sometimes have the feeling that her entire life was merely a continuation of her mother’s...” or “Where and when did it begin, the movement that later turned into Tereza’s life”(41), or “Tereza appears to me a continuation” (46). The line “I sometimes have the feeling” is crucial to understand Kundera’s approach to his characters. By clearly pointing out that he himself is not entirely sure whether Tereza’s life was a continuation of her mother’s or not, Kundera not only abandons the authoritative tone that he doesn’t like, but also he helps the readers to evaluate and imagine characters by themselves. The ambiguity that Kundera presents about his characters enables his readers to do experiments in the creation of the characters. By not providing the readers the details about character’s physical features and past, Kundera aims to make the readers create and narrate the characters with him. Hence, the narration comes with his polyphony technique that he masters wonderfully.

In “The narrator in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*”, Pichova explains that “In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, however, the narrator intentionally limits his powers to avoid subjugating his characters to the same totalitarian rule they try to escape on thematic level”(217). This approach fully supports Kundera’s escape from a totalitarian voice or idea which prevents the formation of various perspectives in a novel.

Thus, this escape permits the novelist to discover and experiment boundless meaning and every possible human actions as there is no character that everything is known about.

Kundera achieves this ambiguity of his characters through his narrative. The narration often consists of conflicts that Tereza and Tomas go through in that they question their own decisions and actions. From the moment that Tereza and Tomas meet, the reader sees Tomas' uncertainty about his actions: "Should he call her back to Prague for good?" "Or should he refrain from approaching her?" "Did he want her to come or did he not?" (6). By portraying these hesitations of the characters, Kundera creates another platform for the reader to go on questioning. This approach of Kundera to his characters also explicitly maintains the ambiguous position of the author. As discussed earlier, Kundera prefers to create an author that plays hide and seek in his texts in which his presence is not always evident and instead he prefers to leave traces so that he can show himself. The questions and statements that include "I" in the novel are the exact places where Kundera chooses to show himself and the parts left to the reader are the places that Kundera steps back. He creates his characters with the reader by leaving some pieces of the puzzle to the reader. For instance, his questions about characters intrude into the narration, but Kundera's approach allows readers to examine the characters and possibilities closely.

A different type of Kundera's polyphony is his narration of the same event by different characters. In the novel, the narration of the same events is made by the two different characters that experienced the event and it gives away a great deal of new information about how the two come to perceive the same event. The first example of this technique is seen in Tomas' and Tereza's own depictions of the night when they go

dancing. Tereza dances with a friend of Tomas because Tomas does not like dancing. The first narration of this event is made by Tomas (17). Here, Tomas sees Tereza's dance as a declaration of her devotion, "her ardent desire to satisfy his every whim", and this makes him realize that Tereza's body is actually compatible with every male. With these thoughts Tomas feels jealous of Tereza for the first time. "This absurd jealousy, grounded as it was in mere hypotheses, proved that he considered her fidelity an unconditional postulate of their relationship" (17). Tomas' telling of the event adds that he tells Tereza of his jealousy when they return home but he does not give further information regarding how Tereza feels when Tomas confesses her his jealousy for the first time. Tereza's narration is seen and she goes on to talk about her excitement when she learns that Tomas is jealous of her: "You mean you were really jealous? She asked him ten times or more, incredulously, as though someone had just informed her she had been awarded a Nobel Prize" (55). In this narration, Tereza hugs Tomas joyfully and dances around the room with enthusiasm. On one hand, through this narration, Tereza proclaims her happiness upon learning that Tomas is jealous of her, on the other hand Tomas' narration reveals a lot about his hesitation in being jealous of her.

This polyphony is also quite helpful in pointing out what one partner wants to tell the other one by talking about something but the other partner is unable to understand. With reference to this, there are lots of dreams and one of them belongs to Tereza who walks around a pool with a bunch of naked women singing and dancing together. When the reader first learns about this dream, it is through Tomas' perspective, as Tomas narrates what Tereza told him about this dream. What Tomas knows is the basic outlines of the dream; he knows naked women dancing around a pool and he shoots the women in the middle of the pool who are unable to do the knee-bend that the dance required. Tomas

knows he eventually shoots Tereza in her dream (19). These are the things that Tomas knows about this dream. A few pages later, the reader realizes that Tomas cannot grasp the hidden meaning behind this dream when Tereza points out that "Its horror did not begin with Tomas' first pistol shot; it was horrifying from the outset. Marching naked in formation with a group of naked women was for Tereza the quintessential image of horror" (56). Tereza remembers how her mother forbade her to lock the bathroom door when she used the bathroom. Learning this from Tereza's point of view makes the reader detect another meaning out of the dream and it gives another meaning to the part in her dream. Without the narration from Tomas' perspective, the reader would have been unable to understand what Tomas understood from this dream; they would only know what Tereza was trying to tell Tomas. On the other hand, without Tereza's perspective on this dream, the reader would never have been informed about the past experiences of Tereza and perhaps could have judged Tereza for being too sensitive and emotional. But with these different perspectives on hand, the reader is able to be one step further from both of the characters and understand one of the reasons for their problems in their relationship. The reader now knows both what Tereza wanted to say and what Tomas failed to understand, so s/he actually now has a better informed opinion about Tomas than Tereza has.

### **Kundera's Technique of Advance Notice**

In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* Kundera states "the wisdom of the novel comes from having a question for everything. The novelist teaches the reader to comprehend the world as a question" (1). With reference to this, Kundera applies to advance notice to show the validity of his statement about questioning. To expose the

readers to the questions that Kundera gives importance to, he diverts the attention of the readers from the storyline. A reader who is too attached to the storyline can in fact read only to learn about what happens to Tomas and Tereza, and unconsciously ignore some of the fundamental questions that the writer tries to present. To prevent his readers from getting too excited by the story line, Kundera uses the technique called as advance notice. By advance notice, Kundera interrupts the story and makes himself apparent to remind the readers that these characters are created by him and then, he reveals the end of an event that the reader might wonder. In that sense, in "The narrator in Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*" Pichova gives the aim of Kundera's technique of advance notice:

By revealing the conclusion of the novel much earlier than expected, the narrator eliminates suspense and lays bare his technique with all its complexities. When a text is dominated by a suspenseful plot, the reader can block out everything but the outcome of the novel. By eliminating suspense, the narrator points to himself and his technique and forces the reader to read beyond the plot." (*Slavic and East European Journal*, 220).

Hence, this method helps the reader to focus on the *sjuzhet*, which is the theme surrounding the text, rather than focusing on the *fabula*, which is the story line or the plot. In *Art of the Novel*, Kundera also mentions about why he applies this technique in his novels:

I have always constructed them (novels) on two levels: on the first, I compose the novel's story, over that, I develop the themes. The themes are worked out steadily within and by the story. Whenever a novel abandons its themes and settles for just telling the story, it goes flat " (*Art of the Novel*, 83).

Kundera's technique of advance notice is also linked to his use of polyphony. As it was indicated earlier, polyphony is the simultaneous existence of voices, and Kundera does not let any voice become more dominant. Thus, he prevents the voice of the narration from becoming dominant by interrupting the storyline and by unveiling the end. Therefore, Kundera's technique of advance notice is indeed an example of polyphony, as well.

The most striking example of Kundera's use of advance notice is actually in the second part of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, "Body and Soul". Part two talks about how Tereza and Tomas happen to meet and how Tereza comes to Prague by leaving all of her life behind her to live with Tomas from the perspective of Tereza. All these were told earlier in Part One from Tomas' perspective so the reader has already known whether Tereza will keep up with living with Tomas or not. Thus, advance notice of Part Two is actually Part One, and by retelling the same events, Kundera diverts the reader's attention from the events (storyline) to how Tereza perceives them. The reader has already known from Tomas' narrative how Tereza had discovered the letter that gave away Tomas' relationship with Sabina, for this reason what holds the reader's attention in part two is not how Tereza learned their relationship but how she felt during all these events.

Another notable example of advance notice in the novel is about Tereza and Tomas' deaths. This advance notice is presented to the reader with a letter that Sabina receives from Tomas' son, and the letter does not only notify of their death but also how they were living:

For the past few years, they had been living in a village, where Tomas was employed as a driver at a collective farm. From time to time they would drive over to the next town and spend the

night in a cheap hotel. The road there wound through some hills, and their pick-up had crashed and hurtled down a steep incline. Their bodies had been crushed to a pulp. The police determined later that the brakes were in a disastrous condition (122).

Throughout the book, Tomas and Tereza's relationship can never be described as a stable and predictable relationship because of their incessant quarrels. The reader has always been curious about how their relationship ends up. However, through the letter of Tomas' son, Kundera gives advance notice of their relationship. Now, the reader is informed that Tereza and Tomas will be together until they die, although s/he goes on reading about turmoil in their relationship in the following chapters.

After the letter of Tomas' son, Tomas' life is seen in great transitions. Tomas loses his job as a doctor at the hospital because of an article against Russia that he writes for a magazine and ends up as a window washer. The reader may wonder if Tomas will ever be able to return to his profession, whereas Kundera excludes the suspense by stating beforehand (through the letter in the previous chapter) that he will end up as a driver and never return back to his profession. This allows the reader to pay more attention to the events that lead him to lose his job. As the events are associated with historical and political nature of the period, Kundera naturally wants the reader to focus more on the injustices that lead to Tomas' losing his job. And the bond that the reader has founded with Tomas plays a significant role to make the reader more emotionally charged to these injustices that Tomas faces because now the reader knows that they are irreparable and thus they will affect the character until his death. The article, which Tomas writes, also causes to attract the attention of the secret police who asks Tomas to sign a paper that he was misused by the editors of the journalist. In other words, the police wants him to be

seen as a supporter of Russia by retracting the article. However, instead of retracting, Tomas resigns from the clinic he works at: “assuming (correctly) that after he had descended voluntarily to the lowest rung of the social ladder. The police would have no more hold over him and he would cease to interest them” (188). Here, Kundera again presents the advance notice to the reader that Tomas was right in thinking that to fall off the radar of the secret police he must resign from his job. This particular advance notice actually helps in gaining the reader’s support for Tomas’ decision. By pointing out that Tomas was right in his thinking beforehand, Kundera prevents readers from thinking that Tomas had done a wrong thing and made a wrong decision. This approval by Kundera strengthens the reader’s confidence in Tomas and improves the relationship between Tomas and the reader.

Thus, by using advance notices Kundera eliminates the suspense in the novel and this enables the reader to disregard the plot and be involved in questions that Kundera poses. In addition to these, Kundera makes sure that the focus is on the ideas behind the actions. He also strengthens the relationship between his character and the reader not only by approving character’s decision before any suspicion occurs on the mind of the reader but also by giving out an information about a character’s future that the reader knows before the character himself. Furthermore, he makes polyphony apparent and possible by reminding the reader that as an author his voice should be heard simultaneously with the voice of the story.

## **Technique of Tone Variation**

Polyphony can be employed by changing the speaker or the narrator of the novel, as well as by changing the form and style of the writing. Similar to polyphony, Kundera achieves another type of variety by changing his tone either abruptly or gradually, thus the mood and different perspectives of an event are emphasized more strongly. At the same time, his novels get rid of automatism through these sudden musical variations. In *The Paris Review* Kundera states that "Each part could have a musical tempo indication: moderato, presto, andante, et cetera." A change that he employs in his tone is seen when Franz came to the realization that his wife commented on the ugliness of Sabina's pendant which reminds Sabina (Franz's mistress) that Franz was her husband, not hers. Franz's realization comes step by step, with an increasing excitement in his tone: "Franz suddenly saw the answer plainly..." "Or to be more precise..." "Yes, Franz saw it plainly..." (107). The steps his mind takes are apparent in these series of sentences and he creates somewhat an increasing speed, an allegro in the tone of the narration. When Franz reaches the peak of the realization, the chapter ends abruptly and it gives way to the "Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words" chapter in a much calmer and more subtle tone. The first sentence that the chapter starts off is that "There are houses running along one side of the street..." (107). This street description doesn't increase its tone in its nature, thus it can be called as *lento* for the tempo of narration. However, the excitement can build up when a man thinks his wife is aware of his infidelity and for this reason, there is nothing that can increase the excitement in the description of a street. As it is seen, Kundera suddenly changes the tempo of his novel. While here he presents an uneventful, quiet tone with the description of a street, in the previous paragraph he gives a very moving and fast tone through Franz's affair.

### **Kundera's Technique of Metaphor and Juxtaposition**

Through his art of the novel, Kundera takes revenge on some novels, which diminish the role of the novel into subordination of philosophy, history and politics. In a conversion, he claims that these novels misuse the novel by presenting their ideas through “novelistic illustrations” (“The Review of Contemporary Fiction”). Besides, as mentioned above, when graphomania is employed, everyone devotes themselves to listen to these illusions (kitsch).

Kundera disturbs the reader by unveiling these manipulations. Besides, his novelistic techniques help his passion for the demystification of these illusions. In that sense, metaphors and similes are also among the experimental forms of Kundera’s novels. While employing these similes and metaphors, Kundera stays true to his identity as a writer and does not etiquette anything as good or bad. For this reason, he uses similes and metaphors for exploring characters and character’s relationships with one another. Again, he does not present clear conclusions or answers; instead, he leaves questions and ambiguity by using simile and metaphor in this way. In addition to these, he sets up a more intense narration and deeper understanding for his readers; therefore, he grabs the attention of the reader to the ideas behind the relationships and characters.

One of the similes repeated many times is Tereza’s “heavy suitcase”. In the beginning of the novel, the reader does not yet know Tereza’s past and her “heavy” character, and the first meeting of Tereza with the reader occurs when Tereza comes to Tomas’ house for the first time. She tells Tomas that she leaves her suitcase at the station, and when Tomas goes to the station for her suitcase, his opening remarks are “it was large and enormously heavy”(9). The heaviness of the suitcase is the first indication to the reader that Teresa symbolizes the heavy character in their relationship and at the

same time it shows that Tomas has tried to avoid such heaviness in his life: “He tried to design his life in such a way that no woman could move in with a suitcase” (9). When Kundera refers to the suitcase, his word choices should be noted here because he does not change his description of it by constantly using the words “enormous” and “heavy”. These indicate that Tereza’s suitcase actually is a metaphor for her life and her heavy existence. By bringing her heavy suitcase to his home, Tomas willingly accepts the burden of their love.

Kundera’s use of juxtaposition is also his technique for proving his welcoming approach to ambiguities in the novel and he suggests this: “the novel is grounded in the relativity and ambiguity of things human, the novel is incompatible with the totalitarian universe” (AN, 14). This ambiguity willingly accepts contradictory juxtapositions by which “a dogmatic thought turns hypothetical” (AN, 79). For example, in the novel, lightness and weight are not reflected as opposites; instead Kundera juxtaposes them by describing desirable. First he presents the assumption that man feels himself as being destined to choose one of them. Nevertheless, Kundera tries to refute this assumption by portraying light Tomas and heavy Teresa as sympathetic characters. Throughout the novel, he affirms neither of them and heaviness meets lightness all the time. Instead, he shows that Teresa’s heaviness involves in Tomas lightness and Tomas’ lightness is engrossed in Teresa’s heaviness. Tomas, believing in lightness and meaningless of love, begins to find love in Teresa and Teresa starts to find heaviness unbearable because of the disappointments that she encountered. For these reasons, juxtaposition and metaphor in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* are employed to disturb the assumptions that the

readers attach themselves. Kundera does not offer any affirmation to opposites, they just meet: "What then shall we choose? Weight or lightness?" (5).

### **Recurring Themes in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being***

In *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera defines novel "It is the great prose form by which an author thoroughly explores, by means of experimental selves (characters), some great themes of existence" (42). Then with reference to this, the novel asserts nothing but it explores the unknown side of existence through themes that he considers essential. As mentioned above, he is concerned with possibilities of human existence and to present possibilities, he poses questions. His explorations of these questions are built around themes which form the unity of the novel. In other words, the unity in the novel can only be provided by themes. In *The New York Times*, Kundera says "The synthetic power of the novel is capable of combining everything into a unified whole like the voices of polyphonic music. The unity of a book need not stem from the plot, but can be provided by the theme." Through the predominance of certain themes in a unified form, he can investigate basic questions that challenge kitsch and graphomania. Therefore, he suggests how novel moves away from his vision of novel when themes are removed from the novel: "I've always constructed them [novels] on two levels: on the first, I compose the novel's story; over that, I develop the themes. The themes are worked out steadily within and by the story. Whenever a novel abandons its themes and settles for just telling the story, it goes flat" (AN, 83).

For these reasons, theme for Kundera is one of the most significant devices of his novels for posing his question which is the core of his novel. His novel's coherence is provided

by the situations which are connected thematically. He suggests this in *Paris Review*, "It's the unity of the themes and their variations that gives coherence to the whole." In addition to these, He builds up themes one by one to form the greatest theme of the novel, that is: lightness and weight. In other words, in Kundera's novel these thematic variations contribute to this major theme. The theme of lightness and weight will be dwelled upon latest as other themes will create a clearer understanding for this theme.

### **Theme of Kitsch**

Before moving on to other themes in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, it is necessary to examine the theme of kitsch as it represents the main ideas behind Kundera's understanding of the novel. Kundera integrates the theme of kitsch to his story line in "The Grand March" and explains what it means to the character Sabina. Kundera explains his understanding of kitsch, "The translation of the stupidity of received ideas into the language of beauty and feeling" (AN, 163), or in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, he also explicates "kitsch is the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence" (246). He believes that kitsch portrays something evil as good, and while portraying it as such, it eliminates questions, therefore any doubt regarding the matter. Sabina's own encounter with kitsch is presented when she remembers how a German political organization once organized one of her exhibitions and the brochure. Heroically, it talks about how she suffers from oppression and Communism in Czechoslovakia and how she has been able to surpass all limitations to execute her art "Her paintings are a struggle for happiness" (251) and these explanations invoke great horror and realization in Sabina. For Sabina, her enemy is

kitsch, not Communism. In that sense, the brochure that the political organization prepares is “translation of stupidity of received ideas” under the veil of beautiful language of heroism. With reference to this example, it is possible to claim that since kitsch reinforces accepted norm rather than challenging it, its source comes from ready-made sweetest emotions that are appreciation of beauty and goodness of human existence; thus, this prevents the ability of questioning which is the backbone of Kundera’s art of the novel.

To understand kitsch, it is necessary to figure out the approach of Sabina. As mentioned above, she does not hate communism but she detests communist kitsch and she points out how kitsch can be dangerous under a totalitarian regime, eventually when it takes the form of “totalitarian kitsch”. May Day parades in Czechoslovakia symbolize kitsch and Sabina’s recollections show that on May Day, the women, wearing red, white or blue, go out to the streets and from hearts with five-pointed stars and letters while people are watching them from their balconies: “As a group approached the reviewing stand, even the most blasé faces would beam with dazzling smiles, as if trying to prove they were properly joyful or, to be more precise, in proper *agreement*” (246). The problem with these May Day parades is, Kundera goes on, that their motto is not “Long live Communism!” but “Long live life!” “The power and the cunning of Communist politics lay in the fact that it appropriated this slogan. For it was this idiotic tautology (“Long live life!”) which attracted people indifferent to the theses of Communism to the Communist parade”(247). Thus, through these parades what Communism aims to is to hide behind something that praises life, while what they are trying to say is something much more different. In terms of kitsch, they hide behind kitsch to make their mottos seem probable and to gain the people’s support. Kundera explains this, “the feeling induced by kitsch

must be a kind the multitudes can share” (248), and the Communists know that if they provoke a feeling, and not an ideology, and make it seem as if they were doing these out of their joy from being alive or being Czech, people will not realize the propaganda behind it. For this reason, Sabina does not have a problem with Communism, but with totalitarian kitsch. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera says:

When I say totalitarian, what I mean is that everything that infringes on kitsch must be banished for life: every display of individualism (because a deviation from the collective is a spit in the eye of smiling brotherhood); every doubt (because anyone who starts doubting details will end by doubting life itself); all irony (because in the realm of kitsch everything must be taken seriously) (249).

Here he shows how totalitarian kitsch is contrary to his understanding of the novel. He also supports this in *The Art of the Novel* by claiming why individualism, doubt and irony, which are basic points of his novel, irritate the realm of kitsch: “irony irritates. Not because it mocks or attacks but because it denies us our certainties by unmasking the world as ambiguity” (134). In that sense, as opposed to kitsch, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* insists on using irony through his interpretation of “light” and “heavy”. For instance in some parts of the book, lightness perceived as loss of life value can be burden for the characters because lightness may refer to emptiness, meaninglessness and loneliness, thus sometimes lightness become unbearably heavy for the characters. However, heaviness means to undertake responsibilities which dismay the characters. Hence the irony between the notions declares the ambiguity in the human existence that belongs to his art of the novel. Another point that Kundera supports in his novel against kitsch is individuality. Since individuality implies pluralistic truths of the

novel, it applies to Kundera's novelistic understanding. With reference to individuality, he puts forward "The novel is the imaginary paradise of individuals. It is the territory where no one possesses the truth, neither Anna nor Karenin, but where everyone has the right to be understood, both Anna and Karenin" (AN, 159). Thematically, he appreciates the notion of individuality against kitsch's collectivism by depicting character's choice. For instance, Tomas loses his job as a surgeon and begins to work as a window cleaner as he refuses to refute the article that he writes against Communist authorities. In spite of his loss, this is his individual victory against collectivist or pack mentality.

Kundera keeps avoiding totalitarian world of kitsch by respecting privacy of individualism through his narratological techniques, as well. For this reason, he subverts his omniscient identity as an author and limits his access to the character's world. For instance, he confesses his lack of understanding one of his characters:

Almost apologetically, the editor said to Tereza, 'Of course they're completely different from your pictures.' 'Not at all,' said Tereza. 'They're the same.' Neither the editor nor the photographer understood her; and even I find it difficult to explain what she had in mind when she compared a nudist beach to the Russian invasion. (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 67)

Here "I" refers to the author himself and like editor he cannot comment on Tereza's photos which compare the Russian invasion to a nudist beach. In that sense, he emancipates his character and reflects her as an individual, who has independent opinions, by both revealing himself to the reader and diminishing his omniscient author identity. In addition to this, absence of omniscient author identity leaves blanks for the reader to fill in. The reader has already been told that Tereza is a character who finds nudity very disturbing due to her childhood memories. Therefore, for Tereza, nudity is as

chaotic as tanks and soldiers invading a city. Tereza finds these two unlike things similar and compares them in her photograph. Despite the fact that the writer, editor and the other photographer are shocked and oblivious of the reason, the reader has already been given potential to bridge the connection between the blanks.

As mentioned above, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, since Kundera never regards the author as the owner of the definitive judgment, he respects for sacredness of character's individuality to resist prying eyes of kitsch. Therefore, for the sake of individualism, in the novel he avoids internal monologues which can be regarded as one of the most intimate literary way of portraying a character. In *the Art of Novel*, He explains his preference not to use it: "Thanks to the fantastic espionage of interior monologue, we have learned an enormous amount about what we are. But, myself, I cannot use that microphone" (28). With reference to this, for example, he does not use this microphone when he reports Sabina's feeling: "I think that Sabina, too, felt the strange enchantment of the situation: Her lover's wife standing oddly compliant and timorous before her" (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 65). Here, he is suspicious of Sabina's emotions but if he preferred interior monologue, he would give vivid portrayal of her inner world. In the light of these, it can be said that Kundera's opinions are voiced in the novel, whereas, they end up with a doubtful tone to offer ambiguous world of the novel against the oppressive world of kitsch.

As opposed to Kundera's art of novel, kitsch aims to form conformity that rests on the ideal vision of the world. In that sense, it makes its followers blind to the unacceptable things in the human existence, and Kundera suggests this: "To please, one must confirm what everyone wants to hear, put oneself at the service of received ideas" (*AN*, 163). In other words, it seeks for Kantian "categorical agreement with being" (*The*

*Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 247). For example, in Tereza's nightmare, she was marching around the pool naked with other women in a line, singing songs, and a man standing up high shoots women dead if they do something wrong. Here, cheerful song is part of Tereza's dream and they sing not to die. The nightmare symbolically has a close relationship with the part where the Communist ideal is cheerfully celebrated on May Day parades and here, people deny the existence of unacceptable in accordance with kitsch to be a part of the group and hide the shattering reality behind what they are celebrating. Kundera supports that the real danger begins when the Communist ideal takes the place of the Communist reality. While "death" is hidden by cheerful songs in Tereza's dream, the (unacceptable) realities behind the Communist ideal is hidden by happiness of celebrations on May Day parades. With reference to this, Kundera defines Tereza's dream as a kitsch which is considered as a curtain to hide the inappropriate one to promote Kantian "the categorical agreement with being": "Tereza's dream reveals the true function of kitsch: kitsch is a folding screen set up to curtain off death" (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 251).

In the light of these, it can be claimed that throughout novel, Kundera declares a kind of war against kitsch both thematically and structurally and his approach to kitsch presents significant hints to comprehend his novels.

### **Non-authoritative writer**

In *the Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera challenges and subverts traditional authorship by restricting his authority over the reader. He provides equality by giving plurality of viewpoints since he never assumes himself as the guarantor of the meaning in the novel. Therefore, for him "the novel is not author's confession; it is an

investigation of human life in the trap the world has become" (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 218). With reference to this, he endows the reader with a kind of equal and democratic aura in the novel since he aims to remove totalitarian nature of kitsch from his novel structurally as well. For instance, Kundera emphasizes that the reader knows as much as he does. In other words, in some instances, he reminds the readers that they are in fact very close to him in their knowledge of the characters. Sabina as a Czech gets angry with a distinguished Czech émigré, and all of a sudden she gets annoyed with all the Czechs. Walking down a street, she becomes aware that her thoughts are meaningless and childish and she starts questioning why she thinks this way. "No, they were probably bewildered by the sudden hatred, the lack of understanding they were all subjected to in emigration. Then why wasn't she sorry for them? Why didn't she see them for the woeful and abandoned creatures they were" (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 96). After Sabina's questioning of herself, the tone changes abruptly and Kundera asserts, "We know why" (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 96). Here, "we" refers to the writer and the reader and he brings the reader closer to his position as the creator of this story and of Sabina. The reason that "We know why" is because Kundera has already mentioned how Sabina's relationship with her father had led her to enjoy betrayals. Thus, here, the reader knows as much as Kundera does, and thus, Kundera emphasizes that both the reader and he simultaneously know why Sabina gets angry in this way. As the reader has already known the reason, the reader does not focus on this specific event, instead s/he concentrates on the notion of betrayal. Therefore through Kundera's technique, instead of a plot, the theme is highlighted and this enables the reader to question.

Another example that indicates Kundera as a non-authoritative writer is that a character is not a living being, but s/he is created out of ideas or imagination. In that

sense, by not presenting detail about characters' appearances and reminding fictiveness of the characters, Kundera gives freedom to the reader to imagine and this helps the reader to fill in the blanks that he leaves. With reference to these, in *The Art of the Novel*, he suggests that "the reader's imagination automatically completes the writer's vision" (28). Reader and the writer collaborate to create characters and for this reason, he gives up his authority again and shares his authorship with the reader. He explains how his characters come into being as such:

It would be senseless for the author to try to convince the reader that his characters once actually lived. They were not born of a mother's womb; they were born of stimulating phrase or two or from a basic situation. Tomas was born of the saying 'Einmalistkeinmal'. Tereza was born of the rumbling of a stomach (*UBL*, 39).

Here, he explicitly explains fictiveness of the characters to break Coleridge's suspension of disbelief. And also throughout the novel, Kundera never gives a detail about physical portrayal of his characters thus; he provides opportunity to the readers to interpret them on their own.

As mentioned above, in the novel, although Kundera sometimes intrudes the novel by showing himself with personal pronoun "I", he also presents a kind of indifference standpoint in his narration to depict his characters. For this reason, to protect independence of his characters, the novel ends up like an impartial source which does not give any permission to be involved. For instance, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* Kundera provides "A Short Dictionary of Words Misunderstood" which defines everything from fidelity to betrayal. The dictionary's role in the novel is to demonstrate how each character understands specific words and what they think about

them. Here, the dictionary is an impartial source telling character's understanding of specific words and thus, he protects his distance from the characters. Kundera uses his own voice and explains the readers why he is now going to form a dictionary. "If I were to make a record of all Sabina and Franz's conversations, I could compile a long lexicon of their misunderstandings. Let us be content, instead, with a short dictionary" (87).

It also deepens the reader knowledge about the characters because in the form of the narration, the readers are only able to see how a character reacts to a situation. However, with the dictionary, the reader gets the opportunity to learn why the character thinks in a specific way because Kundera explains what each character understands from certain words. In this way, reader has opportunity to recognize each character as Kundera does, thus as an author, Kundera again equalizes his and reader's knowledge of characters.

### **Allusions Technique**

Kitsch as an evil in aesthetics tries to eliminate anything that is offensive to provide categorical agreement. It removes everything that disturbs the categorical agreement. In that sense, it offers a sort of escape from the burden of undesirable or unacceptable realities. Kitsch presents this escape by imposing forgetting as Kundera suggests "Kitsch is a stopover between being and oblivion" (*ULB*, 274). Therefore, when kitsch suspends memory, it can easily manipulate to provide categorical agreement which destroys individualism. However, novel as the investigation of individuality and the forgotten, protects the memory to resist kitsch and Kundera's confirms the novel's pivotal role in preserving memory: "raison d'être of the novel is to keep of life under a permanent light and to protect us from the forgetting of being" (*AN*, 17).

With reference to these, it is possible to say that kitsch's foremost manipulative device for surviving comes from its reliance on forgetting. Again, Milan Kundera implicitly claims this in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (3). For example, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, it can be inferred that while kitsch only foregrounds the glory with cheerful songs on May Day parades, it makes people forget the death behind May Day parades. Nevertheless, the art of novel through its techniques reminds each facet of realities. In that sense, while kitsch imposes forgetting, in Kundera's novel, allusions may reconstruct the memory and destroy the artificial solace that kitsch offers.

For Kundera, allusion with its referentiality has a great role in his novels since it serves as the link that connects the narration and the story in the novel to the real world and the real history. As mentioned earlier, the Czech history both politically and socially holds a great place in his novel with the storyline and it affects the lives of the characters immensely. Despite the fact that Kundera gives a great deal of attention to historical allusions and mythical allusions, he does integrate the near past of Czechoslovakia and particularly Prague with the help of allusions in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

Kundera alludes to Oedipus to criticize those who do not question some totalitarian acts of Communism. Protagonist Tomas compares and contrasts the Communist kitsch to Oedipus. Oedipus is ignorant of his guilt and results of his actions, whereas he undertakes the responsibilities of his actions. However, followers of Communist kitsch claim that they were ignorant of what they did and at this point, Tomas questions whether being ignorant of their actions makes them innocent. He suggests that those, who do not undertake the responsibility of their actions, hide themselves behind the curtain of kitsch. In that sense, unlike Oedipus, followers of totalitarian acts of

Communism under the artificial innocent mask of kitsch, do not accept the responsibility for their actions and therefore deny and forget the realities and resume staying in power. In the light of these, here thanks to the allusion, Kundera succeeds in implying realities behind kitsch by reminding the mythical Oedipus.

As suggested above, Kundera uses allusions to resist in kitsch which imposes forgetting in order to exist. However, this is not the sole reason of his use of allusion. He also uses it to employ digression in his art of the novel and digressions are one of the essential characteristics of Kundera's art of the novel. Through digressive narrative technique, he breaks the unity of action to develop and interweave his existential themes. In other words, instead of narrating the plot from beginning to end, he enables themes to be connected through digressions because as in an interview with Philip Roth, Kundera explicates "the unity of the book need not stem from the plot, but can be provided by theme" (*Voices and Visions: selected essays*, 197).

Kundera, who breaks the unity of actions through digressions, provides unity of the novel through thematic coherence. For instance, the allusion to *Anna Karenina* allows Kundera to once again stop telling the story of Tereza and Tomas and imply one of his existential themes. When he alludes to *Anna Karenina*, he draws attention to the theme of mysterious coincidences in life which he considers as one of the beauties of life. At the beginning of the novel, Anna and Vronsky's first meeting is at a train station and they witness the death of a railway worker who accidentally falls in front of the train. By the end of the novel, Anna commits suicide by throwing herself under a train. Therefore, the novel starts and ends with someone being run over by a train. With reference to these, here while Kundera alludes to *Anna Karenina*, he presents his theme as:

It is wrong, then, to chide the novel for being fascinated by mysterious coincidences (like the meeting of Anna, Vronsky, the railway station, and death or the meeting of Beethoven, Tomas, Tereza, and the cognac), but it is right to chide man for being blind to such coincidences in his daily life. For he thereby deprives his life of a dimension of beauty (*ULB*, 51-2).

Through the allusion of *Anna Karenina*, Kundera explores the possibility of mysterious coincidences in life by breaking the unity of action. In addition to these, as usual Kundera shows how he combines his themes and structure of the novel when he alludes to *Anna Karenina* in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. He refers to one of the novelistic techniques that he confirms in the novel. Here, Kundera underlines that the novel has a “symmetrical composition” because of the mysterious coincidences. With reference to *Anna Karenina* which nearly starts and ends at the same point, the novel sometimes can include coincidences which construct symmetrical composition for Kundera. In the light of these, he goes on to explain how this symmetry can be understood by the readers:

This symmetrical composition- the same motif appears at the beginning and at the end- may seem quite “novelistic” to you, and I am willing to agree, but only on condition that you refrain from reading such notions as “fictive”, “fabricated”, and “untrue to life” into the word “novelistic”. Because human lives are composed in precisely such a fashion (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 51).

In that sense, for Kundera “symmetrical composition” is a technique which should be regarded as a novelistic element contributing to the novel’s theme and structure. As a struggle against forgetting, allusion not only refreshes the memory against kitsch but also it disrupts the unity of action through digressive narrative which contributes to the unity of themes and structure of the art of the novel.

## **Kundera's Technique of Repetition**

Kundera starts *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by referring to Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return where all the actions and event of life infinitely recur. In other words, when something happens, it does not happen once but for all the time and it ceaselessly repeats. Therefore, this recurrence endows actions of the individual with meaning through heaviness. According to eternal return, an action recurring infinitely has an immense heaviness and significance in the individual life. For this reason, the idea that everything recurs as the individual once lives it gives weight and meaning to the person's actions and decisions. The world without eternal return is light and meaningless because nothing echoes. Kundera asserts this as such: "Putting it negatively, the myth of eternal return states that a life which disappears once and for all, which doesn't return, is like a shadow, without weight, dead in advance, and whether it was horrible, beautiful, or sublime, its horror, sublimity and beauty mean nothing" (*ULB*, 3). Here, Kundera indicates how Nietzsche associates eternal return with meaning and heaviness. With reference to these, in the last pages of the novel, while Kundera comments on the tremendous significance of repetition (heaviness), he also implicitly explains why lightness is unbearable by saying "happiness is the longing for repetition" (295).

Kundera is engrossed with the notion of eternal return not only on the thematic level, but also he applies to it in his novel's structure. In that sense, in his novel, some words are repeated to invest the meaning. In other words, throughout the novel, these words are recurred in order to acquire meaning or significance with a sense of heaviness. Thus, this helps him improve vital themes and ideas of the novels in a succinct way.

The echo created by recurrence contributes to the holistic aura of the novel. More precisely, it grants harmony and coherence to the composition of the novel. In addition to these, although each time these repeated words acquire new meaning, they protect their former meanings. For example, Kundera explains how a bowler hat as a recurring motif acquires heaviness in *the Unbearable Lightness of Being*:

It returned again and again, each time with a different meaning, and all the meanings flowed through the bowler hat like water through a riverbed. (...) Each time the same object would give rise to a new meaning, though all former meanings would resonate (like an echo, like a parade of echoes) together with the new one. Each new experience would resound, each time enriching the harmony" (86).

While the bowler hat is echoed, it gains additional meanings by preserving its former meanings. It is reminiscent of Sabina's grandfather, the notion of betrayal, her father's death, and object of love games. As a result, the writer uses the bowler hat to comment on the notion of betrayal and hence, he enriches the meaning of the word through repetition.

Repetitions are not only seen as motifs, but also they are used to explore the themes of the novel. For instance, he repeats the words "kitsch", "forgetting", "identity", "lightness", "weight" and "soul" to present existential themes of the novel. As the codes of the themes through recurrence, these words have gained independent meanings that are specific to *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In that sense, they can be classified as heavy words of the novel.

For all these reasons, repetition as a literary device is one of the basic techniques in Kundera's novel since he can develop the significant notions of the novel to reveal existential themes.

### **Technique of Humor**

Kitsch or the illusion of "categorical agreement with being" (*ULB*, 247) presents what everyone wants to hear; and it provides this totality by offering the assumption of absolute truths. However, Kundera's art of the novel strives to undermine this illusion by examining the existence which is the realm of possibilities and ambiguity. In *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera humorously comments on the absurdity of kitsch's assumption of getting to the absolute truth through the metaphor of God's laughter and thus he quotes the Jewish proverb: "Man thinks, God laughs" (158). Influenced by this proverb, he goes further as to say: "The art of the novel came into the world as the echo of God's laughter" (158). With regard to this, he supports that God laughs at man's futile thinking for absolute truth because when man thinks, the truth escapes and there is no way of getting to the certain truth. (158) Here, he points to man's useless attempt to reach unity and the truth and in that sense, Kundera's metaphor of God's laughter seems to be akin to the absurdity in Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Sisyphus is aware of his pointless attempts to succeed in his task but he goes on doing it. As mentioned above, in Kundera's God's laughter metaphor, God knows man's futile effort for searching totality and certain truth and laughter comes from God's knowing the absurdity of man's situation. Sisyphus' absurdity also comes from his being aware of the futile attempt to fulfill his task. Kundera's art of the novel offers the same connection between novel and kitsch, in other words, novel laughs at kitsch.

In *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera defines kitsch's follower as "agélaste" (159) called as humorless man. It can be claimed that as kitsch's follower, agélaste believes in Kantian "categorical agreement with being" or existence of certain truths. With reference to these, Kundera explains that there cannot be any reconciliation between the novelist and agélaste in that s/ he cannot hear God's laughter:

No peace is possible between the novelist and the agélaste. Never having heard of God's laughter, the agélaste is convinced that the truth is obvious, that all men necessarily think the same thing. But it is precisely in losing the certainty of truth and unanimous consent of others that man becomes an individual" (AN, 159).

Here Kundera emphasizes how humorless agélaste is bitterly opposed to his understanding of the novel in that s/he is against both individuality and ambiguity that the novel's laughter offers. As mentioned above, Kundera defines agélaste as a person who "has no sense of humor" (159) and in that sense, humor can also be reckoned as one of the intrinsic parts of his novel. In *Testaments Betrayed*, Kundera portrays the function of humor as such:

"Humor; the intoxicating relativity of human things, the strange pleasure that comes of the certainty that there is no certainty" (32). In the light of this, he humorously describes humor's function of eradicating certain truths, thus, humor plays a central role in understanding Kundera's art of the novel in that he mostly employs it in his novel as a refusal to recognize kitsch.

Humor is regarded as such a significant part of the novel that Kundera makes a direct correlation between the birth of the novel and humor when he gives a detailed explanation of it in *Testaments Betrayed*:

Humor is not an age old human practice; it is an invention bound up with the birth of the novel. Thus humor is not laughter, not mockery, not satire, but a particular species of the comic, which, Paz says (and this is the key to understanding humor's essence), "renders ambiguous everything it touches. (5-6)

Here, Kundera mentions about the comic when he develops the notion of humor. He goes on to tell how humor contributes to novel's skepticism and defines it as a variation of the comic. Like the notion of comic, humor is considered as having an ability to "render ambiguous everything it touches." In that sense, humor has a cruel and dark side in it since again like the notion of comic; it reveals certainty of uncertainty and meaninglessness. In addition to these, Kundera states this in *The Art of the Novel* as such: "By providing us with the lovely illusion of human greatness, the tragic brings us consolation. The comic is crueler: It brutally reveals the meaninglessness of everything" (126). According to Kundera, as opposed to the comic, the tragic like kitsch offers certain truth and meaning in the meaninglessness. Nevertheless, the comic and humor share absurdity of ambiguity in the novel.

Kundera explores humor in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* when he mentions about "the Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words". Here Kundera gives a detailed description of a street in Amsterdam to juxtapose weight and lightness in a humorous way. On one side of the street, there is "a gigantic and gothic cathedral dating from the fourteenth century" (107). On the other side of the street, there is a brothel house. He presents the border between them as such: "Between the whores' world and God's world, like a river dividing two empires, stretches an intense smell of urine" (107). While

Franz is fascinated by the weight history of the gigantic church, at the same time he has to witness the sight of lightness of the brothel house. The juxtaposition between lightness and weight forms the basis of humor.

Another humorous thing in the novel is the bowler hat of Sabina and he again juxtaposes lightness and weight by pointing to the bowler hat. She inherits it from her grandfather who was once the mayor of a town: "It was a vague reminder of a forgotten grandfather, the mayor of a small Bohemian town during the nineteenth century" (85). But now, it just turns out to be a plaything in Sabina's and Tomas' relationship. Kundera tells the bowler hat's degradation in a humorous way:

The reason why Tomas and Sabina were touched by the sight of the bowler hat in a Zurich hotel and made love almost in tears was that its black presence was not merely a remainder of their love games but also a memento of Sabina's father and grandfather, who lived in a century without aeroplanes and cars (86).

Through humor, Kundera blurs the line between lightness and weight. While it is the relic of her respectable mayor grandfather, it becomes a kind of plaything. Here, Kundera shows humor's dark and cruel side because the humor renders the meaning of the bowler hat ambiguous or liminal, in other words, it is neither the relic of a respectable man nor just a petty plaything of her game.

With reference to these, it is possible to say that humor works when the border between the significant (weight) and the insignificant (lightness) is rigid as Kundera adds in *Immortality*: "Humor can only exist when people are still capable of recognizing some border between the important and unimportant. And nowadays this border has become unrecognizable" (344).

In the light of these, it can be claimed that in Kundera's art of the novel, humor is one of the most remarkable tools that unveil the ambiguous meaning behind so called absolute truths.

### **Technique of Magical Realism**

Kundera's art of the novel is inextricably interwoven with discovering ways of questioning. For this reason, throughout his art of novel, Kundera struggles to explore ways for undermining intoxicating power of totalitarian kitsch which is totally absorbed in answers. Then, it presents only affirmation and Kantian "categorical agreement with being" through blindness to any kind of suspicion or difference. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Kundera brings depth to the notion of totalitarianism as such: "Totalitarianism is not only hell, but all the dream of paradise-- the age-old dream of a world where everybody would live in harmony, united by a single common will and faith, without secrets from one another" (233). Here, Kundera emphasizes that by distorting representation of reality, totalitarian kitsch proposes a harmonious world where other possibilities or alternatives vanish. In other words, it denies the human condition by eliminating indeterminacy and it does this through breeding forgetting the alternatives which render distorted reality of kitsch ambiguous.

In that sense, it leads its followers to live in dogmatic and manipulated reality of the paradise. Therefore, dogmatic reality of totalitarian kitsch is versus realistic representation of Kundera's hypothetical novel. Through his art of the novel, Kundera tries to find new ways for showing how the realm of paradise is also the realm of hell.

In the light of these, Kundera uses magical realism in that it seems to provide the suitable ground for proposing his hypothetical art of the novel. In other words, by offering alternative, magical realism destabilizes single vision of kitsch's reality and in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, critics Zamora and Faris state that "Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures [(...)]" (6).

It combines realism and fantasy, thus it blurs the boundaries between them to draw attention to the absurd representation of totalitarian kitsch. Wendy Faris goes on to explain it as such: "Magical realism combines realism and fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them" (*Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and Remystification of Narrative*, 1). With reference to this, it can be claimed that magical realism is a way for questioning ready-made answers of kitsch through indicating the ambiguity of boundaries.

Hence, considering magical realism's function, it is not surprising for Kundera to apply it to *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. He prefers to use it when he mentions about Tereza's dream. Magical realism involves itself in the novel with its "all-at-onceness and in-betweenness". He abruptly starts to tell the dream as if it is part of his former narration. Thus, the reader cannot notice whether it is a dream or not and he blurs the line between the reality and fantasy "organically". In her dream, while Tereza is dancing around a pool with other naked women, she and other women have to sing happy songs or else, they will be killed by Tomas with a gun. Women seem to be happy because of the songs that they sing and at the same time they celebrate the sameness and unity among them. He describes this ecstatic but soulless condition as such:

All the women had to sing! Not only were their bodies identical, identically worthless, not only were their bodies mere resounding soulless mechanisms, the women rejoiced over it! Theirs was the joyful solidarity of the soulless. The women were pleased at having thrown off the ballast of the soul- that laughable conceit, the illusion of uniqueness- to become one like the next (56).

Through this dream, Kundera refers to the notion of Kantian categorical agreement with being or kitsch. While dancing women celebrate their sameness or unity, they are indeed on the verge of being killed because of their movements against this unity. Kundera explains this contradiction in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: “On the surface, an intelligible lie; underneath, the unintelligible truth (62).

With reference to this, kitsch, like the gun is ready to destroy any resistance against its manipulation and thus, this dream is a vivid description of how kitsch “folds screen set up to curtain off death” (*ULB*, 251). Magical realism removes the curtain because the invisible one is brought to the surface and it succeeds it by blurring the fantasy and the reality.

For all these reasons, Kundera uses magical realism for “an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become” as he states in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (218).

## **Metafiction**

Kundera’s art of the novel rests on the idea of the autonomous existence of the novel which renders it “realm of possibilities” (*AN*, 42). Novel’s autonomous existence, rooted in its distrust of certainties, welcomes possibility and ambiguity with a democratic approach. Kundera defines novel’s welcoming approach as the “wisdom of the novel” associated with “wisdom of uncertainties”. In the light of these, he implies the mission of the novelist as such:

Not only is the novelist nobody's spokesman but I would go so far as to claim that he is not even the spokesman for his own ideas. [...] in the course of writing he listens to another voice than that of his personal moral conviction. He listens to what I would call "the wisdom of the novel" (AN, 158).

In that sense, according to Kundera, since novel's wisdom comes from listening to individuality, in "the realm of possibilities" the novelist should overcome any sort of dominant voice aside from novel's which does not seek to impose anything. With reference to this, it can be claimed that novelist's aim is to remove sentimental voice of the dominant (totalitarian kitsch) which arouses collective memory by denying the existence of individuality and ambiguity. Then, if novel's wisdom stems from wisdom of uncertainties, totalitarian kitsch's power comes from the sentimentality that breeds forgetting of distinctions by arousing "the brotherhood of men on earth" (248, *ULB*). In the light of these, Kundera's general comment on kitsch's manipulation also provides a suitable ground to explain how dominant discourse or totalitarian kitsch tries to insinuate itself into the novel: "The feeling induced by kitsch must be a kind the multitudes can share. Kitsch, maynot therefore, depend on an unusual situation; it must derive from the basic images people have engraved in their memories" (248, *ULB*). In addition to this, totalitarian kitsch creates its illusion by offering the assumption of representing realities. To challenge the illusion, Kundera's art of the novel emphasizes metafiction which blurs the line between fiction and reality. The art of the novel questions the reality that totalitarian kitsch offers by drawing attention to fictional elements of the novel in other words, it indicates artificiality of kitsch's representation by highlighting fictional devices of the novel. With regard to these, in her book, critic Patricia Waugh not only defines

metafiction, but also she points out the fact that metafiction questions the dominant discourse's representation of reality:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which selfconsciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (*Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self Conscious Fiction*, 2).

Here, she reflects that metafictionselfconsciously resists totalitarian representation of reality which supports the totalitarian kitsch. Considering this, metafiction hinders reader to be absorbed into the novel by reminding artificiality of the representation and thus, it creates a distance for the reader.

For these reasons, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera consciously uses metafictional devices to investigate wisdom of the novel.

For example, when he explicitly reminds that his characters are fictional, he distorts the realistic representation: "They were not born of a mother's womb; they were born of a stimulating phrase or two or from a basic situation" (*ULB*, 39). With regard to the characters, Kundera does not mention about characters' physical description and all these prevent readers from feeling any kind of empathy for them, instead they become part of the possibilities that the novel offers.

Absence of internal monologues is another device for artificiality of the characters. Throughout the novel, Kundera does not give any clue about the inner world of the characters: "Perhaps Tomas was led to surgery by a desire to know what lies hidden on the other side of 'Es muss sein!'" (192). He is unsure about his character's motivation for being a surgeon.

Kundera's direct address to the reader is his another way for reflecting metafiction in the novel, thus he breaks the distance between author and the reader:

This symmetrical composition—the same motif appears at the beginning and at the end—may seem quite 'novelistic' to you, and I am willing to agree, but only on condition that you refrain from reading such notions as 'fictive', 'fabricated', and 'untrue to life' into the word novelistic" (51).

Thus, Kundera self-consciously reminds the reader what s/he is reading is fiction.

He also abandons linear narration and chronology of the events and employs advance notice as the device of metafiction in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. The most striking example for it is Tereza's and Tomas' death. Since the reader is told in advance, s/he has already been informed about how the story is resolved, thus through the elimination of suspense, Kundera hinders the reader from being immersed in the fictional world.

To distort the illusion of reality, Kundera uses digressive narration as well. For instance, in "Words Misunderstood" part, he presents "a short dictionary of misunderstood words" between Franz and Sabina. Here, he suddenly breaks the storyline and begins to mention about meaning of the words. Therefore, he breaks the unity of

action which is influential in representation of reality and he subverts cause and effect relationship in the plot with the digression.

All these metafictional techniques indicate how Kundera gives up his authority to enable the reader to be equally active in the writing process. Hence, Kundera also undermines representation of reality through this collaboration in the writing process.

In view of these, metafictional devices contribute to the wisdom of the novel in that it subverts the illusion of reality that the dominant discourse offers. While it parodies represented reality of the dominant discourse, it resists artificiality of the represented reality. It somewhat creates its autonomy within the tradition as Waugh implies:

Saussure distinguished between langue and parole: between the language system (a set of rules) and any act of individual utterance that take place within this system. Each metafictional novel self consciously sets its individual parole against the langue (the codes and conventions) of the novel tradition. (*Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self Conscious Fiction*, 11).

In that sense, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* succeeds in “setting its individual parole against the langue” of kitsch and therefore it can be regarded as one of the novels called as the realm of possibility.

### **Freedom of play**

As mentioned above, while Kundera’s art of the novel rests on investigating human existence or possibilities, it strives to subvert the representation of reality. As investigation of human existence prefers questions to answers and ambiguity to certainty, it denies the existence of a totalitarian truth which is incompatible with “the spirit of the novel” (AN, 14).

In that sense, while the spirit of the novel undermines the authority of the totalitarian truth, it celebrates freedom of the play which offers equivocal meaning. Indeed, in *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera explains the absence of the singular truth as such: “But why does God laugh at the sight of man thinking? Because man thinks and the truth escapes him” (158). With this metaphor, he emphasizes that there is no obvious truth in the novel which demystifies binary oppositions. Instead, throughout the novel, in order to present ambiguous nature of the novel he indicates how dichotomies depend on each other to exist. Therefore, for him, the art of the novel explores the artificiality of the border between binary oppositions: “It takes so little, so infinitely little, for a person to cross the border beyond which everything loses meaning” (AN, 124). Then, everything loses its meaning when the border is transgressed because the absence of totalitarian truth signifies the absence of a stable meaning. With reference to this, the fact that meaning is changeable provides a ground for the play in the novel.

As the realm of possibilities, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* distrusts binary oppositions. The most striking binary oppositions that Kundera offers and deconstructs are lightness and weight and he supports the absence of the border in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: “Which one is positive, weight or lightness? Parmenides responded: lightness is positive, weight negative. Was he correct or not? That is the question. The only certainty is: the lightness/weight opposition is the most mysterious and ambiguous of all” (5). As usual, he shows his mistrust of the dichotomies by giving an equivocal answer for the question.

Characters also imply artificiality of the border between lightness and weight. It does not seem possible to claim that Tomas stands for lightness or Tereza stands for weight. Although Tomas desires lightness, he never completely becomes part of it. For instance,

after Tomas and Tereza escape to Switzerland, Tereza returns to Prague alone. Tomas enjoys the lightness and freedom of living alone but shortly after he begins to miss Tereza and thus, experiences weight. Kundera explicates vacillation of Tomas' emotions as such: "On Saturday and Sunday, he felt the sweet lightness of being rise up to him out of the depths of the future. On Monday, he was hit by a weight the likes of which he had never known" (30-31).

Tereza, who longs for weight, never completely succeeds in being part of it. She thinks the soul is restricted by body. While she strictly believes in body and soul dualism, she regards soul as a sacred thing; and she is mortified by her body mechanisms. Therefore, she disregards body mechanisms and considers her body as the expression of her soul:

It was not vanity that drew her to the mirror; it was amazement at seeing her own 'I'. She forgot she was looking at the instrument panel of her body mechanisms; she thought she saw her soul shining through the features of her face. She forgot that the nose was merely the nozzle of a hose that took oxygen to the lungs; she saw it as the true expression of her nature (40).

In that sense, it can be stated that Tereza hates her body as to reject its existence. In soul and body dualism and hierarchy, she posits the soul above the body.

With reference to body and soul dualism, Kundera adds his own opinion to offer ambiguity as he does in the dualism of lightness and weight: "The old duality of body and soul has become shrouded in scientific terminology, and we can laugh at it as merely an obsolete prejudice" (40). Here, he indicates how he challenges body and soul oppositions.

As the recurring theme of the novel, betrayal is also a way for denying the certainties and binary oppositions. In that sense, Sabina's ideas about betraying are similar to Kundera's. Both of them see betrayal as a mean to emphasize their individuality

against totalitarian kitsch. Therefore, Kundera explains “Sabina was charmed more by betrayal than fidelity” (89). Throughout the novel, she betrays her father, her grandfather and her friends because betrayal undermines authority and dichotomies. For this reason, her betrayal signifies freedom and a break from binary oppositions. Kundera defines it as such: “Betrayal means breaking ranks and going off into the unknown. Sabina knew of nothing more magnificent than going off into the unknown” (89). Through her betrayal, she tries to reveal what is hidden behind totalitarian kitsch which offers binary oppositions. Actually, her ideas about painting suggest her reason to betray: “On the surface, there was always an impeccably realistic world, but underneath, behind the backdrop’s cracked canvas, lurked something different, something mysterious or abstract” (62). Behind the veil of beauty, totalitarian kitsch conceals reality by betraying and hence, what Sabina betrays is the veil of beauty imposed by totalitarian kitsch which offers dichotomies. Thus, Kundera regards betrayal as a way to offer ambiguity in resisting kitsch.

Kundera rejects singularity of the truth by claiming himself as a non-authoritative writer. He always underlines this fact by asserting he is not a confessor or owner of the truth. Therefore, in the realm of possibilities he explains the spirit of the novel as such: “No one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood” (AN, 164). Thus, once more, he shows that novel is a democratic genre by making reader question binary oppositions.

## **Laughter**

Kundera’s art of the novel denounces affirmations, certainty which banish possibilities of human existence and equivocal meaning, thus, the novel seeks to stimulate reader’s ability to question the trap imposed by the totalitarian truth. Instead, throughout his art

of novel, Kundera tries to explore semantic illusions of the language by revealing the multiple and shifting meanings of the same word. With reference to these, Kundera claims that ambiguous meaning in the novel offers the notion of laughter, however, he proposes two kinds of laughter: "Whereas the devil's laughter denoted the absurdity of things, the angel on the contrary meant to rejoice over how well ordered, wisely conceived, good and meaningful everything here below was" (*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 86-87). In the light of these, while devil's laughter implies the absence of a singular truth, angel's laughter celebrates the prescribed truth and order. Angelic laughter seems to be associated with sentiment, certainty or totalitarian truth. As opposed to angel's laughter, devil's laughter bursts from ambiguous meaning and thus, it appears to be a way of breaking up stable meaning and singular truth. Unlike angel's laughter, devil's laughter celebrates the play of shifting meaning.

In that sense, devil's laughter is also audible in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* when Kundera mentions about overlapping meanings of the bowler hat:

It returned again and again, each time with a different meaning, and all the meanings flowed through the bowler hat like water through a riverbed. I might call it Heraclitus' ('You can't step twice into the same river') riverbed: the bowler hat was a bed through which each time Sabina saw another river flow, another semantic river: each time the same object would give rise to a new meaning, though all former meanings would resonate (like echo, like a parade of echoes) together with the new one. Each new experience would resound, each time enriching the harmony (86).

Here, Kundera tells absence of a singular meaning because of the overlapping and plural meanings of the same object (the bowler hat). He also supports that each meaning of the same object contributes to the harmony. For instance, for Sabina the bowler hat is not

only a reminder of love games but also it is a relic of her grandfather and father. Considering this example, the bowler hat brings about devil's laughter through its ambiguous meaning.

Devil's laughter can also burst from misunderstandings between Sabina and Franz. Therefore, he forms "a short dictionary of misunderstood words" to show how the same word means different meanings for each character. He points out misunderstandings between Sabina and Franz as such:

Now, perhaps, we are in a better position to understand the abyss separating Sabina and Franz: he listened eagerly to the story of her life and she was equally eager to hear the story of his, but although they had a clear understanding of the logical meaning of the words they exchanged, they failed to hear the semantic susurrus of the river flowing through them (86).

He claims that "abyss" stemming from plural meanings of the same word brings about incompetency in communication and thus it leads to misunderstandings. In "Words Misunderstood" part Kundera indicates how the same word differs for each character. For instance, for Sabina "living in truth" means "lying neither to ourselves nor to others, was possible only away from the public" (111) or "Having a public, keeping a public mind, means living in lies" (112). As to Franz, "living in truth" is the opposite of what Sabina thinks: "For Franz, living in truth meant breaking down the barriers between the private and the public" (112). In fact, these examples ironically show the impossibility of a stable meaning. Throughout the novel, Kundera tries to point to how the world is indeed deprived of a stable meaning through character's perceptions. For this time, he goes on to give example of Tereza to imply indeterminacy of meaning:

We all have a tendency to consider strength the culprit and weakness the innocent victim. But now Tereza realized that in her case the opposite was true! [...] Her weakness was aggressive and kept forcing him to capitulate until eventually he lost his strength and was transformed into the rabbit in her arms (307).

This shows how Tereza's view about strength and weakness differs from prescribed truths of the singular truth. Considering these, meaning has a tendency to slip away and while indeterminate meaning signifies failure of language in presenting stable meaning, they also offer variety of meaning which facilitates ambiguity and possibility in understanding human existence.

As mentioned above, Kundera explains that devil's laughter threatens angel's laughter and its harmony. Furthermore, he justifies humorous devil's laughter in that it offers infinite possibilities of meaning: "Initially, therefore laughter is the province of the devil" (*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 61). Since laughter helps reader for transgressing the border of the totalitarian truth, it contributes to the wisdom of the novel, too. As laughter humorously breaks up Kantian "categorical agreement with being", it tries to transform collectivist into individualistic one. For this reason, laughter reveals existential problems which are intrinsic part of the human condition and it is a way of freedom from the oppressive world of the totalitarian truth.

### **Novelistic Counterpoint**

The art of the novel investigates human condition while it challenges certainties that the categorical agreement with being offers. While the novel shows beneath of the surface, kitsch hides the possibilities that the novel tries to uncover. Therefore, kitsch

presents only answers to maintain the sameness. Through art of the novel, Kundera tries to break the fictional harmony in that his art of the novel enables the reader to question Kantian “the categorical agreement with being”. In that sense, he tries to subvert this conformity in his novel with both themes and structures. With reference to this, he elucidates his aim in the art of the novel as such: “My own imperative is completely “Janáčekian”: to rid the novel of the automatism of novelistic technique, of novelistic verbalism; to make it dense” (AN, 73). Here, Kundera implies the significance of being an authentic novelist by referring to Janáček who is a musical theorist renowned with his original style. Kundera also indicates his aim of undermining conformity of kitsch by employing authentic techniques for his art of the novel, in other words, he attempts to leave some traditional elements of the novel for revealing the beneath of the surface. For instance, unlike traditional novels, the unity of his novel does not stem from the plot, instead he offers “new art of novelistic counterpoint which can blend philosophy, narrative and dream into one music” (71). In other words, he adds philosophical musings and magical realism through digressions which are held together by theme. In an interview with Philip Roth, Kundera explicitly suggests his novelty technique of “novelistic counterpoint” as such:

A novel is a long piece of synthetic prose based on play with invented characters. These are the only limits. By the term synthetic I have in mind the novelist's desire to grasp his subject from all sides and in the fullest possible completeness. Ironic essay, novelistic narrative, autobiographical fragment, historic fact, flight of fantasy: The synthetic power of the novel is capable of combining everything into a unified whole like the voices of polyphonic music. The unity of a book need not stem from the plot, but can be provided by the theme (*Shop Talk*, 94).

In that sense, “synthetic power of the novel” protects the unity in spite of novelistic counterpoint. With regard to this, it can be claimed that in novelistic counterpoint, novelistic narration is interwoven with non-fictional narration and fantasy which contribute to polyphony of the novel. On the one hand, these heterogeneous voices work in harmony in the novel through theme, on the other hand, they serve for breaking up fictional reality imposed by totalitarian truth that kitsch offers.

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is composed of these heterogeneous voices, too. For example, he adds a dictionary for misunderstood words between Franz and Sabina. However, the dictionary is a way for exploring the notions of lightness and weight which are central themes of the novel. Through “invented characters”, Kundera tries to explore the notions such as betrayal, strength, parades and music which are related to weight and lightness. The dictionary as a part of the novelistic counterpoint can be regarded as one of the heterogeneous voices of the novel.

Another striking example for novelistic counterpoint is introduction of the novel. The novel starts with a philosophical musing where Nietzsche’s theory of eternal return is discussed. When he explains the eternal return, he says “everything recurs as we once experienced it” (3). He goes on to say “in the world of eternal return the weight of unbearable responsibility lies heavy on every move we make. That is why Nietzsche called the idea of eternal return the heaviest of burdens” (4). With reference to these, actually Kundera deals with eternal return for preparing the ground for the dilemma between lightness and weight. Since a few pages later he asks “what then shall we choose? Weight or lightness?” (5). This dilemma is reflected on invented characters, thus as a novelistic counterpoint the philosophical musing on eternal return contributes to the unity of the novel through theme.

Metafiction can be regarded as a novelistic counterpoint as well. By preventing reader's immersion in the plot, Kundera enables the reader to focus on theme related to human existence. For instance, when he tells how he develops Tomas, he implies that he is born out of his reflections on one of the key themes of the novel: lightness and weight: "I have been thinking about Tomas for many years. But only in the light of these reflections did I see him clearly" (5).

As a flight of fantasy, magical realism is another form of novelistic counterpoint. Tereza's dream indicates one of the key themes of the novel: Kantian categorical agreement with being or kitsch. Through digression of the dream, Kundera draws attention to the notion of conformity imposed by kitsch. However, he abruptly begins to tell the dream as if it is not a dream; hence the dream and reality are interwoven. Although the digression of the dream seems to be a rupture in the story line, it indeed enriches the theme of the novel as a novelistic counterpoint.

"The Grand March" part is another example of novelistic counterpoint where Kundera defines kitsch with reference to characters. He regards this part as one of the examples of novelistic essay. When Kundera explains novelistic essay in an interview with Christian Salmon, he says writer describes notions as hypothetical, playful, or ironic instead of telling them in an apodictic way. (the *Paris Review*: "The Art of Fiction No: 81") In that sense, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, kitsch is not depicted with a serious tone. In the interview, Kundera also states the significance of defining kitsch in the novel by referring to the tone: "This meditation on kitsch is of vital importance to me. It is based on a great deal of thought, experience, study, and even passion. Yet the tone is never serious; it is provocative. This essay is unthinkable outside of the novel; it is a purely novelistic meditation". In other words, when Kundera comments on kitsch, he never tries

to convince readers of his belief; instead he prefers to use a questioning tone. He also supports that if he wrote the essay on kitsch aside from the novel, he could not write it with the questioning tone.

As mentioned above, in “The Grand March”, when Kundera ruminates on kitsch, he never distorts the unity of the novel because he refers to the characters with reference to the notion of kitsch with a questioning and hypothetical tone. Therefore, through novelistic counterpoints, Kundera achieves to find harmony among heterogeneous voices in his novel.

### **Parabasis**

Through novelistic techniques, Kundera emancipates the art of the novel from the oppression of totalitarian kitsch. For the liberation of the novel, he subverts the illusion of reality imposed by totalitarian kitsch. Thus, he often betrays traditional novelistic techniques such as linear narration, unity of time, place and action through digressions that he employs. For Kundera, one of the methods for “breaking ranks” (89, *ULB*) is to write self-conscious novel which emphasizes itself as fictional. Therefore, he sometimes interrupts the plot and directly addresses to the reader as ancient Greek playwrights did. In that sense, like ancient Greek playwrights, Kundera breaks the illusion of the reader in his self-conscious novel. This technique, called as parabasis, contributes to hypothetical nature of the novel in that through elimination of the illusion, it removes certainty of reality offered by kitsch. In addition to these, parabasis brings about a kind of irony because it takes the reader from the serious tone of the novel through sudden interruptions of the writer. With reference to this, Critic Fred Misurella comments on Kundera’s understanding of parabasis as such:

For Kundera parabasis furnishes a practical novelistic method of having things two ways (serious yet playful, tragic yet comic, meaningful yet meaningless, and, to use one of his own contradictory couplings, heavy yet light) with narrative tone and theme working as the glues that hold opposites together (*The Legacies of Modernism: Historicizing Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*, 141).

Considering these, when Kundera directly addresses to the reader, he breaks not only the illusion but also serious tone of the novel and thus he enriches the ironic tone of the novel through juxtapositions.

For instance, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* Kundera employs the parabasis technique when he directly asks his question to the reader: "The idea of eternal return is a mysterious one, and Nietzsche has often perplexed other philosophers with it: to think that everything recurs as we once experienced it, and that the recurrence itself recurs ad infinitum! What does this mad myth signify?" (3). Through pronoun "we" and the question, he speaks to the reader and his serious and certain tone abruptly changes into playful and uncertain tone via his interruption.

When he tells how he creates Tomas, he again directly addresses to the reader:

And once more I see him the way he appeared to me at the very beginning of the novel: standing at the window and staring across the courtyard at the walls opposite. This is the image from which he was born. As I have pointed out before, characters are not born of a situation, a sentence, a metaphor containing in a nutshell a basic human possibility that the author thinks no one else has discovered or said something essential about (218).

Through his collaboration with the reader in the creation of his novel, Kundera has the opportunity to explore endless possibilities of the human existence. For these reasons, parabasis is one of the most significant instruments that contribute interrogative tone of the novel.

## CHAPTER III

### **Kundera's influence on authors**

Kundera's most recognized novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* was published in 1984, and here, he touches on totalitarian kitsch which clashes with his art of the novel.

His idiosyncratic ideas about kitsch, which affect many writers, have a pivotal role in understanding his novels. For instance, Kundera has influenced one of the most successful contemporary British Indian novelist; Salman Rushdie. In *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, Rushdie admits the influences of Sterne, Kundera and Grass on his works by saying "I won't deny that it's flattering. It's very pleasant to be mentioned in the same company as those people" (Rushdie and Reder 1-2). Critic Cristina Sandru shows similar style of Kundera and Rushdie in demystifying totalitarian kitsch: "Fictional writing is regarded by both Rushdie and Kundera as an antidote against the regimenting uniformity of totalitarian systems and the destructive grip of fundamentalist beliefs" (*Worlds Apart? A Postcolonial Reading of post-1945 East Central European Culture*, 198). Here, she mentions about Kundera's and Rushdie's allegiance to question totalitarian established truths of kitsch through their novels. Like Kundera, Rushdie offers individualistic and idiosyncratic style of writing as opposed to collectivist and conformist style of totalitarian kitsch.

Philip Roth is one of the writers inspired by Kundera's notion of kitsch. According to the writer Ross Posnock, Kundera has made such an impact on Roth that he even "dedicated *The Ghost Writer* to the Czech writer" (*Philip Roth's Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity*, 63). Like Kundera's art of the novel, Roth's novel is also against illusions and denial of the unacceptable realities and he tries to hinder totalitarian kitsch in his art of the novel. In that sense, Ross Posnock shows how Philip Roth follows Kundera's understanding of the novel "Kundera and Roth share an abiding suspicion of lyricism and utopian thinking of pastoral and idylls, all fantasies of regression cultivated by totalitarianism to erase the past and satirize the present" (63). Here, Posnock emphasizes similar approach of Kundera's and Philip Roth's to the cynic nature of kitsch.

Terry Eagleton also praises Kundera's novels by describing their striking aura which banishes oppression and totalitarian truth. In "Estrangement and Irony", he explains how Kundera positions novel to a very different place where infinite multitude of things can be written: "he treats the novel as a place where you can write anything you like, anything, as it were, that has just come into your head, as a genre released from constraint rather in the manner of a diary" (27). Here, Eagleton shows how Kundera's novels resist retreating into the world of dogmatic certainties. Therefore, he emphasizes how Kundera's art of the novel never serves for historical and philosophical interests:

Kundera constantly interrupts himself in order to give the slip to totalitarian drive of literary fiction, breaking off the narrative to deliver his latest ontological musings, inserting a sheaf of

brief philosophical reflections between episodes, airily abandoning the fictional pretence in the interests of historical documentation (26).

In "The Other K." Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes deals with Kundera's exploration of kitsch. He gives details about Kundera's view on the notion of kitsch. With regard to this, he supports Kundera in that he discloses the mask of kitsch through his art of the novel during the period of Stalinism:

What he finds interesting is the similarity between totalitarianism and the immemorial and fascinating dream of a harmonious society where private life and public life form but one unity and all are united around one will and one faith. It is not accidental that the most favored genre in the culminating period of Stalinism was the idyll (17).

Here, he delineates Kundera's comment on kitsch which removes individuality by arousing "brotherhood of men on earth" (248, *ULB*).

The critic O'Brien is also influenced by Kundera's novels by appreciating his unique contribution to the genre of the novel. In his article "Milan Kundera: Meaning, Play and the role of the author", he emphasizes the importance of Kundera's authorship by showing how Kundera considers the novel as a free play with social, linguistic and philosophical codes. Here, he goes on to talk about how Kundera regards novel as a playground for revealing disavowal of the unacceptable. (8)

As a conclusion, it can be stated that all the authors and critics mentioned above recognize Kundera's indisputable aesthetic contribution to the novel genre.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, with reference to *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, I aimed to provide a deep analysis for exploring Kundera's art of the novel based on uncertainty and ambiguity. Kundera's art of the novel rejects affirmations, certainties which banish possibilities of the human existence. In regard to this, his novel's quest for wisdom of uncertainty forms the basis for his art of the novel. In line with Kundera's art of the novel, the study revealed that his novel; *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which is considered as one of the significant breakthroughs in the history of the novel, enables the reader to benefit from the wisdom of uncertainty and freedom of seeing possibilities that are denied to him in the real world. In order to demonstrate this point, I discussed aesthetic value in Kundera's work.

According to Kundera, aesthetic value lies in something which has never been said before; in other words, Kundera's art of the novel unveils deception of kitsch and with regard to his aesthetic value; his novel reveals the reality that has not yet been explored. For this reason, he keeps alive the sense of protest against totalitarian kitsch and as opposed to the notion of kitsch, he focuses on individualism, doubt and irony. Moreover, my study has shown how Kundera's novel excludes everything that regards the novel as the mouthpiece of the dominant philosophy and politics. In that sense, the novel, written on the level of hypothesis, resists representation of all the agreements with being by subverting totalitarian voice.

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* succeeds in exploring theme of kitsch because it suspends all the agreements with being by questioning individual's freedom. The novel can create "the fascinating imaginative realm where no one owns the truth; everyone has

the right to be understood" (AN, 166). In the light of this, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* can be characterized by absolute freedom of the reader.

With reference to these, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* offers many layers of meaning which present the notion of ambiguity and therefore, the sense of reality never rests on the basis of kitsch. The ambiguous world of his novel is mainly based on an interrogative tone. In this regard, as *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* suggests his playful and questioning tone, Kundera challenges serious tone of the novel that tries to impose totalitarian truth. For this reason, one of the aims of the thesis was to investigate Kundera's ways of posing questions.

Furthermore in his novels, Kundera refuses to abide the conventional author figure by leaving authoritative writer identity. Since Kundera's approach to authorship signifies incompatibility of his art of the novel and totalitarian kitsch, the thesis can be extended with the views of critics who oppose to Kundera's authorship. In that sense, comparing Kundera's authorship with these critics will show particularity of his authorship among the heterogeneous voices. In addition to these, as Kundera's art of the novel laughs at kitsch, the analysis of laughter in *Immortality* and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* can also help to understand his novels' aesthetic value.

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