

**The Unbearable Vagueness of Being in Love: Scrutinizing  
Milan Kundera's Idea of Love in  
*The Unbearable Lightness of Being***

**Submitted by**

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***You promise heavens free from strife,  
Pure truth, and perfect change of will;  
But sweet, sweet is this human life,  
So sweet, I fain would breathe it still;  
Your chilly stars I can forgo,  
This warm kind world is all I know.***

---

**William Johnson  
Cory**

**When a society is rich, its people don't need to work with their hands; they can devote themselves to activities of the spirit. We have more and more universities and more and more students. If students are going to earn degrees, they've got to come up with dissertation topics. And since dissertations can be written about everything under the sun, the number of topics is infinite. Sheets of paper covered with words pile up in archives sadder than cemeteries, because no one ever visits them, not even on All Souls' Day. Culture is perishing in overproduction, in an avalanche of words, in the madness of quantity. That's why one banned book in your former country means infinitely more than the billions of words spewed out by our universities.**

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**(Franz, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*) Abstract**

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, a philosophical romantic novel by Milan Kundera demands a thorough investigation on the theme of love that Kundera tries to depict to his readers. However, this multidimensional, existential, and heavily inter-textual novel does not allow the readers to come to a concrete definition of love. The fluctuating storyline and omniscient narrator make it even harder for the readers and critics to provide a steady interpretation of the novel. As a consequence, the idea of love seems to be ambiguous which makes the readers struggle throughout the novel that eventually becomes unbearable for them as well. Thus, the title of this paper has been chosen as– ‘The Unbearable Vagueness of Being in Love: Scrutinizing Milan Kundera’s Idea of Love in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*’.

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## **Abbreviations of Frequently Used Books and Terms**

*TULOB:* The Unbearable Lightness of Being

*BN:* Being and Nothingness

*TAOL:* The Art of Loving

*TAON:* The Art of Novel

Es muss sein: It Must Be!

Einmal ist keinmal: Once Doesn't Count (German Proverb)

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Milan Kundera's most appreciated novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* explores different dimensions of human existence with philosophical insights. This contemporary masterpiece takes its readers on a philosophical journey by penetrating through the characters' mind and their actions in order to understand the complexity of human existence. To be more precise, the actions and narration of the story revolve around one central question that Kundera presents in the first few pages of the novel: "What then shall we choose? Weight or Lightness?" (*TULOB* 5). In order to ask this question the author juxtaposes two views made by two philosophers (Nietzsche and Parmenides) and comes up with a third angle. The author agrees with Nietzsche that the idea of eternal recurrence is 'the heaviest of burdens' in human life (*TULOB* 4). On the other hand, if human life is just once and for all— "einmal ist keinmal.. what happens but once... might as well not have happened at all" (*TULOB* 8)— then it becomes light, unbearably light. Kundera in a sense imprints this duality of 'lightness and weight' in the storyline and upon the characters. As a result the entire piece of work becomes utterly ambiguous to understand and interpret, just the way the narrator agrees to this ambiguity himself— "the only certainty is: the lightness/weight opposition is the most mysterious, most ambiguous of all" (*TULOB* 5). An important thing should be noted before the discussion begins— which is, throughout the novel the narrator plays the most important role among all the characters. This omniscient entity guides the storyline (which is of course the style of Kundera) and the characters, takes the readers into the thoughts of characters, interprets those thoughts, gives opinions regarding those thoughts, gives background information of characters as well as Czech

history, politics, and culture, and brings philosophical, historical and literary allusions from time to time. The narrator seems the dictator of a totalitarian system from which the characters struggle to escape in the actual story. As a result, often the readers are deprived of the freedom of interpretation. Hana Pichova also identifies the narrator as ‘an absolute authority’ who can be “accused of creating a totalitarian world that is dominated both by “the faceless gaze” of the secret police as well as by the authorial narrator” (222). The characters’ pre-interpreted actions and thoughts are imposed on the readers by the narrator who limits and hinders the readers from an open-ended interpretation. As a consequence, with the ambiguous actions taken by the characters and their close-ended philosophical interpretations by the narrator make the entire novel a vague one. In that sense, nonetheless, this paper will try to investigate the theme which it is concerned about– the vagueness of being in love.

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is a philosophically structured novel of interpersonal relationships; to be more precise, one of the fundamental themes of the novel is ‘love’. Indeed it will be difficult to categorize this novel as a plain romantic love story, rather it appears to be a philosophical novel which scrutinizes interpersonal relationships that embody love, sexuality, hatred, emotion, passion, betrayal and many other emotional aspects of human lives. The narrator describes the love and conjugal relationship of the two central characters– Tomas and Tereza, and also narrates the subplot– the love relationship of two subordinate characters Sabina and Franz – in an unusual manner of storytelling.

This paper primarily examines the love and romantic relationship between Tomas and Tereza, and Sabina and Franz. It scrutinizes the narrator’s description of the storyline, individual character’s action, and their close-ended interpretation given by the narrator. Afterwards, this paper tries to deconstruct the already given interpretation and offers a fresh perspective on the



novel. As the title suggests, according to the investigation of this paper, the theme of love or being in love is presented sheer ambiguously in the novel. Neither the narrator nor the story itself gives a satisfactory image or theme of love to its readers. The intensity of this utter vagueness increases with Kundera's unusual style of revelation of the climax or ending in the middle of the novel. It seems that Kundera with the help of his narrator is keener to show the after effects of the actions and thoughts that characters do or think in their love relationships rather than investigating the reasons that triggered those actions. Or even if there is any valid reason for any particular action to justify itself, it again comes from the restricted interpretation of the narrator, limiting the readers to interpret. Therefore, the whole idea of 'love and being in love' inside the novel is blurred either intentionally or involuntarily by Kundera. Another way to put this problem is- it may be possible that Kundera himself is not clear about love and deliberately leaves the interpretation to the readers to conclude. Whatever his intentions are- this paper identifies and scrutinizes the problem regarding the theme of love and justifies the vagueness by critical investigations.

Additionally with the primary objective- to scrutinize romantic and/or passionate love among the central and subordinate characters- the paper also explores other forms of love by scrutinizing auxiliary characters of the novel. One of these love forms is- parental love, to be more precise- fatherly and motherly love. Finally, this paper also tries to explore love towards non-human being, objects, profession, country (patriotism), and most importantly- love of the self.

The most fundamental and bizarre representations of 'love' in the novel which intensifies the vagueness to its extreme is that the all four characters conduct some actions in their love life which-if considered from general ethical point of view- seem quite unexpected and unusual in

both reality and fiction. In the love relationship between Tomas and Tereza, Tomas frequently engages in sexual relationship with other women and still boldly claims his uncompromised true love for Tereza. It is needless to bring any factual evidence to justify that in any intimate love relationship it is without any doubt expected from a partner to be faithful towards his or her partner. Although infidelities and extramarital relations are evident around the world, what makes Tomas's situation different is that "... he argued that his polygamous way of life did not in the least run counter to his love for her (Tereza)" (*TULOB* 16). In the novel, the readers see Tomas having multiple sexual relationships while leading a conjugal life with Tereza until they exile themselves in the country during their last days of their lives. The psychological depth of his affection and passion for Tereza seems completely against his practical actions. It seems Kundera through this dichotomy of Tomas's psychological passion and erotic actions wants to reflect the complex duality of 'soul and body' which Tereza struggles with throughout the novel. To make this already vague situation even more intense, the readers see Tereza again trapped in psychological 'concentration camp' (*TULOB* 46) of bodies like her mother's which she once has escaped from. Instead of divorcing Tomas or abandoning him permanently, Tereza pleads Tomas that goes in vain and intensifies her suffering more. Here the problem reader's encounter with is—how Tomas places Tereza in his routine of womanizing and what psychology works behind this kind of unusual mindset, and why Tereza is unable to decide whether to leave or not to leave Tomas forever. The parallel plot of Sabina and Franz echoes similar kind of problem, where Sabina betrays Franz once he completely submits himself in her hands by leaving his wife. Despite of this betrayal how on earth does Franz worship the idea of Sabina as an omniscient goddess?

## Chapter Two

### Love- triggered by self-love?

#### 2.1 Tomas: Metaphor for Thymself?

To begin with, let us look at Tomas first. Tomas, a divorced surgeon in his forties living in Prague, Czech Republic, lives a bachelor life with frequent sexual engagement with multiple partners whom he identifies as his mistresses. The narrator introduces us with Tomas's 'rule of three' (*TULOB* 12) which he invents and maintains in order to retain his uninterrupted life of a 'womanizer'. It seems like Tomas gets lightness in his divorce as he "celebrated the event the way others celebrate a marriage" (*TULOB* 9) and "designs his life" according to his 'rule of three'. Let us stop and think about this matter and Tomas as well. A man who celebrates his divorce of a marriage that lasts only a couple of years may have been fed up for several reasons. The narrator or Kundera doesn't feel it necessary to provide adequate information regarding Tomas's first conjugal life. There are two possibilities that can lead to a broken marriage in case of Tomas- firstly, it is he or his wife who has been unfaithful (perhaps it is Tomas as the readers get idea about his womanizing) or secondly, it is simply because they have lost their passion, intimacy, and commitment (Sternberg 120) for being together any longer. If it is the first reason, then it should be compared to his second conjugal life with Tereza and must be scrutinized further. And if it is the second reason, then it seems the decision is mutually taken with individual acceptance to become free. The second possibility seems more credible because only after divorce has Tomas understood "... he was not born to live side by side with any woman and could be fully himself only as a bachelor." (*TULOB* 9). The narrator never gives any description of Tomas's first wife; in fact it is not clear whether their marriage is a love or an arranged one? On whatever grounds their marriage is based on, it seems Tomas has no love left either for his

past wife or his son. He is unable to accept the idea to 'bribe the mother for the son's love' 'to whom he was bound by nothing but a single improvident night' (*TULOB* 11). Therefore, let us assume Tomas is deeply in love with his selfhood or to be more precise- his freedom and will. And because of his free will, Tomas lives a life of womanizer for ten long years after his divorce until he meets Tereza. To get an idea of how much Tomas loves his self-hood and freedom, one must look onto his words to his mistresses- "... the only relationship that can make both partners happy is one in which sentimentality has no place and neither partner makes any claim on the life and freedom of the other" (*TULOB* 11).

Tomas is unable to sleep beside an 'alien body' which can overhear him brushing his teeth in the morning like an intruder which is why after any sexual involvement he has "an uncontrollable craving to be by himself" (*TULOB* 13). It seems pretty clear that once he reaches the climax of a sexual intercourse, the person, or to be more precise- the body of a woman loses its significance and becomes a burden for him. However, after being able to sleep beside Tereza he realizes that "He wanted to be able to watch over her, protect her, enjoy her presence, but felt no need to change his way of life" (*TULOB*13). This may mean Tomas needs Tereza for his sake; he needs her to fulfill his ambiguous empty corner hiding nowhere inside his mind just the way he needs other women for his sexual routine. Tereza seems to be an added element to Tomas's bachelor life that soothes his soul's craving. The narrator perhaps interprets the right thing about their intimacy- "I might even say that the goal of their lovemaking was not so much pleasure as the sleep that followed it." (*TULOB* 13). Is it then only because of the 'chemistry of sleeping' that ties Tereza to Tomas, or to put it in different words- does Tomas need her only for the sake of his sleep, his wish? It seems so, and it indicates Tomas's love for self. He knows his

womanizing would tear Tereza apart and sees her suffering hysterically, and still he is unwilling to quit his sexual involvements.

The definition or the idea of love that Tomas has got is an utterly vague one. He thinks that “attaching love to sex is one of the most bizarre ideas the Creator ever had” (*TULOB* 234). So, for Tomas, love is an emotion that has the least connection with bodily desires. Why does he think that? Is it because that is the only justification he can bring against his unnatural womanizing? Perhaps it works that way for him. Even if he dreams of his ‘ideal woman’, “the woman from his dream was the ‘Es muss sein!’ of his love” (*TULOB* 236) still he would choose Tereza over anyone; he can “abandon his paradise and the woman from his dream and betray the ‘Es muss sein!’ of his love to go off with Tereza, the woman born of six laughable fortuities” (*TULOB* 237). We may look for the reasons behind this decision. Perhaps following his ‘Es muss sein’ of love means the end of his erotic adventures because without the continuation of his sexual engagements, Tomas will not be himself. Let us stop and consider the ‘Es muss seins’ of his life. The narrator suggests that Tomas has two types of ‘Es muss seins’- external and internal (*TULOB* 192). What he means by that is Tomas has “a deep desire to follow the spirit of Parmenides and make heavy go to light” (*TULOB* 192) which is his ‘external’ ‘Es muss sein’. On the other hand, “the ‘Es muss sein’ of his love for medicine was internal” (*TULOB* 192). He has deep love for his profession because it enables him to slit and “... open the surface of things and looking at what lies hidden inside” (*TULOB* 192). This internal ‘Es muss sein’ of his is just the mirror image of his womanizing. Every time Tomas involves in sexual engagement, it gives him the opportunity to use his ‘imaginary scalpel’ (*TULOB* 196) to slit open and discover the “individual I” out of every woman (*TULOB* 195). His desire has become his obsession and he can never get over with it.

“Tomas was obsessed by the desire to discover and appropriate that one-millionth part; he saw it as the core of his obsession. He was not obsessed with women; he was obsessed with what in each of them is unimaginable, obsessed, in other words, with the one-millionth part that makes a woman dissimilar to others of her sex.” (*TULOB* 196)

Now, let us go back to the former discussion. Tomas can betray his ‘Es muss sein’ of love, the ideal woman of his life who as Plato suggests in *Symposium*– the other half of hermaphrodites (13), but cannot betray his internal ‘Es muss sein’ of womanizing. Let us ask for the reason here. Perhaps the union with the lost half means completeness– which Tomas cannot endure in real. It seems he prefers to live in between a serene place where the image of a helpless person– in this case Tereza– whom he can love, and sexual engagement with other woman for his obsession will travel in a parallel way, without colliding with each other. This image of Tomas seems to be a selfish character where the only concern is to fulfill the desire of self– whether having multiple sexual engagements in a committed marriage or whether loving someone with a vague justification in favor of infidelities, not bothering what impacts it is having on the partner.

Another problem with Tomas is his fascination with imagination. Sometimes it seems that his imagination is only to pacify his selfhood even though he is completely unaware of it. A question arises– why and how his love for Tereza can relate to his love for self? The answers are hidden in Tomas’s imaginations. Tereza is a “child someone had put in a pitch-daubed bulrush basket and sent downstream for Tomas to fetch at the riverbank of his bed” (*TULOB* 6) and this metaphor has given birth to his love for Tereza. He constantly imagines himself in the place of Tereza suffering from nightmares or imagines Tereza in a dystopian setting where every time he sees her or imagines himself dying with her, it breaks his heart and he loves her even more. It seems he is entrapped within the illusionary image of Tereza who always glances “at him with an

infinitely sad expression in her eyes” which “he cannot withstand” and “falls prey to compassion and sinks deep into her soul” (*TULOB* 236-237). Perhaps these imaginations are the result of his yearning for ‘an image’ to support his lonely selfhood. It seems Tomas loves more the idea of Tereza, to be exact, the idea of a helpless woman who seeks salvation with her eyes, rather Tereza herself or even any other woman as well. With his constant imagination, Tomas also looks into logic as well. He understands that his longing for Tereza is the outcome of compassion (*TULOB* 19, 33). It is compassion that leads Tereza into Tomas’s ‘poetic memory’:

The brain appears to possess a special area which we might call *poetic memory* and which records everything that charms or touches us, that makes our lives beautiful. From the time he met Tereza, no woman had the right to leave the slightest impression on that part of his brain. (*TULOB* 205)

This poetic memory seems to be the cage of Tomas’s imagination. Tomas wants to entrap someone he has been looking for, perhaps it is an idea of a woman or a woman in real who seeks help through her eyes that Tomas cannot ignore. And may be the image of Tereza as a “child put in a pitch-daubed bulrush basket” (*TULOB*10) has been successful to imprint itself on the pre-determined image of a woman already entrapped in Tomas’s poetic memory.

Then again the question arises, what is the connection between the pre-determined image and self-love? The most possible answer is that Tomas being a sexually active happy bachelor who seeks the one-millionth part of ‘I’ in every single woman during sex, needs someone in his life to be connected spiritually. Let us ask for the reasons then. Firstly, as Tomas believes sexuality and love are completely two opposite phenomena, so if one-millionth part – ‘I’ – is discoverable through sexuality, then perhaps there is also some existing – ‘I’ – in spirituality

whom he unconsciously wants to discover through being in a loving relationship with Tereza. Another possible answer can be— Tomas deep down inside is a lonely human being who is unaware of his loneliness and seeks someone for a union, to tie up his spiritual self (as he believes sex and love are opposites) with an imaginary pole at the center. Perhaps this imaginary pole resembles the image of his pre-determined woman. Thirdly, after being separated from all the possible close ones— he genuinely needed someone whom he can shower with his love that is being stored for ten years since his marriage. The point must be noted here is that Tomas is basically keener to give love rather expecting it. So, it may mean he is unable to love his mistresses— who are only bodies under his imaginary scalpel. Therefore, he needs someone spiritual; whom he can love according to his will, not bothering what his beloved wants. The whole idea of Tomas's love is utterly ambiguous and hazy to interpret in clear light. This realization again refers to the title of this work— the vagueness of being in love.

Before concluding, let us stop accusing Tomas for being a self-centered human being and for once assume his love as genuine, at least not triggered by self love. Let us look at the image of Tomas at the beginning through the eyes of the narrator when he sees him "... standing at the window of his flat and looking across the courtyard at the opposite walls, not knowing what to do" (*TULOB* 5). It is evident in the scene that Tomas is in a state of 'inexplicable love' for this 'complete stranger' (*TULOB* 6) and wants to call Tereza to come and live with him. Let us look into his thoughts in this regard:

Should he call her back to Prague for good? He feared the responsibility. If he invited her to come, then come she would, and offer him up her life.



Or should he refrain from approaching her? Then she would remain a waitress in a hotel restaurant of a provincial town and he would never see her again.

Did he want her to come or did he not? (*TULOB* 6)

It seems the metaphor of Tereza as a helpless child has been pinned down into Tomas's soul and he is unable to get over it. One thing should be noted here, that he is pretty much sure that Tereza would come and offer her life to him if he calls her to Prague. And when she tells him that she has left her suitcase at the station, "he immediately realized that the suitcase contained her life and that she had left it at the station only until she could offer it up to him" (*TULOB* 9). So, it seems that Tomas has read Tereza pretty well. He seems to consider Tereza different from other women. Here we may look for the reasons.

Let us consider Tomas and Tereza's first meeting. There is no description of physical appearance of any of the characters, no eye contact, flirting, or no love at first sight. The narrator has given description of Beethoven, Cognac, Book, Clock, Number and other fortuities. So, according to these descriptions, it seems that for Tomas the attraction grows during their second encounter when Tereza has caught flu after making love to Tomas. That is the moment the metaphor has ignited love in his mind. But, Tomas has always feared women since his divorce- "The only thing they (Tomas's ex-wife, son, and parents) bequeathed to him was a fear of women. Tomas desired but feared them" (*TULOB* 11). Then how come he starts feeling for Tereza? Perhaps the metaphor has triggered his love. "But was it love?" "What could it have been if not love declaring itself to him?" (*TULOB* 7). Yes it is love, because:

His adventure with Tereza began at the exact point where his adventures with other women left off. It took place on the other side of the imperative that pushed him into

conquest after conquest. He had no desire to uncover anything in Tereza. She had come to him uncovered. He had made love to her before he could grab the imaginary scalpel he used to open the prostrate body of the world. Before he could start wondering what she would be like when they made love, he loved her.

Their love story did not begin until afterwards: she fell ill and he was unable to send her home as he had the others. Kneeling by her as she lay sleeping in his bed, he realized someone had sent her downstream in a bulrush basket. (*TULOB* 206)

There are few occasions when readers see Tomas regretting his decision to be with Tereza. When he comes back to Prague from Zurich following Tereza he "... felt no compassion. All he felt was the pressure in his stomach and the despair of having returned" (*TULOB* 35). From here it seems Tereza is Tomas's 'Amor Fati' or, to be more precise, she is the fate of Tomas. And as 'Amor Fati' literally means 'love of one's fate', Tereza is Tomas's love. But how has she become his 'Amor Fati'? Because of the metaphor, his love for Tereza is nothing but a metaphor. It seems that all these arguments go down to one single union- Tereza is Tomas's 'Amor Fati' because of the metaphor and the metaphor is trapped inside the 'poetic memory'. So, it is difficult to call his love for Tereza genuine. Rather, again it seems his love for Tereza is just a 'metaphor for thyself'.

## 2.2 Tereza: Escape for Thyself, Trapped for Thyself

Let us have a look at Tereza— a small town girl crushed under her mother’s vengeance for ruining her life as an unwanted child—waits for a miracle to happen in her life. The narrator makes it clear that Tereza yearns for ‘something higher’ (*TULOB* 44) that raises her above the status she belongs to. She loves reading books; to her books are “the emblems of a secret brotherhood” (*TULOB* 47). Not that she loves the contents of books only, but they also mean a lot to her as physical objects (*TULOB* 47), therefore, she takes *Anna Karenina* under her arm which she considers a ticket to Tomas’s world. The narrator gives the most vibrant image of her fondness towards books in this way: “Whenever she (Tereza) did the clothes, she kept a book next to the tub. As she turned the pages, the washing water dripped all over them” (*TULOB* 44). Along with books, Beethoven also appeals to her and “became an image of the world on the other side, the world she yearned for” (*TULOB* 49). Why does Tereza yearn for something higher? Is it because the ugly ‘concentration camp of bodies’ (*TULOB* 46) she lives in with her mother? Tereza imagines a world in her, a beautiful world that embodies ‘higher’ things which she has always yearned for. Books and classical music are higher things against the ugly world of her mother’s:

Tereza’s mother blew her nose noisily, talked to people in public about her sex life, and enjoyed demonstrating her false teeth. She was remarkably skillful at loosening them with her tongue, and in the midst of a broad smile would cause the uppers to drop down over the lowers in such a way as to give her face a sinister expression. (*TULOB* 45)

Tereza’s physical world of her mother and the spiritual world of her imagination are in a state of duel and the only salvation of her is to find an escape not only from the ugliness she lives in but the entire small town. That is why the call from Tomas seems to be the escape she was yearning

for, because “that call meant a great deal, because it came from someone who knew neither her mother nor drunks with their daily stereotypical scabrous remarks. His (Tomas) outsider status raised him above the rest” (*TULOB* 46-47). This is the call she was preparing herself for. This call is not meant to her body, not meant to her eyes to say ‘A cognac, please’ (*TULOB* 48). This is the call to her soul, the soul that was suppressed under her mother’s hysterical ugly laugh.

Indeed it shall not be unethical if one tries to cast away her bad situation behind and move forward in life. Tereza has the right to deserve better. She can choose to become what she wishes to make of herself or where she wishes to see herself ahead. However, when she leaves her town with a mindset to never return and with a desire to be with Tomas forever, it asks the readers to interpret beyond the love she is taking with her for Tomas. The readers see her excited about her journey ahead and nervous for meeting Tomas (*TULOB* 39-40). But what is this excitement and nervousness for? Is it the natural anxiety one goes through before meeting her love after a long time or is it a helpless orphan desperately seeking her savior whom she is still unsure about?

One may argue that it is too early to underestimate Tereza’s love and portray her as a selfish person. Taking that charge into consideration, let us look back at the first meeting where it has all started. The universal law of attraction says that the opposite genders get attracted to each other through their physical appearance and charm. Indeed, Tereza finds Tomas attractive (*TULOB* 49). According to Erich Fromm who defines love in his book *The Art of Loving*, ““Attractive” usually means a nice package of qualities which are popular and sought after on the personality market. What specifically makes a person attracting depends on the fashion of the time, physically as well as mentally” (3). Then, what physical appearance of Tomas makes him ‘attractive’ to Tereza? None. The readers are not provided with any kind of physical appearance

of Tomas. The readers only get to see what Tereza sees. And what does Tereza see in Tomas? Tomas is an outsider with a book in front of him when he calls Tereza up for a cognac while at the same moment the radio is playing Beethoven. His room number is six— just the time when her shift ends at 6 o'clock, and also the house she used to live in Prague was number six. And finally she meets him outside the hotel and sees him sitting on the bench with the book— the exact bench she sits every day after her shift. All of these aspects appeal to her and make her fall in love with Tomas. Therefore, when she identifies Tomas as her fate (*TULOB* 50), it is perhaps not only because of love but rather for her salvation. That is why it becomes the 'most crucial day of her life' when she leaves the town and sets off to meet Tomas. The only answer behind this move of hers is- the love she bears for Tomas comes secondary, the primary reason to come to Tomas seems to be the salvation of Tereza from the gridlock she is in with her mother. She needs to break her captivity and live for herself.

Now again this argument may be questioned- if she is only using Tomas for her salvation, then why does she not leave him for his infidelities? Does she get pleasure being humiliated like Franz? (See 2.4). To answer this question, the readers need to ask one more vital question. Had Tereza been a virgin until she was with Tomas? The narrator gives hints of past for every characters. Tomas has been with many women including his wife, Franz has been with his wife and his mistresses, Sabina has been with her husband and from her characteristics it is presumable that she has been with several other men. Only Tereza seems to be the one who protects her chastity until she goes into Tomas's bed. Perhaps, that can be a reason she never dares to leave Tomas; perhaps the chastity is her soul which has been suppressed for years until Tomas comes to her life.

In order to make this argument more credible, let us take a look on two incidents- first, when Tereza leaves Tomas in Geneva and goes back to Prague, she has a sudden desire to offer herself up to the cook who has been her co-worker once. He has always tried to take Tereza in bed, and now she has a feeling to tell him- “You used to say you wanted to sleep with me. Well here I am” (*TULOB* 74). Tired of Tomas’s womanizing, she longs to fall, longs to punish her. “She longed to do something that would prevent her from turning back to Tomas. She longed to destroy brutally the past seven years of her life. It was vertigo... longing to fall” (*TULOB* 74). Secondly, when she goes into the engineer’s apartment, she plays the passive role and does not seem to enjoy being with him. Although her body goes the opposite direction to her emotion, she seems to be in a hypnotized situation.

Since she is a virgin, both of these two examples show her incapability to leave Tomas. She really suffers from Tomas’s infidelities but cannot help herself. Thus, the only solution she sees ahead of her is to destroy her soul, her chastity- in order to punish both Tomas and herself. She never goes to that cook to offer herself up and waits for Tomas to come back. She waits for Tomas by making excuses (*TULOB* 75). But when her suffering becomes unbearable, she loses control over herself and submits herself in the hands of the engineer. But- “Did her adventure with the engineer teach her that casual sex has nothing to do with love? That it is light, weightless? Was she calmer now? Not in the least” (*TULOB* 156).

Therefore, casual sex for Tereza is a burden; it has weight- unlike Tomas, Sabina, and Franz. Indeed, that refers to her chastity again. For a woman who submits her fidelity, her chastity to one man- it is impossible to enjoy casual sex. The readers get to see how much she cares to save her chastity as she thinks this is the only thing she has in her account to offer Tomas:

What weapons did she have at her disposal? None but her fidelity. And she offered him that at the very outset, the very first day, as if aware she had nothing more to give. Their love was an oddly asymmetrical construction: it was supported by the absolute certainty of her fidelity like a gigantic edifice supported by a single column. (*TULOB* 156-157).

Therefore, it seems like her fidelity is restricting her to leave Tomas forever or to enjoy casual sex the way her husband does. The only thing that makes this whole situation ambiguous is when she fears that she will fall in love with the engineer. Why does she think that? Perhaps sexuality for her is genuinely a gesture of love since she involves her soul in it:

Suddenly she felt a desire to go in to him and hear his voice, his words. If he spoke to her in a soft, deep voice, her soul would take courage and rise to the surface of her body, and she would burst out crying. She would put her arms around him the way she had put her arms around the chestnut tree's thick trunk in her dream. (*TULOB* 154)

She thinks she will fall in love with the engineer because she has made herself prepared to fall in love with any man in the world with same affection and devotion she bears for Tomas. Once again the readers should go back to Tereza's self-centered image. The love she bears for Tomas is one of the infinite numbers of loves she may have reserved in hers for other men. For her it is not important who is going to get her love; what is important for her is the idea of a savior who will give her salvation from her situation. So, is she aware of her selfish nature? Perhaps not, perhaps she lives with this false belief that she loves Tomas and can suffer anything to be with him. Once while talking to Tomas about one of their friends, she says, "If I hadn't met you, I'd certainly

have fallen in love with him” (*TULOB* 34). And now she fears that she will fall in love with the engineer (*TULOB* 154). Therefore, would it be injustice if Tereza is accused of being a selfish lover?

One may challenge this accusation that if she is not truly in love with Tomas, then she has the door open to leave him for another man since she is capable of loving another man just the way she loves Tomas. Yes she has the option open but she cannot take it. Firstly because her chastity holds her back to Tomas and makes her to be loyal to Tomas. Secondly, and most importantly, although throughout the novel Tereza appears to the readers as a weak character, she at the end establishes herself as the strongest and most successful character. She seems to be the only one who accomplishes her mission successfully. Tereza, instead of leaving Tomas the way her mother has left her father, battles till the end to win Tomas to make him completely hers. She finally makes Tomas her plaything, a rabbit in her arms (*TULOB* 302-303). She has been successful being a cunning woman to make Tomas follow her (*TULOB* 306), she has been successful to make Tomas weak and old, and she finally reaches the end of her goal (*TULOB* 310). Tereza has been able to transform her weakness into her strength and finally takes complete control over her situation, unlike her mother. Therefore, one would not be mistaken to say that her selfishness or her self-love has been a result of her mother’s treatment of her. She has learned to survive and make her way in this cruel world.



### 2.3 Sabina: Queer Queen

The most complicated character of the novel is Sabina because her every act reflects her narcissistic image. She never holds her back from anything that offers her pleasure, or at least fulfils her wish. Her views of love, interpersonal relationship, and sexuality are complex and demand serious investigation. She has been mistress to both Tomas and Franz, and from her actions in the novel, it is undoubtedly presumable that they are not the only men in her life. She has been married once and it seems she never bears any love for her husband before or after she leaves him (*TULOB* 90).

Her view on sexuality is perplexing; especially how she gets aroused is unusual. She wants to make love to Tomas in her studio in front of an audience; she gets aroused by watching her in the mirror naked with her father's bowler hat on and Tomas standing behind her dressed in formal (*TULOB* 84-85). When she makes love to Tomas and catches him distracted, she punishes him by hiding one of his socks and makes him put on one of her stockings (*TULOB* 22). While she makes love to Franz in the latter part of the novel she seems to be having total control over it. In fact, to her, lovemaking comes easily and she is very cooperative in understanding her partner's personal life. As a result, she has been the only exception for Tomas to break his 'rule of three' and for Franz, she appears to be the initiator of their relationship. In Franz's words—"She had not given him the slightest cause for worry! In fact she was the one who had taken the erotic initiative shortly after they met" (*TULOB* 80).

Sabina being an ideal example of self-lover lives alone in her apartment and always cuts loose her connection to the past. She names her this habit of escaping as 'betrayal'. Although, this betrayal is rooted back to her father (See 3.3), her self-centered attitude also has a major influence on this. But before elaborating that, the readers should take a look on her second and

very important motif after betrayal- which is her hatred to 'kitsch'. She makes it apparent when she admits she hates it- "My enemy is kitsch" (*TULOB* 248). For the narrator- "The aesthetical ideal is called 'kitsch'.... 'kitsch' is the absolute denial of shit. In both the literal and figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence" (*TULOB* 246).

Now let us see what Sabina thinks of kitsch- politicians and political parties and totalitarian governments are kitsch (*TULOB* 249). The narrator has the best understanding of Sabina in terms of her longing for betrayal and hatred for kitsch. One must take a close look on what the narrator says about kitsch -in the scene of Sabina with the US senator- that relates to Sabina as well. When the senator acclaims about the happiness his children are having in the park, the narrator makes a humorous comment on that and then connects his opinions with Sabina's thought:

The feeling induced by kitsch must be a kind the multitudes can share. Kitsch may not, therefore, depend on an unusual situation; it must derive from the basic images people have engraved in their memories: the ungrateful daughter, the neglected father, children running on the grass, the motherland betrayed, first love.

The brotherhood of man on earth will be possible only on a basis of kitsch.  
(*TULOB* 248)

The readers must notice a few important words of this paragraph that describe the entire world of Sabina, and also give an idea about the principles she lives on and also how she has become a selfish person. First two phrases 'ungrateful daughter' and 'neglected father' refer back to her

relation with her father. Since she longs for betrayal and in the process betrays her father– the kitsch she expects or admits about her is that she is an ungrateful daughter who neglects her father, perhaps because he has killed her ‘first love’ (the final word in the paragraph). And finally, the motherland betrayal for which she has been accused of several times in the novel. The final sentence suggests that on the basis of kitsch, brotherhood is possible universally.

Therefore, since love and personal attachment is acclaimed throughout the universe, the above logic makes it kitsch, and since Sabina hates kitsch– she hates love and any kind of emotional attachment. As a consequence, her longing for betrayal always follows her and also makes her follow its path. Thus, the readers should realize now that she can never share an apartment with Franz, can never live in Prague since the totalitarian government hinders her creativity, and cannot ever be the daughter or be the parent to the old couple in America instead of her positive intent. All of these references and arguments indicate to only one conclusion– Sabina has always listened to her will and has led herself according to that. She becomes a perfect example of what Macquarrie depicts, “One does not first exist and then become free; rather, to be human is already to be free” (177). Perhaps, Sabina is being too human in her existence.

#### 2.4 Franz: A selfish or confused lover?

It may seem inconsiderate to call a man selfish who gives away 23 years of his life by sharing a bed with a wife whom he never really loves. Moreover, a man who always keeps himself conscious of not hurting the (Platonic ideal) 'woman' in his mother or in his wife must not self-concerned. Among all the four major characters, Franz apparently has the close proximity to innocence. His actions and thoughts are motivated by a selfless desire to please the women around him. It is evident in his relationships with his mother, his wife Marie-Claude, mistress Sabina, student mistress, and his daughter – all these relationships are tied with one basic knot. The love or affection Franz portrays in his affiliations with women does not evoke any romantic or lustful image; rather it portrays Franz as a man in his duties. The love Franz bears for his mother is a duty not to hurt her and increase her suffering (*TULOB* 88) just like the love he shows to his wife Marie-Claude is a sympathy not to hurt her (*TULOB* 88). His relationship with his mistress Sabina is 'more as religion than as love' (*TULOB* 125). However, the relation with his daughter Marie-Anne is not worth mentioning since she was unlike Franz and almost similar to her mother in terms of her thoughts and actions (*TULOB* 105, 120). And finally comes his student mistress whom he has a reasonable understanding with and can care for her as a lover and nourish her as a daughter since she is much younger than he is (*TULOB* 120).

Now, the question should arise- how come a person who devotes his life to keep women in his life happy does have the luxury to fulfill his wish? Franz, through his actions can confront the condemnation against him regarding his selfishness and justify his innocence effortlessly. The answer to this argument lies within itself. If one takes off the curtain from the surface and scrutinizes Franz's relationships with women from underneath, one must realize that the naïve devotion Franz has to his loved women is a result of suppressed self-love. The attachment one

expects in a relationship seems to be missing in relationships between Franz and women in his life. His attachments seem to be based on being disgraced, humiliated, and tortured rather than on emotional transcending. Franz is simply in love with being in a state of mercy; he gives himself in the hands of another woman and takes pleasure from it- this, is his love for self. Needless to say, the justification appears to be awfully complex and confusing at this point. How could a person who always keeps himself conscious of not hurting any woman of his life be this playful? The answer lies in the question– not willing to hurt means one is capable of hurting the other but wishes not to do so. Indeed this fidelity and devotion towards another need to be dissolved in other manner. Franz, being naïve, channels his burden by getting punished. Before coming into the point of punishment and being at the mercy of others, it is necessary to look back to dig up some supporting information.

Franz marries Marie-Claude because he does not want to hurt her or cannot take the risk of putting her into a suicidal situation (*TULOB* 88). Moreover, her suicidal threat flabbergasts him at once and he seems to be considering himself so small in front of her ‘great love’, that it eventually leads him to bow before her and marry Marie-Claude (*TULOB* 88). This idea of not letting one to suffer perhaps has come from the ‘shoe incident’ with her mother when Franz not willing to hurt her by pointing out her mistake, realizes for the first time- ‘what it means to suffer’ *TULOB* (88). All of the snapshots of his relationship with women indicate that Franz, perhaps unconsciously, is in love with this ‘suffering’. As a result, with the excuse of not hurting any woman he punishes himself, sometimes psychologically and sometimes in real. This ‘punishing game’ becomes graspable when the readers get to know the reasons about his trip abroad with Sabina:

The ban on making love with his painter-mistress in Geneva was actually a self-inflicted punishment for having married another woman. He felt it as a kind of guilt or defect. Even though his conjugal sex life was hardly worth mentioning, he and his wife still slept in the same bed. . . . True, he would rather have slept by himself, but the marriage bed is still the symbol of the marriage bond, and symbols, as we know, are inviolable. (*TULOB* 81)

One may see this as a regretful confession of a guilty husband who seems to be helpless and is in a state of psychological despair for his sinful actions. Indeed, it is a psychological misery and Franz, without any doubt, has a fetish of this humiliation. He lives with and in this humiliation which eventually seems to be more convincing to call it love. Still, if one is not convinced yet, Franz's shame is evident in many occasions as concrete proofs:

Each time he lay down next to his wife in that bed, he thought of his mistress imagining him lying down next to his wife in that bed, and each time he thought of her he felt ashamed. That was why he wished to separate the bed he slept in with his wife as far as possible in space from the bed he made love in with his mistress. (*TULOB* 81-82)

The two quotations above regarding 'bed sharing' prove that Franz feels guilty for both sleeping with his wife and his mistress. It seems like his pleasure gets intensified on this occasion. His submission of himself to the loved one is the ideal image of love to him. And when in love one completely takes the passive role and submits himself to his partner, he also has to give up his strength and power- both physically and mentally. The readers get the idea about Franz's fondness to be in passive role in a conversation with Sabina. According to Franz, 'love means

renouncing strength' (*TULOB* 111) and Sabina thinks that Franz does not lack sensuality but strength (*TULOB* 110).

When Franz decides to reveal his secret affair to his wife, he expects to 'see the despair on Marie-Claude's face, the despair he expected his words to produce' (*TULOB* 113). But to his utter surprise, he sees his wife accept this blow without any difficulty. This perplexing moment reveals to him a new window to look at his wife. He instantly withdraws his mother's 'platonic ideal image of woman' from his wife and this sudden realization inflicts him with 'a flash of hatred' against his wife (*TULOB* 113). He still desperately tries to invoke despair in his wife by 'wounding her with his infidelity' and reveals the name of his mistress, thinking 'the revelation of her rival would do the trick' (*TULOB* 113). Even soon after his final departure from his wife's life, he still secretly desires her to be in despair and drops by to check her if she is in a state of his expectation (*TULOB* 116). To his disappointment when he realizes that his actions have the least influence on Marie-Claude's emotion, the readers get to see another side of his self-love when he considers his idea of Marie-Claude's emotion as a 'misunderstanding' and blames this misunderstanding as a reason for giving 'up scores of women' (*TULOB* 117). This realization of Franz strengthens the argument regarding his self-love, though in a different way. Even after getting disappointed by the reaction of his wife, his quest for humiliation never ends when the readers see Franz accepting of 'becoming a laughing stock among his wife's friends' (*TULOB* 119).

It will be wrong if one thinks that the quest for humiliation stops for Franz after he leaves his wife and gets involved with his student mistress. Yes, it brings a significant change in his life- now he is in active position with his student mistress but only to put Sabina in a position of a secret goddess who watches over his actions. He now 'nourishes the idea of Sabina as a religion

than as love' (*TULOB* 125). He finally stops becoming a little boy and starts enjoying his self-hood (*TULOB* 119). He can now make love to his mistress in his own bed and she admires him the way he admires Sabina. He once goes back to his wife to ask for a divorce (perhaps again with a wish to see her in despair) but fails again and never goes back (*TULOB* 120). In fact, there are no reasons left to go back to see her, not for any more humiliation. Because, now he replaces her with Sabina by putting the 'ideal platonic women' in her and always tries to keep her pleased with his actions- whether it is through participating in the Grand March in Cambodia or fighting the robbers in Bangkok street at night, risking his life.

Eventually, Franz has succeeded to live his self-centered life by achieving his earthly love who now happens to be his mistress and also his unearthly love who of course is his invisible goddess, Sabina. The former gives him the seduction and jubilation that a 'bachelor needs' and the latter perpetrates his longing for humiliation. The narrator of the novel summarizes the latter in his words:

The only explanation I can suggest is that for Franz, love was not an extension of public life but its antithesis. It meant a longing to put himself at the mercy of his partner. He who gives himself up like a prisoner of war must give up his weapons as well. And deprived in advance of defence against a possible blow, he cannot help wondering when the blow will fall. That is why I can say that for Franz, love meant the constant expectation of a blow. (*TULOB* 81)



### Chapter Three

#### Parental Love: Disguised or Suppressed

Kundera appears to be a grand designer of the novel's technicality; especially the blueprints of his characters are clustered in an identical root. All the four major characters seem to comprise some parental influence imprinted in them which manipulates (actively and passively) their way of understanding and seeing personal relations and emotions. Tomas's desire to be in isolation, Tereza's duality of body and soul, Sabina's longing for betrayal, and Franz's secret goddess- all of these individual ideals are rooted back in their relationship with their parents. It is still too early to say whether this parent-child association is an oedipal state of mind, but the influence is irrefutable anyway.

### 3.1 Tomas: A Father and/or a Mother?

The narrator time after time goes back to the ‘metaphor’ that gives birth to Tomas’s love. Let us look at the metaphor once again:

He (Tomas) had come to feel an inexplicable love for this all but complete stranger; she seemed a child to him, a child someone had put in a bulrush basket daubed with peach and sent downstream for Tomas to fetch at the riverbank of his bed. (*TULOB* 6)

Now, let us emphasize the word ‘child’. Tomas has a son to whom he seldom has shown any fatherly affection and to whom he thinks he is “bound by nothing but a single improvident night” (*TULOB* 11). It is then evident that Tomas is in his least when it comes to fatherly affection. How does he then find himself going insane for someone whom he barely knows, especially when he connects that person with a metaphor of child? Does it mean Tomas is tired of being a bachelor and needs someone who can contribute to his loneliness both as a wife and a son? One may disagree with that, since the narrator’s indication is clear- that the metaphor is dangerous because it gives birth to love and is able to enter the poetic memory of an individual. The metaphor of a child is a metaphor for Tereza to enter Tomas’s poetic memory and it may have nothing more to offer for interpretation.

However, if the readers take a close look on the novel’s setting they will find out that each of the characters are substantially motivated by their parental influence. This influence shapes and reshapes them psychologically which is evident in their actions. Tomas’s parents abandon him for giving up on his marriage and family, leaving him completely vulnerable and alone in the world:

Needless to say, he found no sympathizers. His own parents condemned him roundly: if Tomas refused to take an interest in his son, then they, Tomas's parents, would no longer take an interest in theirs. They made a great show of maintaining good relations with their daughter-in-law and trumpeted their exemplary stance and sense of justice. (*TULOB* 11)

Therefore, when Tomas is struck by the child metaphor, he unconsciously gets the stimulation to avenge his parents and his former family. As a consequence, he shows the 'paternal sentiments' (*TULOB* 11) towards Tereza which he has failed to show to his son. The hours of sleep they share together has immense significance in their life. Tomas, who cannot share his bed with any partner, has started making excuses to spend the night with her. Tomas with unconscious motivation has started playing the role of a mother. He lulls Tereza to sleep like a mother does to her child.

... in his arms she would fall asleep no matter how wrought up she might have been. He would whisper impromptu fairy tales about her, or gibberish, words he repeated monotonously, words soothing or comical, which turned into vague visions lulling her through the first dreams of the night. He had complete control over her sleep: she dozed off at the second he chose. (*TULOB* 14)

This image of Tomas is of a mother who unconditionally loves her child and lulls her child into sleep every night. Perhaps this image is able to prove that he has been deceiving himself all this time, thinking that family and children are not for him. This act of his may indicate to his parental devotion towards Tereza, and can be seen both as a vengeful gesture towards his parent and former family, and also as an unconscious fulfillment of the vacuum— created out of his

loneliness. His celebration of being a bachelor is merely a curtain between him and his inner self. The love she bears for Tereza is flooded with ambiguity. Tomas leaves his family, leads a bachelor life, finds Tereza and loves her unconditionally like a parent (a parent Tereza never has, a parent Tomas has never been), then he continues going to his mistresses, marries Tereza, still continues his womanizing, and finally settles in the country. The love that exists between Tomas and Tereza always remains vague. Sometimes Tomas seems to be a genuine lover of Tereza, and the next moment he goes to bed with his mistress— leaving Tereza vulnerable as a child. When he is with Tereza, his constantly shifts his role from a lover to a father, then to a mother. This inconsistency makes it hard to decide actually what the state of their relationship is.

When with Tomas, the readers often see her act as a child with her. Indeed she has been training herself for being with her Mr. Perfect, but her attitude with Tomas goes beyond the lover's relation. Especially when she stays at home with Tomas, especially when she is in bed with him- she becomes the child she has never been able to be with her former parents. She becomes the baby Tereza who once has been lost in the struggle of her life:

While they slept, she held him as on the first night, keeping a firm grip on wrist, finger, or ankle. If he wanted to move without waking her, he had to resort to artifice. After freeing his finger (wrist, ankle) from her clutches, a process which, since she guarded him carefully even in her sleep, ever failed to rouse her partially, he would calm her by sleeping an object into her hand (a rolled-up pajama top, a slipper, a book), which she then gripped as tightly as if it were a part of his body. (*TULOB* 13-14)

### 3.2 Tereza: Mother Can't Lie

The whole point of Tereza's love life has its center bound to her mother. It seems her love is a duel between Tomas and her mother. He leaves her mother for Tomas, then again she wants to leave Tomas for her mother. She does 'everything' to satisfy her mother and to gain her love. The same she does for Tomas. She even accepts Tomas's infidelities and wants to be partnered with him and make his mistresses their 'playthings'. She even tries to seduce Sabina once. She even takes a lesson from her mother. Her mother leaves her father and finds herself trapped in a worse situation and loses the courage to leave her husband again. Tereza, already realizing herself in the latter situation, shows strength. She may seem weak but actually she has been successful in her mission to take Tomas to country with her and live the rest of their lives there. Actually, the love life of Tereza has always been a battle between her mother and the imaginary savior of her. Since she cannot leave Tomas for her chastity and has experience of living in infidelities twice (her mother's married life and her married life), she takes the courage to save her marriage. She puts her strength to make Tomas agree to move to country. She has successfully won the duel with her mother.

The narrator identifies Tereza's entire life as a mere continuation of her mother's (*TULOB* 41), which is true, but what he overlooks is that Tereza unconsciously has evolved herself as a participant who battles every moment with her surroundings. That is why the readers see Tereza preparing herself and waiting for the day of her salvation while she is with her mother. It is true that she has been planning her escape but the narrator believes that she also bears love for her mother. The narrator describes her love for her mother in this way:

“True, Tereza fought with her mother until the day she left home, but let us not forget that she never stopped loving her. She would have done anything for her if her mother had asked in a loving voice. The only reason she found the strength to leave was that she never heard that voice.” (*TULOB* 59)

Since she never gets to hear her mother’s caring voice, she gains the courage to respond to Tomas’s voice. One thing must be noted here that it is a battle between voices, and the presence of Tomas is merely a chance among infinite number of chances. The battle is between her mother and her imaginary savior- and Tomas has come out as the savior of Tereza by sheer luck.

However, when she discovers herself in the middle of Tomas’s infidelities, she comes to realize her mother’s situation of how it feels to be trapped inside infidelities and when her mother calls her back with a loving voice (although it is false) she yearns for going back to her mother (*TULOB* 59). Thanks to Tomas who holds Tereza from going back by revealing that her mother has been lying about her illness. The point one must notice here is that Tereza needs assurance that she is constantly getting her required love at least from someone- it does not matter if she gets it from her mother or her lover. All she needs is— love.

### 3.3 Sabina: Farewell to Father

If Tereza's life is merely a continuation of her mother's life, then Sabina's life seems to be her father's. Sabina's longing for betrayal has been rooted in her relationship with her father. "Sabina was charmed more by betrayal than by fidelity. The word fidelity reminded her of her father", because at 14 she fell in love with a boy of her own age and her father being overprotective grounded her for almost a year (*TULOB* 89). As a result, the hatred she bears for her father has given birth to her longing for betrayal:

If she couldn't love her fourteen-year-old schoolboy, she could at least love cubism. After completing school, she went off to Prague with the euphoric feeling that now at last she could betray her home.

Betrayal means breaking ranks and going off into the unknown. Sabina knew of nothing more magnificent than going off into the unknown.

Her longing to betray her father remained unsatisfied: Communism was merely another father, a father equally strict and limited, a father who forbade her love and Picasso, too. And if she married a second-rate actor, it was only because he had a reputation for being eccentric and was unacceptable to both fathers.

(*TULOB* 89-90)

From the above paragraph two points require inspection. Firstly, has Sabina been in real love with that boy, her first love? Does she hate her father for ruining her relationship? Secondly, has it been the over imposing attitude of her father which gradually makes her a rebel? Perhaps both of the views together can give a better understanding of Sabina. Indeed her first love means a lot to her and when this love gets crushed under her father's wrath; Sabina seriously puts her father

in the position of her archenemy. One thing must be noted here that soon after her mother's funeral when her father takes away his life out of grief, Sabina goes into deep thought about him. Perhaps, her rage towards him develops further with a new angle. Perhaps she has become even more furious realizing that her father in his lifetime has never looked onto her wishes and does not even care for her while taking the decision to take his life away.

Is it possible that Sabina desires for her father and this fact of her makes the father to behave in an even more rigid and authoritarian way? Does she hate the idea of her father taking his life away for her mother? Is she jealous of her mother? May be or maybe not. But what is apparent here is her longing for betrayal throughout her entire life and the entire novel starts from the relationship with her father. Either her childhood love or her oedipal desire or her rebellious nature- any of these three or the amalgamation of these three is the foundation of her journey of betrayal.

Now, let us look at the entire foundation of betrayal from a complete, opposite angle. Is it possible that Sabina feels guilty for her father's death? Indeed it is possible. It all starts from her first love, the love for which she has betrayed her father and keeps herself away from her father by marrying a second-rate actor. But when she hears the death news of her father, she feels 'pangs of conscience' (*TULOB* 90) and feels ashamed of herself. To repair her betrayal, she longs for betraying "her own betrayal" and finally divorces her husband. Unfortunately, to her sheer disappointment, she discovers that it has been too late for atonement. The situation Sabina is in, has been described perfectly by the narrator, perhaps justifying her longing for betrayal in one paragraph:



But if we betray B., for whom we betrayed A., it does not necessarily follow that we have placated A. The life of a divorcee did not in the least resemble the life of the parents she had betrayed. The first betrayal is irreparable. It calls forth a chain of reaction of further betrayals, each of which takes us farther and farther away from the point of our original betrayal. (*TULOB* 90)

From the quote above it seems that her chain of betrayals has become her addiction which never ends, and as a result, she goes farther and farther away from her origin— her father. Sabina is crushed under the heaviest lightness which has piled up above her at times and has become unbearable. Her betrayals have freed her, given her lightness- but at the same time the dissatisfactions, unfulfilled desires, memories that she leaves behind pinned her soul into the ground. She finally realizes this horrific truth and desires to become ashes after her death, because, that is the only way her burdens will be released and she will be lighter than ever.

The narrator describes her unbearable situation in this way:

Her drama was a drama not of heaviness but of lightness. What fell to her lot was not the burden but the unbearable lightness of being.... One could betray one's parents, husband, country, love, but when parents, husband, country, and love were gone- what was left to betray?

Sabina felt emptiness all around her. What if that emptiness was the goal of all her betrayals?

The thing that gives our every move its meaning is always totally unknown to us. Sabina was unaware of the goal that lay behind her longing to betray. The unbearable lightness of being- was that the goal? (*TULOB* 121-122)

Her life indeed has always been like her paintings- “on the surface, an intelligible lie; underneath, the unintelligible truth showing through” (*TULOB* 251). The image of her parents she bears in her imagination is of ‘a home, all peace, quite, and harmony, and ruled by a loving mother and a wise father’ (*TULOB* 252) and this image of a happy family will occasionally come and go in her mind while pursuing the trail of betrayal, no matter how much caring a family awaits ahead to adopt her as a daughter (*TULOB* 253).

The readers shall not forget about Sabina’s brother (*TULOB* 85). If she has longed for her lost parents so much, if her guilt and love for her father influence her longing for betrayal, then why does she not hold on to her root to the past– her brother? Is her relationship with her brother not worth mentioning? The narrator not providing any information about her brother, has made these questions unexplainable and vague. Furthermore, the bowler hat which is a “memento of her father” has been used several times as a “prop for her love games with Tomas”- which of course makes things even more ambiguous. Hate, guilt, or love– whatever emotion Sabina shows to her father has obviously shaped her idea of love and interpersonal relationship, and the readers surely will struggle to understand which one of these influences her to use the only memento of her father as a sex toy. All of these actions of her lead the readers to the title of this paper; Sabina also resembles the continuous ambiguity in love throughout the novel– which is almost impossible to understand.

### 3.4 Franz's celestial love: Mother and Sabina, Mother in Sabina?

The limited details provided by the narrator about Franz's mother sufficiently indicate the oedipal complex Franz has in his relationship with his mother. In this regard what surprises the readers most is Franz's complete awareness of his affection towards his mother; in fact he resembles her mother with the platonic ideal of women and finds her image inside other women in his life. And when he fails or loses the sight of his mother inside Marie-Claude, he transcends her mother into Sabina- his invisible goddess. At this point, readers may agree to the point that Kundera deliberately wants the readers to bring the oedipal connection here.

The separation of Franz's father and mother indicates to an unhappy marriage. Franz loves his mother and does not want to hurt her in any way. It appears that Franz, till his mother's death, has- unwillingly or willingly- played the role of a husband and a son as well. His fidelity towards his mother is an expression of love. Perhaps because his father leaves them for another woman, Franz has no choice but to play the role of a lover. Since the narrator or Kundera in several occasions brings philosophical and psychological references in the novel, the readers will not be wrong if they think Kundera is pretty insistent to guide the reader's interpretation towards a certain angle. In this case, he provides all the necessary hints and clues that readers can use to interpret Franz's condition as a consequence of oedipal effect. Franz has no hesitance to admit that he loves his mother and triumphs his loyalty towards her as a lover. He certainly is impressive to his mother's suffering and wants to redeem it with his fidelity.

He loved her (mother) from the time he was a child until the time he accompanied her to the cemetery; he loved her in his memories as well. That is what made him feel that fidelity deserve pride of place among the virtues. (*TULOB* 89)

Before digging into the transcendence of his mother into Sabina let us look at other three women in Franz's life. Although he always has failed to love Marie-Claude as a genuine lover, he never dares to hurt her because he respects the woman in her– the woman that resembles his mother (*TULOB* 88). Take a look at his daughter Marie-Anne whom he is upset at for not being like him instead of Marie-Claude (*TULOB* 105). This particular quality of Marie-Anne disqualifies her from Franz admiration, and to a greater context, from his fatherly love. An important question must arise now, if it is the case that Franz is upset about the fact that his daughter is like her mother, surely then Franz must be upset about Marie-Claude for any of her actions. All of these disliking become clear at the cocktail party of Marie-Claude. The way Franz sees and thinks of the words uttered and actions executed by both mother and daughter, shows his disgust towards them. Then, let us look at the reasons behind this disgust. The party scene shows how Franz detests both his wife and daughter for their frail and deceptive use of words. Franz cannot stand the idea that both his daughter and wife use the word 'love' to express their devotion and affection towards any particular person. It seems he feels betrayed by Marie-Claude since she has used the same words while proposing Franz:

... how much like her mother his daughter was..... She was not like him.... How many times had he heard Marie-Claude proclaims she was in love with this or that painter, singer, writer, politician, and once even with a racing cyclist..... more than twenty years ago she had gone about saying the same thing about him and threatening him with suicide to boot. (*TULOB* 105-106)

These small irritations regarding Marie-Claude eventually conclude the relation between Franz and her when she reacts with unexpected calmness when he confesses about his infidelity with Sabina. It becomes the revelation moment for Franz that there is no mother inside Marie-Claude. Fundamentally, there are four reasons behind his rejection of Marie-Claude and transcending his mother into Sabina. First of all, Marie-Claude uses the same expression to express her love which she has used before for Franz. Secondly, Sabina has been the one who has been successful to enter between Franz's fidelity and his wife. Thirdly, Sabina has been so successful to become the one that Franz unconsciously has started preparing Sabina as well as himself to see Sabina in his mother's position. Therefore, he often speaks "about his mother to Sabina, perhaps even with a certain unconscious ulterior motive" hoping that she will "be charmed by his ability to be faithful" and this ability will "win her over" (*TULOB* 89). Finally, Marie-Claude's encounter with Sabina where she, with her raucous laughter, rejects Sabina's pendant as ugly, throws Franz in a state of anger, because Franz in his mind already has put Sabina's image in place of his mother's. Franz, with the realization that there is no woman (mother) in his wife, abandons her, making his way to conceal the image of his mother in Sabina forever.

When he heard his wife telling Sabina, 'That pendant is Ugly!' he knew he could no longer live in lies and had to stand up for Sabina. He had not done so only because he was afraid of betraying their secret love.

The day after the cocktail party, he was supposed to go to Rome with Sabina for the weekend. He could not get 'The pendant is ugly!' out of his mind, and it made him see Marie-Claude in a completely new light. (*TULOB* 112)

... what had happened the mother image he mentally linked with his wife? His mother, sad and wounded, his mother, wearing unmatched shoes, had departed from Marie-Claude - or perhaps not, perhaps she had never been inside Marie-Claude at all. The whole thing came to him in a flash of hatred. (*TULOB* 113)

Now that finally Franz has found his mother in Sabina and has done the ceremonial rituals by leaving Marie-Claude and coming to Sabina forever, the readers see his reincarnation as a new Franz who is capable of taking the active position in his own life. This metamorphosis of Franz is the result of the divine idea of Sabina, since Sabina does not directly instructs Franz to change; rather he worships her image and fancies Sabina to guide him. Therefore, it has bothered Franz the least when he realizes Sabina has left her. And at some point:

.. he realized to his great surprise that he was not particularly unhappy. Sabina's physical presence was much less important than he had suspected..... A sudden happiness, a feeling of bliss, the joy that came of freedom and a new life- these were the gifts she had left him. (*TULOB* 119)

Indeed he is happy. He, not before too late, has found Sabina, who seems to be the best sculpture for his mother to transcend. He finally achieves his freedom. But, if he is so happy, then why does he get involved in another relation with his student mistress? Does it not disrespect his respect and love towards Sabina, or her mother in Sabina?

The narrator continues his playful ambiguity by juxtaposing real and unreal which Franz always struggles to handle. It seems that he finds both his wife and daughter in his earthly love—his earthly mistress. On the other hand, he finds his mother in his unearthly love—inside Sabina. He even thinks that seeing the relationship with his student-mistress will make Sabina happy.

However, the readers may raise a question, why would his ex-mistress who has dumped him without any notice will oversee him having sexual engagement with his student and will be happy for that? Is this because she is not Sabina but her mother who wants her son to have a normal conjugal life with wife and daughter? Is that the reason he plays both the role of a lover and a father with his mistress? Or is it the narrator again who wants the reader to bring Oedipal connections again in the relationship with his mistress?

... his innate goodness saw to it that he cared for her and lavished on her the paternal love that had never had a true outlet before, given that Marie-Anne had always behaved less like his daughter than like a copy of Marie-Claude. (*TULOB* 120)

The ethereal gaze of Sabina that Franz imagines himself under takes the readers back to Sartre. Before going back to Sartre, let us start with Fromm who suggests in *AOL* that "...love is the problem of object, not the problem of a faculty... People think that to love is simple, but that to find the right object to love- or to be loved by- is difficult" (2). Taking this objects-faculty duality into consideration, McMullin reads Sartre and interprets the third eye gaze as Sartre suggests. McMullin says, "The encounter with the other person's evaluating look makes it clear that the self-like other objects in the world- is available for third-person appraisal and assessment." (103). In *BN* Sartre talks about the third-person gaze, "I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am" (384). Therefore, Franz is being what he is because of Sabina's constant imaginary gaze over him. So, does he love her? He believes he does. But isn't it a vague one to understand? Especially, McMullin in his reading of Sartre depicts that, "...the uncertainty that this kind of dependence introduces ultimately threatens the possibility of genuine love" (104) and therefore, the love Franz bears for Sabina is utterly a vague one indeed.

## Chapter Four

### Narrator's Idea of Love

#### 4.1 Old and Young Love

While people are fairly young and the musical composition of their lives is still in its opening bars, they can go about writing it together and exchange motifs (the way Tomas and Sabina exchanged the motif of the bowler hat), but if they meet when they are older, like Franz and Sabina, their musical compositions are more or less complete, and every motif, every object, every word means something different to each of them. (*TULOB* 87)

The narrator pretty much sums up his distinction of love in terms of two generations. The novel introduces the readers with a number of characters who can be divided in older and younger generation. The older generation includes- Tomas's parents, Sabina's parents, Tereza's parents, Franz's parents, the old American couple Sabina lives with, Franz's wife Marie-Claude, and all four of the major characters in their old age. On the other hand, the younger generation includes- the four major characters at their young age, Tomas's son Simon, the boy who proposes Tereza at the bar, Franz's daughter Marie-Anne and his student mistress, and Tereza's mother and Franz's wife Marie-Claude at their young age. Since the narrator thinks, as life is a musical composition, the motifs at the younger age are incomplete and ready to be composed according to individual interest. On the other hand, individuals at their older age cannot erase their previous composition, as a result of which their compositions conflict with each other.

Perhaps the narrator is right in this regard, or at least his characters through their thoughts and actions prove him right. All of the characters in their younger age execute actions that have



proved them wrong in the later part of life. Tereza's mother regrets her decision of choosing Tereza's father as her husband, Tomas regrets his decision and gives up his marriage, Franz regrets his decision to marry his wife and leaves her, and Tereza occasionally accuses herself for leaving her mother for Tomas. On the other hand, the younger characters in the novel seem to be full of life and energy, and their idea of love appears to be incomplete. As a result, these young characters are often found in the novel using the word 'love' or operating the idea of love with greater and deeper intensity since their musical composition of life is in the process of completion. Therefore, when Franz's daughter Marie-Anne says she is in love with an opera star (*TULOB* 105) and when the young boy at the bar proposes Tereza that he loves her (*TULOB* 142), the narrator actually wants his readers to understand that the idea of love at younger age comes easily, without any complexity beneath.

#### 4.2 Narrator's inexplicable love for Sabina

This may sound unforeseen but there have been several occasions that indicate the narrator's hidden or unnoticed love for Sabina. From a psychological aspect, the narrator appears to be a revengeful character which kills both of Sabina's former lovers in the story. Among all the major characters, the only person who lives till the end of the novel is Sabina, who in characteristics resembles the narrator very much. The narrator admires Sabina's thoughts and gives supporting details to understand her well.

From a thematic standpoint, let us look at the two crucial points that tie the narrator with Sabina- betrayal and kitsch. The narrator throughout the novel has been accusing kitsch not only to support Sabina's hatred towards kitsch but in many occasions he also has shown his hatred towards it. The best example must be his description of God and heaven when he deliberately but

indirectly tries to prove the idea of God and heaven as kitsch. His amalgamation of God-Heaven-Shit-Excitement indicates his rejection of kitsch and embrace of unusual. In a similar way, Sabina too rejects the traditional kitsch around her and continues her journey towards the unknown. Her odd sexual fantasy also matches with the narrator's sexual example of shit. Another important example of kitsch is the grand march. Sabina hates parades, and the grand march Franz attends in Cambodia has been presented and described with dark humor by the narrator. The entire grand march has been an ideal example of kitsch. Therefore, kitsch must be counted as a connecting word between them.

Like Sabina, the narrator too has affection towards betrayal. If the readers take a close look on the sub-plot of the novel which is the Russian invasion in Czech Republic, they will see the narrator has implanted plots of betrayals in several occasions. The tension arising from the possibility of getting betrayed has tantalized the characters throughout the novel. Apart from the political betrayal, the readers will see Tereza betray her mother, Tomas betray his wife Tereza, Franz to betray his wife, and finally Sabina betray everything. Since, the narrator says that his characters are his unrealized possibilities, and then it shall be assumed that every character is born in the hands of the character, and so are the stories in each character's life. And if the narrator implants the theme of betrayal in every character's individual story, then it must be a true fact that he has real fascination towards betrayal just like Sabina. Thus, along with the word kitsch, the word betrayal also ties these two individuals together. And from this, one can surely argue that the narrator is in love with Sabina, or at least has a soft-heart for her.

#### 4.3 Few Other Loves

Other than the love between two human beings, the novel offers several different angles to explore love as affection and passion. Apart from his addiction to women, Tomas has a genuine love for his medical profession and at the same time for his dignity. Similarly, Sabina's inexplicable love for her paintings seems to be an authentic one. Tereza's motherly affection towards Karenin is surprising while the narrator seems to be in love with country life. But before going into the details of these loves, let us first take a look on few subordinate characters and their idea of love.

Let us put some light on Marie-Claude's proclamation "Love is a battle" (*TULOB* 120). The details readers get about Marie-Claude from the novel, portray her as someone who desperately needs attention from her surroundings to convince herself that she exists. She is a woman who is aware of her living in lies. Her husband Franz who never humiliates her by exposing her lies, sees her this ability as "a sign of true vitality" (*TULOB* 103). This true vitality of her wife has left a false inscription on his gravestone- "A Return After Long Wanderings" (*TULOB* 274). She hides the fact that her husband has left her for Sabina, and announces that due to mid-life crisis Franz sometimes has gone with his 'not so pretty' student who caught him in her net but while in coma he has begged forgiveness through his eyes and she has forgiven him (*TULOB* 273). Every false statement she utters about Franz is an indication to her idea of love as battle. Indeed, for her love is the longing to live in a false utopian world. For her, it is not mandatory to bloom a genuine love between two people who want to sleep in the same bed. Rather, she prefers a false self-indulgence and also needs a group of audience who will make her believe that her indulgence is true and happening in real life.

That is why she never utters about the affair of Sabina and Franz in public because Sabina is capable of defeating her in every aspect, that is why she celebrates her husband's

funeral like a wedding day (similar to Tomas celebrating his divorce as a wedding), and continues her fabricated opinions about Franz. She has never loved her, rather she always longed for the utopian world where she always remains the center of attraction. Her threat to take her life if Franz abandons her has not been a call for love, rather it has been her desperate attempt to save her relationship (her utopian image to be precise) from public humiliation. She never has wanted to provide her audience with a chance to criticize her life instead of appreciation.

Tereza's unsatisfied mother has also loved once, but her love was not for any man or one of the suitors, rather she has been in love with her image as Raphael's Madonna (*TULOB* 41). Her frustration in her marriage has been a result of the lovemaking with Tereza's father before their marriage when "he was purposely careless" and got her mother pregnant (*TULOB* 42). Her marriage is not a result of love but a result of vulnerability. Her love for Raphael's Madonna has been buried under her husband's treachery.

The motherly love of Tereza for Karenin is a surprising one to the readers. Tereza never asks for children to Tomas, and it seems like she finds her child in Karenin. She even thinks her love for Karenin greater than what she feels for Tomas and she refers to this love as "a complete selfless love" for Karenin (*TULOB* 293-294). The moment they euthanize Karenin, Tereza seems to go through genuine motherly affection and whispers to Karenin, "Don't be scared, don't be scared, you won't feel any pain there, you'll dream of squirrels and rabbits, you'll have cows there, and Mefisto will be there, don't be scared..." (*TULOB* 298).

#### 4.4 Romantic Kundera and Philosopher Tereza

For once, let us take a look at the novel without scrutinizing its appeal simply as a romantic novel. This romantic novel besides being a love story, also portrays the author's

affection towards nature– like the poets and authors of romantic era. Therefore, let us see the relationship between Tomas and Tereza as truly a tender one and scrutinize Kundera’s affection towards nature. It will not be wrong if Kundera is termed as a Romantic author. The country life he depicts through Tereza’s eyes and the love Tereza bears for both Tomas and Karenin touches the hearts of every reader. Other than the nature, the readers get to see the narrator’s genuine devotion towards animal. The last part of the novel ‘Karenin’s smile’– is completely devoted to describe the country, animal, and nature. The rigid narrator finally breaks out his outer shell and shows his softer inside.

Tereza keeps appearing before my eyes, I see her sitting on the stump petting Kerenin’s head and ruminating on mankind’s debacles. Another image also come to mind: Nietzsche leaving his hotel in Turin. Seeing a horse and a coachman beating it with a whip, Nietzsche went up to the horse and, before the coachman’s very eyes, put his arms around the horse’s neck and burst into tears....

And that is the Nietzsche I love, just as I love Tereza with the moratally ill dog resting his head in her lap. I see them one next to the other: both stepping down from the road along which mankind, ‘the master and proprietor of nature’, marches onward. (*TULOB* 286-287)

The narrator seems to be tired of the modernity, industrialization, the hypocrisy and betrayal of mankind, and the deception and destruction of the society. For him, the village life offers boredom (*TULOB* 278) without excitement but still the description he provides of the country life indicates his fondness of it. The life in village revolves in a circle of time like the time of a

dog which means repetition. And according to the narrator/ Kundera– “Human time does not turn in a circle; it runs ahead in a straight line. That is why man cannot be happy: happiness is the longing for repetition” (*TULOB* 278). And since the village life repeats itself, then it is closer to happiness, in the least, better than cosmopolitan cities.

In the last chapter of the book, the readers see Tereza under a complete new light. Both the narrator and Tereza are seen to be contemplating philosophical thoughts about life, love, and human-nature relations. The narrator discusses about human morality and ethics- the fundamentals of being good or bad. According to him, “Mankind’s true moral test, its fundamental test, consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animal” (*TULOB* 286). His philosophizing of the relationship between human and animal is a vital one because it binds human with the nature unlike industrialization. He provides example with a small incident. Tereza names a heifer as Marketa, and according to the narrator, not long ago, “forty years or so, all the cows in the village had names (and if having a name is a sign of having a soul, I can say that they had souls despite Descartes)” (*TULOB* 286). But after forty years, the villages are unfortunately turned into large collective factories and the cows start spending their entire life in five square feet space in cow sheds. The animals are unfortunately transformed as ‘*machinae animatae*’—a term Descartes used to refer to soulless animal. The way the narrator detests this idea of mechanization of villages portrays his affection towards the originality of nature. The narrator actually echoes the idea Kundera depicts in *TAON*:

The rise of the sciences propelled man into the tunnels of the specialized disciplines. The more he advanced in knowledge, the less clearly could he see either the world as a whole or his own self, and he plunged further into what

Husserl's pupil Heidegger called, in a beautiful and almost magical phrase, "the forgetting of being".

To Tereza the unconditional selfless love for animals is a precious one; this love gives her the boundless freedom to love without any expectations and without being conscious like "human couples: Does he love me? Does he love anyone more than me? Does he love me more than I love him?" (*TULOB* 294). Therefore, whatever the villagers or readers think of her love for Karenin, above all, Karenin- a limping dog who represents "ten years of their lives" (*TULOB* 290). Therefore, they plan to euthanize Karenin in the guise of love: "Death would come for him in the guise of his loved ones" (*TULOB* 296).

The readers may get confused since the narrator reveals the death of Tomas and Tereza long before the ending of the novel. The reason behind this has only one explanation- the narrator wants to end the novel in love. The conversation in page 309 and 310 between Tomas and Tereza indicates that they finally have come to an understanding with each other and forgive and forget the struggle they have gone through. They have come to their last station together. The novel ends with Tereza's conclusion: "happiness filled the space of sadness" (*TULOB* 310)

#### 4.5 Love: Excitement, Sexuality, and Lovemaking

The narrator/ Kundera has been straightforward about sexuality in the novel. What makes the presentation of sexuality interesting is the amalgamation of excitement and love with it. The readers in several occasions are given with the chance to see the characters get sexually aroused by some unusual stimulation. According to the narrator, there is "pleasure in Paradise, but no excitement" (*TULOB* 244). What he means by that is without being excited, sexuality loses its appeal. The examples and incidents of excitements he provides are perplexing to have a grasp on,

and are even more difficult to connect them with love. Finally, the central and most important dilemma the narrator puts the readers into is the replacement of the word 'sex' with the word 'making love'.

For Tomas, "attaching love to sex is one of the most bizarre ideas the creator ever had" (*TULOB* 234) but still both the narrator and Tomas uses the word 'making love' instead of 'sex'. Sabina and Franz also share the same view and term the word 'sex' as 'making love'. The only exception is Tereza, to whom making love literally means something. She is the only person who bears love for one person and makes love to that person only. Yes, she has been with the engineer once and surprisingly escapes from him, even from Prague to the country because she fears that she can lose control over her emotion and fall in love with him. For her, sexuality cannot be separated from love. Making love or having sex- both of these two expressions bear the same meaning to her; they call for their soul. Her emotions can be seen clear in her thoughts:

Tereza knew what happens during the moment love is born: the woman cannot resist the voice calling forth her terrified soul; the man cannot resist the woman whose soul thus responds to his voice. Tomas had no defense against the lure of love, and Tereza feared for him every minute of every hour. (*TULOB* 156)

Still the readers find Tereza getting excited in a couple of occasions; of course those excitements do not involve any conjugal lovemaking, but rather they are continuation of Tomas and Sabina's fantasy. Before coming to those occasions, let us look at the enigmatic sexual chemistry between Tomas and Sabina. Indeed Sabina has been the only exception as for his rule of three in Tomas's life, and the reason behind this is pretty clear. Sabina appears to be the strongest character in the novel that celebrates her sexuality and unlike most of other women never confuses sex with love.



Sabina's fantasies are bizarre like she is- first, she wants the lovemaking of Tomas and hers to put on live public display, then she puts on the bowler hat with her lingerie on and both Tomas and she get excited by that, and finally the readers get to know that the excitement behind the bowler hat incident was actually triggered by her imagination where she sees herself sitting on the toilet voiding her bowel with her hat on and Tomas seeing her. While with Franz, Sabina even gets excited by the thought of her betrayal while making love (*TULOB* 116). Tomas also has his own word to activate excitement- 'Strip!' He uses this word in a commanding voice to both his mistress and beloved to arouse their desire.

One of the occasions where the readers see Tereza being sexually excited is when she imagines herself as an assistant for Tomas's womanizing. One important thing to be noted is that she does not feel any love putting her in this situation. Even when she visits Sabina, the excitement they feel followed by their nude shots is purely physical. She seems to enjoy being at the mercy of her husband's mistress; the commanding word 'strip' binds the two women in sheer excitement.

The idea of love without excitement and the idea of excitement without involving love while 'making love' is a vague one. Neither the narrator nor Kundera has been able to provide a transparent idea of what they think of sexuality and love. Perhaps, the human nature is so complex that it is hard for the narrator or Kundera to put the idea of love and sexuality in a single line. As a result, Kundera and the narrator seem to explore the sexuality of various characters and leave the readers to offer their own definition. Therefore, the narrator says:

I have known all these situations, I have experienced them myself, yet none of them has given rise to the person my curriculum vitae and I represent. The

characters in my novels are my own unrealized possibilities. That is why I am equally fond of them all and equally horrified by them. Each one has crossed a border that I myself have circumvented. .... The novel is not the author's confession; it is an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become.  
(*TULOB* 218)

## Chapter Five

### The Unbearable Vagueness of Being in Love

In the preceding chapters, we have seen extensive textual analysis of love with reference from the novel. In chapter two we have analyzed love as an outcome of self-love and in chapter three we have identified parental influence as one of the crucial aspect in love relations. The analysis of these two chapters will be merged in this chapter under the light of existentialism. However, before beginning our discussion, let us understand the word– Being.

In dictionary term, a being is “a person or thing that exists or the state of existing” (*Cambridge* 121). To begin with, let us separate the meaning of being in two– ‘a being is a person or thing that exists’ or ‘being is a state of existing’. Therefore, we can say that a being is a person who can exist in different states. This idea takes us back to what Heidegger terms as ‘thrownness’:

...this “that it is,” the thrownness of this being into its there; it is thrown in such a way that it is the there as being-in-the-world. The expression thrownness is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over. (*Being and Time* 127)

Kundera in *TAON* and Fromm *TAOL* almost echo this state of ‘thrownness’ of human beings. Kundera says that “life is a trap we’ve always known: we are born without having asked to be, locked in body we never chose, and destined to die” (*TAON* 25). Similarly, Fromm realizes a being as a “life being aware of itself” who “has awareness of himself, of his fellow man, of his past, and of the possibilities of his future” (*TAON* 8). Since this paper explores the idea of being in love, this chapter will investigate the vagueness of ‘human beings’ and their ambiguous actions, when they are in a state of ‘being a beloved’ or ‘being a lover’.

In his book *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre provides the idea of being in two forms- 'Being-for-itself' and 'Being-for-others'. However, before exploring the relationship between these two, let us look at the complex structure of 'Being-for-itself' that Sartre describes in *BN*, under part 2, section 3- Transcendence. For Sartre, human beings, before any exposure to other beings, can be described into two forms- 'Being-in-itself' and 'Being-for-itself'. This in-itself, to him, is a never-changing linear being which actually is nothingness. 'Being-in-itself' is just there and unchangeable and 'Being-for-itself' is the realization or reflection of this nothingness. From my reading, a suggested interpretation of this complex idea could be that Sartre actually is indicating to the essence of being through 'in-itself'. He probably signifies the 'in-itself' as an unrealized being (or nothingness) which is realized by the 'for-itself' as realized. In simple words- 'for-itself' is the realization of the reflection of the 'in-itself' which actually is nothing and at the same time it is the realization of its own realization regarding the reflection of its nothingness. And there comes the necessity of 'being-for-other', because, without the realization of other existing beings (whether in totality or single entity), the 'for-itself' will lose its existence. Thus Sartre says:

...since totality is an internal ontological relation of "thises," it can be revealed only in and through the individual "thises." That means that the for-itself as a realizing presence to all being realizes itself as a realizing presence to the "thises," and as a realizing presence to the "thises" it realizes itself as a realizing presence-to all being. In other words, the presence of the for-itself to the world can be realized only by its presence to one or several particular things, and conversely its presence to a particular thing can be realized only on the ground of a presence to the world. Perception is articulated only on the ontological foundation of presence

to the world, and the world is revealed concretely as the ground of each individual perception. (BN 180-181)

Therefore, since the world is revealed in terms of individual perception, then let us assume that our world will very much be shaped by the– Other and vice-versa. Now, let us look at what Sartre thinks about love in terms of ‘Being-for-others’. Sartre begins his discussion on love by asking a question, “why does the lover want to be loved?” (BN 366). During the discussion of Sartrean love, two words will be coming frequently– possession and freedom. A being, when exposed in front of another being, feels like an object that is being-looked-at and at the same time he is aware of the fact that the Other being is also aware of the fact that he is aware of the Other’s gaze. Since ‘being-for-itself’ provides no meaning and ‘being-for-others’ is able to provide meaning since the Other is the foundation of my being, therefore, in love– the other is the foundation of my existence. Let us look at what Sartre argues on that:

I am responsible for my being-for-others, but I am not the foundation of it... I want to stretch out my hand and grab hold of this being which is presented to me as *my being* but a distance... this is conceivable only if I assimilate the Other’s freedom. Thus my project of recovering myself is fundamentally a project of absorbing the Other. (BN 364)

Gavin Rae in his reading of Sartrean love, identifies that Sartrean lover wishes to possess the freedom of his beloved but still let his beloved to be free. As Sartre says, “...the lover does not desire to possess the beloved as one possesses a thing’ he demands a special type of appropriation. He wants to possess a freedom as freedom” (BN 367). Rae interprets this freedom of freedom as, “...because he desires both the certainty of knowing that his beloved loves him and the excitement gained from having to constantly discover and win this” (Rae 76).

Rae also identifies that for Sartre there is not romantic love, it is just a pre-reflective project– “we create a love relationship with another because we want to be in a relationship” (Rae78). Later he interprets Sartrean love as a game of ‘winner loses’ because in quest to grasp the freedom of beloved, the lover ends up giving away “his freedom because by demanding that his beloved make him the ground of her existence, his true position emerges; he is dependent on her” (Rae 78). This discussion on Sartre and interpretation of Rae lead us to our previous discussion in the second chapter– can love be triggered by self love?

Before going into detailed analysis, let us understand self-love in order to distinguish it from selfishness. However, in order to understand self-love, few questions should be taken into consideration. Is it possible to love oneself? If so, then is this love for self different from the love for others? If so, then would it be considered as selfishness? And finally, is selfishness another appearance for narcissism?

Let us begin with the biblical reference– love thy neighbor as thyself. This biblical quote has been scrutinized in every occasion by scholars who have tried to grasp on the idea of self-love. Søren Kierkegaard in his *Works of Love* has categorized self-love into two. He admits that to love the ‘thyself’ of biblical reference is one form of self love, at the same time, he also finds erotic love and friendship are too forms of self-love:

Erotic love and friendship are preferential and the passion of preference....

Therefore self-love, egocentricity, is sensuality. Consequently Christianity has misgivings about erotic love and friendship because preference in passion or passionate preference is really another form of self-love. (Kierkegaard 65)

Since this paper deals with preferential love— erotic relations and friendship, we must understand how Kierkegaard distinguishes this preferential love from neighborly love and identifies it as selfishness. Since passionate preference centers around one and only beloved among all:

The beloved and the friend are therefore called, remarkably and significantly enough, the *other-self*, the *other-I*— for one’s neighbour is the *other-you*, or more accurately, the third-man of equality.... But wherein lies self-love? It lies in the I, in the self. Would not self-love then, still remain in loving the *other-self*, the *other-I*? (Kierkegaard 66)

The *other-I* which Kierkegaard talks about is the beloved— the preferred one. In the novel, readers get to see all the four characters love the preferred one. Therefore, according to Kierkegaard, their love is not genuine:

.. to admire another person certainly is not self-love, but to be loved by the one and only object of admiration, must not this relationship turn back in a selfish way to the I which loves—loves its other- I?

The more securely the two I’s come together to become one I, the more this united I selfishly cuts itself off from all others. (Kierkegaard 67-68)

Both Krishek and Ferreira have disagreed to Kierkegaard that self-love and selfishness are the same. Ferreira in Kierkegaard’s defense suggests that he actually does not reject preferential love rather criticizes it as an indication of “the obligation to care for all without exclusion” (Ferreira 44). Krishek interprets Ferreira regarding how “she turns the ‘no’ (to preferential love) into a ‘yes’ (to equality) and says, “we are allowed to love “preferentially,” as long as we (first and foremost) love dutifully” (Krishek 604).

Fromm identifies “selfishness and self-love, far from being identical, are actually opposites” (*TAOL* 60) and he continues that a selfish person hates himself and he is not only “incapable of loving others” but also “are not capable of loving themselves either” (*TAOL* 60-61). This idea of Fromm recalls the image of Sabina and Franz. The analysis of Sabina from chapter two strongly supports Fromm’s claim that selfish persons hate themselves. Sabina’s longing for betrayal and escaping from everyone and everything suggest that she has no love left for anyone, not even for herself. She cannot be a ‘being-for-other’ and wish to die in lightness. Franz has been committed to Marie-Claude, Sabina, and student mistress but he has never been able to love any one of them as a ‘preferential love’ because deep down inside he seems to be dissatisfied of him as well. Although, Sabina seems to be the one for Franz, and Franz too, discovers his meaningful existence under Sabina’s ethereal gaze (object-looked-at), genuine love lacks in his case as well.

Tomas and Tereza, on the other hand, are completely in love with themselves. As a result, they have been prepared to fall in love. They have given themselves to each other as ‘free subjects’. They discover themselves as suggested by Sartre’s ‘being-for-others’ concept. In the beginning of the novel Tereza seems to be fully dependent on Tomas, and in the latter part of the novel, the readers get to see Tereza taking control over Tomas. This idea of submission to another person is called *masochism*. On the other hand, the person who makes another person to submit himself is a sadistic person. All of the four character’s situation can be described by the definition given by Fromm:

The masochistic person escapes by asking himself part and parcel of another person who directs him, guides him, protects him; who is his life and his oxygen, as it were. (*TAOL* 19)



The sadistic person wants to escape from his aloneness and his sense of imprisonment by making another person part and parcel of him. He inflates and enhances himself by incorporating another person, who worships him. (*TAOL* 20)

In relationship of Tereza and Tomas, the guidance and dependence are evident; on the other hand, Franz worships sadistic Sabina. Their relationship could be distinguished in Fromm's words, "The difference is only that the sadistic person commands, exploits, hurts, humiliates, and that the masochistic person is commanded, exploited, hurt, humiliated" (*TAOL* 20).

One of the interesting comparisons would be Tomas's thoughts on fortuity and Sartre's idea of facticity. Sartre's idea regarding this almost echoes Tomas's thought in the novel— "...if I had not come to a certain city, if I had not visited the home of so and so, you would never have known me, you wouldn't have loved me?" (*BN* 370). What Sartre is trying to establish here is identical to Fromm's discussion on the same topic— "... 'deserved' love easily leaves a bitter feeling that one is not loved for oneself, that one is loved only because one pleases" (*TAOL* 42). It seems that this idea of facticity or fortuities makes love an inexplicable emotion in human lives. Like Thomas, perhaps there are millions in the world who suffers from this same anxiety and distress. This vagueness probably will never be answerable.

Other than self-love, in chapter three we have seen the relationships under the light of parental love. Let us go back to Sartre again and assimilate his findings with parental influence to see what answer comes out. We have seen Tereza and Franz influenced by motherly affection. This motherly affection perhaps has influenced their attitude as 'being-for-others'. In order to be involved with others, they always find their mother, to justify their existence. In Fromm's word:

I am loved. I am loved because I am mother's child. I am loved because I am helpless. I am loved because I am beautiful, admirable. I am loved because

mother needs me.... I am loved for what I am... I am loved because I am. There is nothing I have to do in order to be loved– mother’s love is unconditional. (*TAOL* 39)

Although Franz has been seen to try different things to impress his goddess, still he would be considered as a child like Tereza, who completely submit oneself to someone they can idolize and worship. From mother-centeredness one struggles to cope with life realistically (*TAOL* 46) like Franz. Among these types of masochistic people, few women (like Tereza) find their father in everybody and few men (like Franz) find their mother in every woman (*TAOL* 45). Therefore, these influences and reactions to those make both ‘beings in love’ and ‘being in love’ ambiguous.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

There's no particular merit in being nice to one's fellow man. She (Tereza) had to treat the other villagers decently, because otherwise she couldn't live there. Even with Tomas, she was obliged to behave lovingly because she needed him. We can never establish with certainty what part of our relations with others is the result of our emotions- love, antipathy, charity, or malice- and what part is predetermined by the constant power play among individuals. (*TULOB* 285)

And that is the vagueness of being in love for the human beings that appears throughout the novel. All the characters- all the Beings the readers are introduced with are in a constant inconsistency regarding their emotion. The Beings in the novel who are being loved or being lovers seem to be bewildered and struggling to have grasp on their fluctuating emotion. The idea of love the narrator present is never clear and almost impossible to interpret. Any question regarding love is if not unanswerable, must be ambiguous in nature. Thus the narrator says,

“Perhaps all the questions we ask of love, to measure, test, probe, and save it, have the additional effect of cutting it short. Perhaps the reason we are unable to love is that we yearn to be loved, that is, we demand something (love) from our partner instead of delivering ourselves up to him demand-free and asking for nothing but his company.” (*TULOB* 294)

What the narrator means by this quote refers to what McMullin identifies as the primary obstacle for genuine love— jealousy. He argues, “Jealousy, I will argue, is love distorted by the effort to force the other person's freedom to serve the project of completing and perfecting one's sense of

self” (McMullin, 104). Let us take two examples from the novel— Tereza on one hand is jealous about Tomas’s womanizing and constantly nags as an obstacle to his freedom. On the other hand, Marie-Claude being jealous of Sabina, remains silent and normal when Franz abandons her. This opposite reaction of two people being in love or in a relationship makes the definition of love hard to explain— a plain ambiguity. Perhaps, in his lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre is right about his idea of “Existence precedes Essence” (20), because since Tereza and Marie-Claude are two different existing entities, their reflection on love must not necessarily cooperate.

Perhaps Kundera has never started the novel with the intention to make it a love story. However, the undeniable theme of love the novel bears needed to be scrutinized, and this thesis has been devoted as an attempt to do so. There are many possible angles other than those proposed in the chapters here, and there shall be countless counterarguments as well against the logics that are presented here. Whatever logic may arise, the question of love will always remain unsolved and the quest for its answer will always perplex everyone involved in the quest— author, narrator, characters, readers, and interpreters.

The word ‘unbearable’ has been used in the thesis title to portray the excruciating unease the readers feel when they try to hold on to a single definition of love since the narrator never gives any specific idea of love; and the details of the love life of the characters provided in the novel only deepen the ambiguity even more.

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